So many learners with disabilities cannot easily start a conversation or interact socially with their peers without adult support. By providing a series of concrete conversation starters, a learner can talk to peers without adult interference and can initiate communication instead of only responding to questions or participating in conversations others initiate. Sticks and questions can also be used to teach listening skills, encourage appropriate comments, and practice using a new communication system.

Use talking sticks as an ice breaker, brain break or (if you want to generate content-related questions) as a kick-off or conclusion for a unit of study.

If you want to know more about this strategy, you can read about it in the book, From Tutor Scripts to Talking Sticks. You can also watch my “Off the Page” video featuring this idea:

**materials**

- tongue depressors, craft sticks, or popsicle sticks
- fine-tipped marker or 8 ½ x 11 shipping labels

**directions**

- Create a series of questions that are both appropriate for a student’s age group and tailored for the time period or environment you are targeting. For example, questions you design to ask in the lunchroom may be different from those you design for students to use to start a unit in science class. Provide a range of questions. Some might be thought provoking, such as, “What does it mean to be a good friend?” Others can be just plain fun, such as, “Describe your favorite pair of socks.” Still others may be used to get students to dive deeper into an area of study (e.g., “What does authorship mean?”)

- Use a fine-tipped marker to print one question on each stick or print the following pages of questions on shipping labels [8 1/2 x 11 sheets]. Put the sticker paper into the printer one sheet at a time. Once you have printed, cut out the questions and affix each one to a stick. The font and “shape” of the questions below should allow each one to fit on a single craft stick.

Adapted from: Kluth & Danaher (2017). From Tutor Scripts to Talking Sticks: 100 Ways to Differentiate Instruction in the K-12 Inclusive Classroom.
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• If you don't have sticker paper or a lot of time to prepare, give each student a few questions and a few sticks and have each one create a few talking sticks for the group.

• Once you have created your sticks, give one to each student and have them all find a partner (or assign partners). Then, ask them to take turns asking and answering the questions on their sticks. After a few minutes, direct students to find new partners and repeat the process. You can have students work with just one or two partners or you can allow them to change partners several times.

• To add some variety to the activity, have students switch sticks when they are finished talking with each one of their partners.