

Advanced
Conversation with Character

By Bill & Derri Smith

A home-based language arts program



Curriculum and aids for real life

Bill & Derri Smith

7736 Greenbrier Road ◻ Joelton, TN 37080
sweethomepress.com ◻ contact@sweethomepress.com

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Advanced Conversation with Character

Advanced Conversation with Character builds upon the 22 parent-led lessons in the highly-acclaimed **Conversation with Character**.

Conversation is becoming a lost art in today's culture. Families sit side-by-side watching television, teenagers can do little more than "grunt" and spouses quickly share pertinent information before falling off to an exhausted sleep. Yet relationships are, most would agree, what life is all about. And conversation is the primary tool we are given to develop those relationships past the level of business partnerships, past superficial banalities and into the deep and beautiful sharing of lives for which we long.

The goal of Christian parents is to help children relate to people as Jesus did—leading them to acquire the mind of Christ to see people as He does. Parents want children to have his heart for the unlovely, the socially inept, and the lonely, as well as for friends and family.

The Golden Rule sums up the type of conversation we desire for families. Listen the way you want to be listened to. Talk about others and to others the way you want them to talk about and to you. Consider ways to bless your conversational partner, rather than focus solely on your own interests.

As with most things, exercising good conversation skills comes down to a matter of the heart. That is why issues of character are an integral part of the study of conversation.

Words are powerful. Whether spoken without thought, or with malice or for good, every word that you speak has lasting power. The Book of Psalms describes the tongues of the evil men as swords. (Psalm 57:4 and 64:3). Likewise, "the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword." (Hebrews

Conversation with Character



Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword.

Note:

When you encounter an anecdote in italics, this is the author, speaking from personal experience.

4:12). So, no matter whether you serve yourself, the enemy or God, your mouth is armed and powerful.

When you commit to make everything you say and do a service to God, then may the Lord richly bless your conversations for the greatest good.

Advancing Beyond the Basics

Advanced Conversation with Character (ACwC) compares to **Conversation with Character** (CwC) in the following ways.

- CwC trained children in conversational basics, from answering the telephone to saying “thank-you.” ACwC both builds on these basics and addresses new topics appropriate to older students.
- CwC is 22 parent-led lessons. ACwC is a 21-chapter guide for self-teaching, and therefore more suitable for older students.
- CwC ends each chapter with activity suggestions that often involve the whole family. ACwC challenges the self-learner with ways to personally put each lesson into practice.
- Both books are based on the belief that conversation is a God-given tool to be used with excellence, and that training and effort are keys to such excellence.
- Both books prominently feature Bible verses and famous quotes related to each lesson.
- Both books present good character as the essential ingredient for the exercise of conversational skill.

How to Use this Book

Who Is This Book For?

Advanced Conversation with Character is written for students ages 13 to young adult. A responsible, motivated student with a minimum junior high level reading ability should be able to work through the lessons on their own. (Optionally, this book can be used as a parent guide for instruction of one or more students.)

Advanced Conversation with Character

How Is This Book Used?

Using this book is very simple:

1. Read a chapter.
2. Execute the Plan of Action
3. Optionally, memorize the Bible verse and famous quote at the beginning of each chapter.

Work through the book, spending one week on shorter chapters and up to two weeks on longer chapters. Most of the student's time will be spent in the "Plan of Action," practicing skills. Working through the book at a faster pace is possible, but not recommended.

Learning can be enhanced if the student memorizes the Bible verses and quotations featured at the beginning of each chapter. For the acquisition of time-honored wisdom to incorporate into conversation, the authors recommend **Quotes with Character**, a book of 201 quotations that students copy, memorize and recite.

Be flexible to move quickly through topics the student has already mastered for their maturity level, and spend more time in areas of special interest or need.

How Should Parents Be Involved?

