COMIC STRIP CONVERSATIONS (Carol Gray)

What is a Comic Strip Conversation?

A Comic Strip Conversation uses pictures or illustrations to illustrate the ongoing process of a conversation. Drawing while you speak provides visual information for the listener to support their understanding. It is an effective tool for parents and professionals when communicating with students who have autism and other developmental disabilities.

Like regular conversations they report the past, describe the present, plan for the future, and share information. However Comic Strip Conversations also identify visually what people say, do and think. Comic Strip Conversations provide insight into a student’s perspective of a situation; serve as an excellent prerequisite activity to a Social Story, and to visually “work through” a problem situation to identify solutions.

How do you write/develop them?

You may use paper and markers, a white board, a computer, or other programmes like Board Maker, PICS for PECS, Clicker, etc. You need to use something quick and simple to begin with (paper and coloured pens) and later you can publish the Comic Strip using other programmes. White boards allow easy erasing but are not permanent.

Begin by explaining you want to “Draw while you talk” to the student and show them what symbols you will use:
Then find out details about the situation:

1. “Where were you?” (student draws a person and location symbol such as a swing) OR the adult can draw the location symbol and person for the student.
2. “Who else was there?” (Draw other people and label)
3. “What were you doing?” (draw action)
5. “What did you say?” (write it in talk bubble)
6. “What did others say?” (write in talk bubble)
7. “What did you think when you said that?” (write in thought bubble)
8. “Guess what others were thinking when they said/did that?” (write in thought bubble/s)
9. If the student is unable to follow questions then draw a person and say “That's you James, and this is ...?” “James said...?” In this way they are finishing your statements rather than answering the questions. You can also write from your perspective: “Celeste thinks James was by the swings”
10. Summarise the situation and plan what to do or say next time. You may need to list a variety of responses and sort through the best ones to use.

Other tips:

- You may use little boxes to identify each part of the action and order these correctly after the process (like a proper comic strip)
- Prepare for up and coming events such as an excursion, concert, disco, working in a group, going to a party etc.
- Use colours as a code for feelings (“Tell me a happy, friendly colour?” “Tell me an angry unfriendly colour?”). A colour code can then be used to shade in talk and thought bubbles to teach how people can use friendly words but be thinking unfriendly thoughts.
- Use in conjunction with Social Stories or on their own to ensure student understands the story
- Use Comic Strip Conversations to illustrate when things have gone well as a way of giving positive feedback to students (not just when they get things wrong)