

# After the Buzz, social thinking ideas for parents and caregivers

From *What's the Buzz?* A social skills enrichment programme for primary students



## Lesson 1: meeting people and exiting

This section highlights the value of parental care and that no one knows a child as well as a parent. The focus of lesson one was to teach students how to greet, receive a greeting and say goodbye. These can be awkward skills for some and by explicitly teaching them we offer children a design to initiate improved social communication. Here are a few practical ideas parents can do at home to support the quality of their child's social thinking, especially with a view of strengthening their greeting and exiting skills.

### What do your children see?

How do you greet and say goodbye? What are you showing your child? If you are certain that you greet and farewell warmly, then do not underestimate the influence you will have on them in the longer term, especially with a little purposeful guidance.

### Be encouraging

Talk to your children about the importance of a warm greeting. It is more likely to lead to conversation and friendship. If your child feels shy about greeting people share the fact that many others feel exactly the same. Encourage them to try, even if it means taking on one small challenge at a time.

### Mental rehearsal

As you are on the way to visit someone help your child to rehearse by discussing who will be at the gathering, what is likely to happen and what they should say as they enter. You might tell your child, "Say hello to each person. If they say hello first then make sure you say hello back to them with that gorgeous smile of yours." Also remind them that when it is time to leave it is important for them to do the same as you.

### The secret signal

Prompt your child to remember the steps to greet and farewell by using an agreed secret signal. It may be as simple as saying, "Sophie, have you got a tissue?" Alternatively, you might lightly squeeze their hand or ruffle their hair as a prompt that means, "remember to greet or say goodbye to this person." And, when they respond positively by using their skills, commend them! Good instruction and praise, in the company of patience, is the most valuable behaviour shaping tool.

### Shaking hands

For boys and men in particular the handshake is often a part of the greeting process. Children are always fascinated by the stories surrounding its beginning. Share these stories with your child as a means to raise the importance of getting the handshake right. Although historical accounts are a little contradictory, the most popular story is that years and years ago a person showed an open right hand as proof they were not carrying a weapon. If two men met and displayed empty right hands, this seemingly meant a basic level of trust existed and that neither would reach for a weapon to stab the other. One variation to this story is that the handshake evolved to check for hidden knives. Apparently, the shaking motion of the hands and arms was supposed to displace any sharp objects that may have been kept in the sleeve. Share this brief history of handshake with your child and teach them how to get their handshake just right.

### Practice makes perfect



The safest place for your child to sharpen their greeting and goodbye skills is at home with family members. Make a start by expecting everyone to use them. As you see their confidence growing, also expect these skills to be used at school, cubs, ballet, karate, bowling club, scouts etc. This process is called training to proficiency, and can be used to reshape all sorts of behaviours. As an incentive for your child to continue using these skills create a chart and place a sticker or tick on it, and reward them for applying this into their life. Use it over several weeks until the skill is embedded.



“Don't walk in front of me, I may not follow.”  
Don't walk behind me, I may not lead.  
Just walk beside me and be my friend.”

*Albert Camus*