It is up to parents to decide the level of involvement needed to make sure the student reads the lessons, pursues the Plan of Action and, optionally, memorizes verses and quotations. Parents should encourage the student to discuss and practice conversation skills at

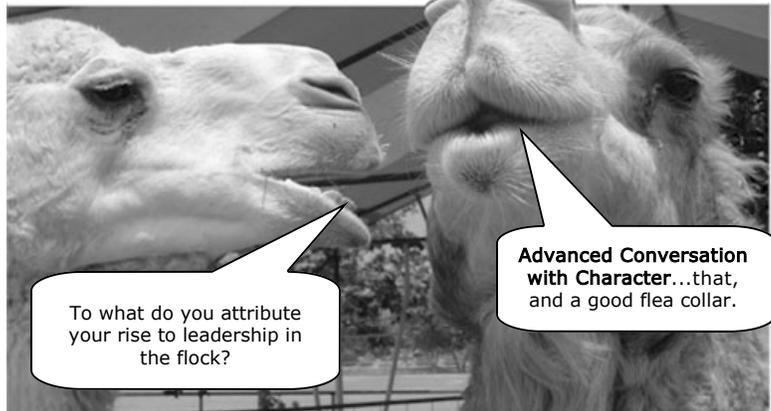
meal times with other family members, and in life, in general. There are occasional practice activities that will need participation by parents and/or siblings. In general, though, students can use this book on their own.

Should You Start First with Conversation with Character?

In most cases, training children in the art of conversation should begin with **Conversation with Character**, but it depends on the needs of each family and student.

Students well into their teens have benefited from CwC. The family-style approach makes that basic book a lot of fun. CwC lays a solid foundation for character-led conversation. **Advanced Conversation with Character** builds on that foundation, preparing them for the adult world by honing skills, focusing on specific needs and weaknesses and equipping them for adult conversational situations.

On the other hand, a teen (or near teen) who already has a good grasp on the basics of conversation can begin with **Advanced Conversation with Character** without first using CwC.





17 Getting Closer

Facts

Facts are important—no denying it. If you don't know that someone was raised by wolves and prefers to gnaw on bones during a conversation, you might mistake their seeming strangeness for hostility. You might not press forward to learn their true feelings about weightier issues like gun legislation, dietary laws and the protection of endangered species. Having failed to learn such facts, you might let slip your own opinions, which would hinder their objectivity about who you really are.

So, yes, facts have their place in a conversation. They provide a reference point from which we can take the quest for getting to know each other much further.

Developing intimacy in relationships, however, requires revealing who you are, beyond the facts. This *revealing* includes sharing opinions and feelings in a way that invites the same from another person, and in a way that assures that person that you accept them, no matter what they feel or believe.

Opinions

People don't REALLY get to know who you are by facts, alone. Sharing your views on politics, what makes a book "good" or "bad," or why one worldview makes more sense than another, helps people know you much better than by simply telling where

I John 1:7

If we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another...

Wishing to be friends is quick work, but friendship is a slow-ripening fruit."

Aristotle

you live and that you have two sisters and a brother.

Sharing opinions is one way to reveal who you are. Opinions should, however, be communicated with discretion and tact, lest you drive people away. Samuel Clements, better known by his pen name, Mark Twain, described the perils of stating opinions as absolute fact: "His answers were so final and exact that he did not leave a doubt to hang conversation on." (from *Rambling Notes of an Idle Excursion*)

Nor do we get to know others if we quickly cut them off for their stated opinions. In matters of opinion, remain open to hear other viewpoints, thoughts and ideas.

Even when a person is sure they are correct, it is helpful and respectful to try to understand the other person's point of view and to ask questions to discover why they think as they do.

Feelings

Facts provide a framework, and opinions help people get to know you better. Yet, the recipe for a deep and trusting relationship requires a third ingredient—telling how you feel. Do you find it difficult to tell about your struggles, your joys, your frustrations and your highest aspirations when no one in the room is willing to volunteer such information? Have you experienced how others tend to "open up" and express similar feelings after someone else "breaks the ice" by sharing their feelings? Soon, those who have shared feel much closer.

