

Activities for College Conversation Classes: The Generation Gap and Getting Along with Peers

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About the Activities

These activities were designed to help students promote their speaking skills, as well as to develop their vocabulary.

The activities presented below not only encourage students to simply "practice" the language in class, but also help them learn something interesting, meaningful and important to them, something they would honestly like to reflect on and talk about.

The Vocabulary development is done with the emphasis not on a single word but on the collocations. This section also provides students with lexical culture embedded/bound items which are taken for granted by native speakers and which present a unique difficulty to EFL students.

The Conversation Practice is designed to stimulate students to speculate, explore and think in English, thus developing their personalities and conversation skills.

Vocabulary Activities

1. Match the words in column A with their definitions in column B.

	A	B
A	Generation gap	Emotional adjustment encountered during stages of development;
B	Curfew	A difference in attitude and behavior between older people and younger people, which often causes them to argue;
C	Allowance	The desirable state of being away from other people;
D	Growing pains	Money given by parent to child weekly, often earned by doing chores;
E	Latchkey child	Natural hostility and competition between siblings;
F	Sibling rivalry	Young child of working parents who spends part of day at home unsupervised;
G	Autonomy	Independence, ability to control one's own life;
H	Privacy	Time, set by parents, at which child
I	To socialize (with s.b.)	
J	Adolescence	

	<p>must return home, especially in the evening;</p> <p>Period of growing up, from puberty to maturity;</p> <p>To spend time with others in a friendly way.</p>
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2. Every age is beautiful in its own way. At the same time there are problems typical only for a certain age. Below are some of them. Match them with a particular age period and try to continue the list.

- falling down and having bruises
- rearing children
- growing pains
- being rejected by peers
- diaper rash infant diseases
- not getting along with parents
- separation and divorce
- anxiety for children
- choosing a college
- dating someone
- empty nest syndrome
- being shy and tongue-tied

3. Fill in the gaps in the text that follows with the words given in the list. Think up an answer to the question at the end.

Use these words: peers, taken up, commute, grades, glued, salaries, alienation, top, let their hair down

Do you think that parents and children spend less and less time with one another? Children's time is _____ with after-school activities, homework, dating and the rest. Parents are forced to throw themselves into their work in order to provide a family living, give time to _____ to and from work, keep up the house, entertain, and so on. And nearly everyone watches television or is literally _____ to it. As parents and children have fewer and fewer common interests, it makes it difficult for the family to reduce the _____ between each other and give individuals a place where they can _____ think out loud, and be themselves.

At the same time, parents are satisfied when they see their children succeed. They are pleased when their children walk at an early age, talk before their _____, are better looking than other children on the block, earn good _____, perform well in athletics, graduate at the _____ of their class, go to college and so on. Is this parental love, parental pride or maybe something else? Do you know?

4. Do you clearly remember your childhood? At least some of its moments? Were you a boisterous child or on the contrary a docile one. Describe either yourself or your smaller sibling using the helpful vocabulary. Self irony is welcome.

Helpful vocabulary: a diffident child, a forward child, an obnoxious child, a precocious child, a brat, a rebel, a tearaway, a tomboy.

5. Parents and children may not see eye to eye on a lot of things. Parents may scold you for the way you wear your hair or for coming home too late. Below are some examples of "misconduct" that may easily make some parents angry. Rank them in decreasing order and continue the list.

- listening to music at full volume
- tying up the telephone
- dating the wrong person
- inviting some friends over when parents are out for the weekend
- overlooking one's studies
- going to a night club

6. In American English there are many idiomatic expressions that manifest high respect of the Americans towards such values as independence and individualism. Look up the explanations of the phrases that follow in a dictionary such as the *Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* and be ready to discuss them in class. Are there any similar expressions in your native language?

- To stand on one's own feet:
- To cut the (umbilical) cord:
- To be (off) on one's own:
- To leave the nest:
- To have a mind of one's own:
- To make it on one's own

7. Parenting can be stressful. So too can be the role of the child. Below are jumbled pieces of advice for both parents and children. Read and categorize them into groups: "Handling the Parents" and "Calming Down"

Handling the Parents. Calming Down.

1. Remember, you're no bargain to live with either!
2. Take a deep breath. And another. Then remember you are the adult.
3. Close your eyes and imagine you're hearing what your daughter/son is about to hear.
4. Phone a friend.
5. Remember, nobody gets everything in the world. There are other people in the world besides you.
6. Show a little sympathy.
7. Take a hot bath or splash cold water on your face.
8. Ask their advice now and then on something big enough to make them feel important.
9. Learn how to say "I am sorry."
10. Go out somewhere with your spouse.
11. Try to work on agreements which will eliminate some arguments in advance.
12. Communicate with them! Please, just one sentence now and then.

Conversation Practice

1. Discuss the following cross-cultural questions in section A. Then continue with the questions for discussion in section B Work in groups of three and choose someone to report the overall opinion of the group.

Section A.

- At what age do people start being off on their own in your country? Are children encouraged to work for money outside of their homes? If yes, at what age? If no, what are the reasons?
- At what age are people considered to be adults in your country?
- At what age do people usually move away from their parents' home?
- Do different generations of the family share the same apartment or house?

Section B.

- What problems may cause the generation gap?

