

Conversation Starter Ideas

Here are a few questions which can be used to start conversation. Asking open-ended questions, rather than simple “yes” or “no” questions, will allow everyone to share more information.

- How many people are in your family? Tell me about them. Ask to see pictures, if they are available. Share pictures of your own family.
- What was it like when you first came to the United States? What did you first see or do? What do you notice about the United States that is different from your country?
- What are some places around here you would like to see?
- What kind of work did you do at home?
- What do you think of the weather here? What is the weather like in your country?
- What kind of music do you like?
- Do you like to play/watch sports? Which sports? Who is your favorite team?
- How do people greet one another in your country?
- What are your favorite foods? What are they made of? How are they prepared? When are they eaten?
- What American foods have you tried? What American foods do you like?
- Are there any foods that you do not eat because of your religion or culture?

Please Note: *Only* after you have been meeting for some time and have developed a relationship with someone are the following questions appropriate to ask:

- Why did you decide to leave your country? How did you leave?
- Do you ever want to return to your country again?
- Is there anything you do not understand or like about the United States?
- What is your religious background?
- What are your plans and dreams for the future?

ESL Question Hierarchy (easiest to hardest)

This question-asking tool is useful if you experience communication roadblocks. You can move up or down the hierarchy depending on the person’s English fluency.

Yes / No	Either/Or	Wh & H	Inference/Open-Ended
Is this your son?	Is this your son or your daughter?	How many children do you have?	Tell me about your family.
Do you live in Kent?	Do you live in Rochester or Buffalo?	Where do you live?	Tell me about your home.