Relationship Spoilers

Odd Man Out

In a group or conversational trio, discussing matters that don't pertain to all present leaves some feeling like the odd person out. An example is discussing family matters when the third person is not in your family. The third person then has nothing to contribute to the conversation.

Breeding Jealousy

Don't talk at length about "my best friend Sam" to another boy who would also like to think of himself as your friend and who might feel hurt that you do not consider him a 'best friend'.

Prejudging

You may think you know what a person is going to say. Give them a chance to voice their perspective, anyway. You may hear something you didn't expect. In any case, attentive listening with a respectful posture helps to preserve the friendship.

17 Getting Closer

Consider the following statements.

Fact Only: I saw a reading list on the internet with over 1000 book reviews.

Fact Plus Opinion: I saw a reading list on the internet with over 1000 reviews. I think it's important to have guidelines in selecting books, because books shape our minds, beliefs and decisions.

Fact Plus Opinion Plus Feelings: I saw a reading list on the internet with over 1000 reviews. I think it's important to have guidelines in selecting books, because books shape our minds, beliefs and decisions. I just love to read, and I was so excited to discover this new list because I really trust the reviewer. I can't wait to check them out!

The progression above, from fact to opinion to feelings is analogous to going from one-dimensional to two-dimensional to three-dimensional.

Disclosing feelings helps connect to others who have experienced similar feelings. Feeling lonely in a crowd, frustration over a series of obstacles to a goal, the enjoyment of a relaxing walk on a beautiful autumn day and the embarrassment over something awkward done in public are examples of situations most anyone can relate to. Instead of simply reciting facts

about the class you are taking or the subjects you are taking in school, try adding interest by telling about your reactions, hopes, desires and other feelings. Remember, people are not looking for more entertainment— a funny movie or book can fill the bill there. In a conversation, they aren't usually looking just for new facts. They are looking for connection with another person. Consider this example:

Just the Facts

"I just started a new class. It's an art class and it meets on Tuesday evenings. We are starting with pencil sketching. Later we will learn about watercolor and oil painting and other media."

Adding Self Disclosure

"I've wanted to improve my art skills for ages and I'm so excited because I finally started an art class this past Tuesday night. I was kind of nervous because I really don't know if I have any talent, but I was amazed at how much improvement I saw after the teacher showed us a few tips. I love to write and always thought it would be fun to be able to illustrate my own books; maybe,



just maybe, I'll be able to do that someday.
This class gives me hope!"

Be Real

Everyone relates better to people willing to admit their faults and weaknesses, since we all have them. Someone who comes across too perfect can be intimidating or seem proud.

That doesn't mean that you should go around parading your faults, either; just keep a balanced picture going. If you are telling about reaching the state championships in the national spelling bee, and all the wins it took to get you there, for example, throw in a few tidbits about problems you encountered, mistakes you made, or times you were really nervous.

If you just tell people what you think they want to hear, you are portraying an unreal person. If someone likes you, it won't really be YOU they like. You'll have to keep up the 'act' and the whole relationship will be built on a false foundation

Plan of Action

Samuel Clemens said "Sane and intelligent human beings are like all other human beings, and carefully and cautiously and diligently conceal their private real opinions from the world and give out fictitious ones in their stead for general consumption."

- What do you think of that idea? Why? Why do you think Mark Twain thought people kept their private opinions to themselves and gave out false ones? Discuss this with your family, or express your thoughts in an essay of one or more pages.

Words Are Forever

I shot an arrow into the
air,

It fell to earth, I knew
not where;

For so swiftly it flew,
the sight

Could not follow it in its
flight.

I breathed a song into
the air,

It fell to earth, I knew
not where;

For, who has sight so
keen and strong

That it can follow the
flight of song?

Long, long afterward, in
an oak

I found the arrow, still
unbroke;

And the song, from be-
ginning to end,

I found again in the
heart of a friend.

-Henry Wadsworth
Longfellow