- What conflicts do parents have with children?
- What are the usual areas of misunderstanding between children and parents?
- What do you think are the key issues in establishing one's own autonomy from the parents?
- For teenagers what is more important, parents' or peers' approval?
 - What may be the reasons for conflict among peers?
 - Does gender, in any way, influence the peers conflict, i.e. are there similar reasons for misunderstanding between two girls and between two boys?
 - Do males make better friends than females?

2. Work in pairs. Match the sentences in column A with the ones in column B so as to produce snippets of conversation. Speculate who the participants might be and think of how to continue the conversation.

A	B
1. I don't know why I let you convince me to come here. I hate parties.	a) Don't tempt me. I have to cram for my exam. I take it on Friday.
2. Sally sure likes to talk on the phone.	b) Come on! This is going to be a blast! You'll love it.
3. Any plans for the weekend? Maybe we can check a movie or play tennis?	c) Not really. I don't watch much TV, and when I do, I usually turn on MTV or The Discovery Channel.
4. Susan told me what you said about my pronunciation.	d) I don't know what she told you, but I never talked behind your back.
5. Do you like "Star Trek?"	e) Sure. When would you like me to be there?
6. You know I've been on a date with Sheila.	f) Are you putting me on? You swore you'd never say a word to her!
7. Could you help me on Saturday when I move out of the dorm to my new apartment?	g) If only she liked her classes as well.
8. What is an appropriate gift to take to a friend's girl for her birthday? I was thinking maybe some flowers?	h) That sounds good. Or you could get something for her hobby.
9. Does your mother criticize you a lot?	i) Yes, she always gets on my case, she hates the way I dress and make up.
10. I don't know how I happened to get a D in algebra. Things just don't come easy for me.	j) I am not sure but we'd better not let Jack watch it.
11. Is this movie rated PG (parental guidance)?	k) Perhaps a little less time spent on television and a little more on books might prevent this kind of a thing in the future.

3. Adolescence may lead an individual through a lot of frustration. Failing to get along with peers or not being accepted by the group is a painful experience. Can you recall a situation from your past when you had to act against the majority? What caused it? How did you cope with the situation?

4. Do people see you in the same way as you see yourself? Work with a partner. Write a few lines about yourself and compare what you have written with your partner's description of yourself. Count how many words and phrases from the following list of useful vocabulary you have in common.

Useful vocabulary: to trust somebody; to be impulsive; to be a natural leader; to be quick at making decisions; to be venturesome; considerate, charming, amusing, sensible, sensitive, moody, cautious, shy, indecisive; to be sure of oneself; etc.

5. Read the following dialogues. Say who the participants are, how they are related, how old they might be and what problems they are discussing. What side are your sympathies with? Choose a dialogue to act out.

- I
 - You know dear, I'm a little concerned about Jenny's poor grades on her history tests.
 - Well, I am too, it's strange that on all her assignments, she seems to be doing fine, but when it comes to writing the test, she freezes or something.
 - Maybe we need to help her study better or quiz her before each exam. She seems to like the class all right.
 - And maybe we could talk to the teacher to see if she's noticed anything strange about Jenny's grades.
- II
 - My parents are from the dark ages or something! They think they can run my life? Well I've got news for them!
 - Well my folks are like that too - they give me a 9:30 p.m. curfew. and force me to finish all my homework before I can go out with my friends.
 - Oh man, . . . sometimes, I just wish I could move out now and make all my own decisions.
 - Really? Wouldn't your parents freak out if you ever mentioned that?
 - Well I suppose, but it's still a possibility.
- III
 - C'mon mom, I can't come now - this movie is so awesome.
 - Jonah, you said you'd help me hang the laundry right after dinner?and what time is it now? . . . I would like you to do it now please!
 - Oh man, it's like the best part. Can't I help later?
 - I said immediately Jonah! This is your last call or I will have to get your father!

6. Work in a small group. Consider the following situation.

Mike is almost 20 years old. He knows that his parents take a great deal of pride in seeing him succeed. He has been angry with them for a long time for not accepting him for who he is, for not taking better care of him, and for downplaying any accomplishment that doesn't fit in with their own tastes. He flunks out of college, which embarrasses and worries them.

Think of possible dialogues that might take place between:

- Mike and one of his parents;
- Mike's parents;
- Mike and his girlfriend;
- Mike's parents and a good friend of theirs who went through the same problems with his son.

7. Interview one of your parents asking the following questions. Be sure to write down the responses.

- Did you get any pocket money as a child? What were your household duties?
- Did you have any misunderstandings with your parents when you were young? If yes, what were the reasons?
- How old were you when you started living on your own?
- How old were you when you got married?

- In the course of years do you start to understand your parents better?
- Have you ever repeated your parents example while handling me?
- When was it more difficult to bring me up ? when I was a toddler? An adolescent? Or now?

8. Role-play.

Contradiction between what one wants and what one may afford is a reason for many conflicts. On the one hand, children want their parents to leave them alone and not to interfere with their things. On the other hand, parents feel they have a right to give advice to their children as they care for them and earn the living for the family.

Work in groups of three. Assume the roles of a parent, son/daughter and a consultant. The parent and a child will discuss the problem based on the contradiction mentioned above. The consultant will advise and reconcile the two parties.

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