

Conversation Starters by Age Group

Age-Appropriate Questions for Elementary, Middle, and High School Students

School Counselor Resource Serie

Purpose

Students of different ages communicate in different ways. These conversation starters are designed to help school counselors build rapport, encourage meaningful dialogue, and better understand each student's experiences. Select questions that fit the student's developmental level, personality, and current situation.

Elementary School (Grades K–5)

Building Rapport

- What has been the best part of your day?
- If you could choose any superpower, what would it be?
- What's something that makes you laugh?
- Tell me about your favorite thing to do after school.
- Who do you enjoy spending time with?

Exploring Feelings

- How are you feeling today?
- When do you feel happiest at school?
- What makes you feel worried?
- What do you do when you're upset?
- Who helps you feel safe?

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Encouraging Problem Solving

- What do you think might help?
- If your best friend had this problem, what would you tell them?
- What's one thing we could try together?
- What usually helps you feel better?
- What are you really good at?

Middle School (Grades 6–8)

Building Rapport

- What's been the highlight of your week?
- What do you enjoy doing outside of school?
- If you had a free day, how would you spend it?
- What's something you're interested in right now?
- What helps you relax?

Exploring Challenges

- What's been feeling difficult lately?
- When do you notice stress the most?
- How have your friendships been going?
- What has been on your mind recently?
- What would you like adults to understand?

Encouraging Growth

- What's one strength you've used recently?
- What are you proud of?

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- What goal would you like to reach?
- What would make this week a little better?
- Who can support you?

High School (Grades 9–12)

Building Rapport

- What's keeping you busy these days?
- What are you looking forward to?
- What motivates you?
- What do you enjoy most outside of school?
- What's something people might not know about you?

Exploring Concerns

- What's been weighing on you lately?
- What has been the most stressful part of this school year?
- What expectations are you feeling right now?
- How are things going outside of school?
- What would you change if you could?

Looking Ahead

- What goals are most important to you?
- What kind of person do you want to become?
- What helps you stay motivated?
- What gives you hope?
- What's one step you could take this week?

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Universal Follow-Up Questions

These work well with students of all ages.

- Tell me more about that.
- What happened next?
- How did that make you feel?
- What do you think was most important?
- What surprised you?
- What helped, even a little?
- What would you like to happen next?
- Is there anything I haven't asked that you'd like to share?

Helpful Reminders

- Begin with simple, non-threatening questions before discussing more difficult topics.
- Give students time to think before responding.
- Follow the student's pace rather than rushing the conversation.
- Listen for strengths, supports, and opportunities—not just concerns.
- Adapt questions to fit each student's personality, culture, and developmental level.

Counselor Reflection

Strong relationships are built one conversation at a time. Age-appropriate questions help students feel understood, respected, and more willing to share what they're experiencing.

Part of the Freedom Path Counseling School Counselor Resource Series

These resources are provided free of charge to support school counselors as they invest in the emotional well-being of students and families. Learn more and access additional downloadable tools at freedompathcounseling.org/school-counselor-resource-center

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