



Comfortable Cafeteria Program

## Week #4 Lesson Plan: Including Others, 'Mix It Up' day

**Theme:** Including others. It's time to toss up your table and 'Mix it up'. Toss up your lunch table to include others and celebrate differences. Continue to learn about and practice conversation skills with someone new. Make a new friend in the cafeteria.

Children and adults tend to be 'creatures of habit' – sometimes it's easier to do the same thing instead of trying something new. We all tend to sit in the same place in classrooms, meeting rooms, and even the dinner table at home. This generally holds true in the cafeteria.

Students like to sit with the same friends and at the same table every day. Sometimes, the problem with this is that certain students may be excluded from joining in. Plus, sitting with the same friends every day will limit opportunities to make new friends.

**In our experience** implementing 'mix it up day', we have found students in the younger grades (K – 3) are more open to sitting by someone new than students in the upper grades (4 – 8). It's important to 'frame' this activity as something fun. If 'mix it up day' is done routinely, say once per month, students will become accustomed to doing this and will be able to practice the conversation skills needed when meeting someone new. It will also increase opportunities for making new friends and decrease the rigidity of cliques and 'closed groups'. The ultimate goal is to promote the inclusion of all students who might be excluded because of disability, social skills challenges, or any trait that may make them less likely to be included.



### Goals:

1. Students continue learn about how to have a positive mealtime conversation and have an opportunity to practice these skills with someone new. Students are randomly assigned to different tables, or other strategies are used to get students to sit with someone new.
2. Cafeteria Supervisors continue to learn about how to model and teach mealtime conversation skills.
3. Students and cafeteria supervisors talk about the importance of respecting differences (cultural, religious, racial, and ability-levels) and including everyone. Teach students to value diversity and that our differences makes the world a more exciting and interesting place to live in!



### Materials:

- Conversation Cube - print out on cardstock or regular paper; form into cube – make enough to give 1-2 per each table. (have a volunteer help make these)
- Scissors
- Poster Board or large post-it paper
- Tape (clear and masking)
- Markers



**Special Guest Activity:** If a ‘Special Guest’ was not brought in to the lunch period to talk with students **during Week 3**, consider having a Special Guest during Week 4 or even, Week 5 or 6. *Remember, this is a flexible program!* **Who?** This guest could be the principal, mayor, school staff member (e.g. nutritionist, coach), or community leader (e.g. chef, artist, musician, sports figure, etc.). Some schools have had high school students attend lunch and sit with one table of students. Consider high school students who can be good role models for younger students and discuss issues related to transition to high school (e.g. how to get involved in clubs, deal with peer pressure, etc.). This type of experience might count toward ‘service hours’ if this is something required by the high school. Consider handing the ‘Special Guest’ Flyer around the school (include date, time and place) to generate interest. **What?** The role of the Special Guest is to introduce her/himself and what they do. The students are given an opportunity to ask the guest questions about what they do (e.g. What is your favorite thing about your job?) and appropriate personal questions (e.g. Do you have children? What do you do for fun?)

### Handouts for Supervisors & Teachers:

- Coaching Conversation Tips for Supervisors (review from last week)
- Encourage Supervisors and Teachers to read this 1-page handout on “ to “Respecting Differences Makes Us Stronger” from the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Parenting and Family Relationships Division of Extension. <https://parenting.extension.wisc.edu/raising-caring-kids/respecting-differences-makes-us-stronger/>

### Handout for Students:

- Conversation Starters for Students (review from last week)
- Friendship Golden Rules (share with supervisors and teachers too)

### Action steps for occupational therapist (OT) and other staff leading the program.

#### ➡ WHAT TO DO BEFORE Week #4’s session:

Determine how you will have the students sit by someone new. There are all sorts of ways to do this creatively. Make sure to ‘talk it up’ in positive ways and have teachers do the same in class. Here are some options that we have used:

1. **Random table assignments by number:** Students pick a number from a bag and sit at that table.



- Count tables in the cafeteria and the number of students. Divide the number of students by the number of tables to determine how many students will sit at each table.
- Print off table numbers in duplicate based on the number of students per table. Cut apart and place the duplicate table numbers in a basket or baggie. Have each student pick a number.
- Print table number cards and display one card and one 'Conversation Cube' on each table.
- Hang Poster Board in cafeteria

2. **Tables with 'themes':** Identify a number of discussion 'themes' that can be assigned to tables. Examples include favorite: sports, art, music, food/cooking, hobbies, or vacation. Other topics might include 'issue-based themes' such as: how students can decrease bullying, how to get ready for middle school or junior high, ways to decrease cliques, etc. Be creative based on your student population. Most important, is to make it fun. Give students in their classroom a list of the themes and have them put an 'X' by their 2 top choices. Before 'mix it up day', give each student a slip of paper with the 'theme' table they are assigned to.

**➡ DURING Week #4's Cafeteria Session – The OT or facilitator is present during lunch and continues the discussion of mealtime conversations, making new friends, and including others.**

1. **Mix up the tables!** Follow the strategy you planned for 'mixing up' the students (e.g. use table numbers or themes) If using the table number method, we have had students pick a number from a bag or basket when they enter the cafeteria. Have cafeteria supervisors guide students to the table number they are assigned to. Let the students know that the purpose of the activity is to help them practice their conversation skills with someone new – and to make new friends.
  - Tell them that being able to talk to new people is an important life skill. For example, almost all jobs require and interview. Learning how to ask appropriate questions, answer questions, and listen to others is critical.
  - If students moan about sitting somewhere else, encourage them to be open in their thinking. Let them know that 'mix it up' day will be done routinely to help them get in the habit of including others and making new friends.
2. Review information from last week regarding mealtime conversations and the special guest (if you had one last week). Ask them how they got to know the special guest and what they learned.
3. **Lead a short 3-4 minute discussion about mealtime conversations.** Ask them to share some tips about how to have a good conversation (refer to supervisor and student conversation handout). E.g. Look at the person talking, act like you're interested by nodding head, take turns talking, ask questions to show interest and remember what the person says,
4. etc. If feasible, write ideas on a poster or a post-it paper.



Conversation starters  
Family Dinner Project



5. **Bring up the topic of respecting differences.** Talk about how we are all different from each other (have students give examples: different sizes/shapes, different skin color, different abilities), but make a point how we are all the same in many ways (have students give examples: we all like to have friends, we all eat food, we all like to feel like we belong and are accepted, we all like people to be kind to us, we all have certain strengths, etc.). Ask students how to show respect for differences and write them down.

**Closing thought:** We all have strengths and weaknesses. Each of us is equally important with different talents. If we see each other's strengths rather than weaknesses, and work together, we can achieve great things, even if they seem impossible at the time!

6. **Use the *Conversation Cubes* to help foster conversations.** Each student will have a turn at rolling the cube and asking the person to their right, the question on the cube. Have the students take turns rolling the cube and asking questions.
7. **Obtain student feedback.** A couple minutes before the students need to leave, ask them for feedback on how the activity went. What did they think about this activity? What was fun about it? What was challenging? Keep the focus on positive outcomes and discourage negativity.

### Teach Respect for Cultural Differences and Differing Abilities

In today's world, schools are filled with students from varying cultures and backgrounds as well as students with various disabilities. In order to promote inclusion, children should be sensitive to what makes each individual unique.

For ideas on how to help children learn how to respect one another, check out the [Responsive Counselor's webpage](#) on 'Respect'.



(image from the Responsive Counselor's website)



**Another simple activity for teachers:** [What we can learn from a box of crayons](#). Refer to the Teaching Tolerance website ([www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org)). Students draw a picture only using 1 crayon. Then, they draw another picture using any crayon in their box. Follow this with a discussion of which picture they like better and why.



"We could learn a lot from crayons. ... (They) all are different colors, but they all exist very nicely in the same box." (unknown author)

**Reinforce Week #1, 2, and 3's themes and content. Continue to explore:**

- Volume Control Strategies – help supervisors find what works.
- Promoting friendships
- Continue to demonstrate and encourage positive interaction with students. Smile, call them by name, show an interest.
- Touch base with the cafeteria supervisors at the end of the session. How do you think it went? What did you observe? Do you have any suggestions? Introduce the theme for week 5.

*Congratulations on completing Week #4 of the Comfortable Cafeteria Program! Move on to Week #5!*

**Resource:** Excellent information on Family Dinners and ways to foster mealtime conversations. Download and print the Conversation Starters which are geared for different ages. These attractive conversation starters can be printed and laminated and placed on the lunch tables to foster conversations.

[www.familydinnerproject.org](http://www.familydinnerproject.org)



Conversation Starters  
Family Dinner Project

Developed by Louise Demirjian, MA, OTR/L, Fran Horvath, OTR/L, Lauren Baird, MOT, OTR/L, & Susan Bazyk, PhD, OTR/L for *Every Moment Counts* (2014). Revised 2021. [www.everymomentcounts.org](http://www.everymomentcounts.org)

