

WE ARE NEW YORK

A Guide for Conversation Group Leaders



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Your **We Are New York (WANY)** Conversation Group is a great way to bring people together around a common purpose: to practice the English they need to achieve their goals.

WANY models the English people need to manage everyday life situations and solve important problems such as:

- How can I help my child in school?
- How can I get low-cost health insurance?
- My friend is being abused. What can I do to help her?
- What can I say when I don't understand someone?

A **WANY** Conversation Group is a rehearsal for how people can take action, get involved and make a difference, just like the characters in the show.

When people feel more confident using English in your group, they will start to feel more confident using English everywhere. They will take what they learn and practice with you back to their friends, parents, neighbors, and children.

The work you do as a Conversation Group leader will make a big difference in the lives of many people!

WANY Conversation Group Goals

- To give people practice talking in English about topics that are important to their daily lives;
- To give people practice asking questions and working together like the characters in the episodes;
- To reinforce the information in the episodes about important City services;
- To build the capacity within every group member to be a leader—in their families, in their workplaces and in their communities.

Who are the people in your group?

- They are adults over 21. Their ages will vary from 21 to over 60.
- Some have been in the U.S. for 2 months, some for 20 years.
- Some may have advanced degrees from their home country, and there may be others who have not completed high school.
- People in your group may all speak the same language or they may speak different languages.
- Many people will have very limited English skills. This guide has good tips on how to draw them out and develop their confidence.

Be sure to watch each episode and review this Guide before each group meeting.

CONVERSATION GUIDE CONTENTS

This Conversation Guide will prepare you to lead a conversation group that meets one time or two times a week to discuss the episodes of **We Are New York**. The Conversation Guide contains tips for conversation leaders and a plan for a 2-hour discussion for each episode. The elements of the plan are the same for each episode.

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Getting Started

- Arrive early to test the video equipment and DVD. Make sure the subtitles are turned on.
- Place the chairs in a circle or semi-circle, so people face each other.
- Greet people as they arrive.
- Create a welcoming atmosphere. Smile and use friendly gestures to help people relax.
- When showing the DVD, make sure everyone can see the screen and is close enough to read the subtitles.

Getting Ideas Across

- Use simple words and short sentences. Say things more than one way to help people understand. For example: *Who is your favorite character? Which person in the story do you like the most?*
- Speak slowly when you give directions to each activity. Practice what you will say ahead of time.
- Put yourself in the learner’s shoes. Remember how difficult it is to understand someone speaking to you in a language that is new to you.
- Give people time to understand and to find the words they want to say.
- Don’t worry about correcting grammar. Mistakes are okay! It’s the meaning that’s important.
- Say encouraging things. For example: *That’s very interesting. Please continue. Can you tell me more? You said that very well. Take your time.*
- If it’s difficult to understand someone, **SAY:** *I’m interested in what you are saying. Can you say that again, please?*

Getting Ideas Across (continued)

- Use gestures, actions and drawings to help explain a word or idea.
- Try not to ask questions that can be answered with “yes” or “no.”

For example: ~~Do you understand the story?~~
What’s going on in the story?

~~Do you know how you can get good health care?~~
What can you do to get good health care?

Getting Everyone to Talk

- Make sure everyone gets a chance to speak. Set ground rules: *Everyone gets a chance to talk. Only one person talks at a time.*
- Let the group members do most of the talking! Limit the amount of talking you do.
- Welcome all ideas and opinions. Get different points of view on the same question. Don’t say anyone is wrong. Instead, ask the group for other ideas and opinions.
ASK: *Does anyone have another idea?*
- Smile and encourage everyone’s efforts to speak, especially those who are struggling to speak English. (Remember how difficult it can be to begin to speak in a new language!)
- Some people speak up often. Say that you are interested in their ideas. But ask the quieter group members for their ideas before the more talkative ones speak a second or third time.
- Have people sit next to new partners, so everyone gets to speak with and learn from each other. This keeps things fresh and creates opportunities for people to get to know each other and to speak more.
- When helpful, have people with different English language abilities help each other.

Rehearsing for Action

- Encourage people to share what they know about a topic and to talk about their own experiences. For example:
 - *How can you help your children in school? What do you think you can do?*
 - *What do you do to stay healthy?*
 - *What do you say to a friend who needs your help?*
- Some people may talk about difficult experiences and may get emotional. Let them express their emotions. Refer to the show and ask what the characters do to solve problems.
- Ask what a particular character said or did to deal with issues you are discussing. In pairs have people practice saying the character’s words.
- Be supportive, but don’t try to solve problems that are discussed. You are not expected to be an expert on any of the topics in the series. Remind people to call 311, and that 311 has interpreters in their language.

Important note for group members about 311:

When you call 311, you can use your first language.
Here are the steps:

- First, listen to the recording.
- When the 311 operator starts to talk, say the name of your language and they will find someone who can help you. You might have to wait a short time. Don’t hang up!

Total Time: 2 Hours

A. Before You Watch

(45 minutes)

1. Introductions (10 minutes)

2. Picture Discussion (20 minutes)

3. Important Words (15 minutes)

B. Show and Discuss the Episode

(1 hour)

C. Wrap-Up

(15 minutes)

Note on Time:

The times are approximate. For example, if you spend a little more time on the “Before You Watch” activities, you can spend a little less on the others.

1 Introductions (10 minutes)

The start of each session is a chance for people to get to know each other better, share a laugh and warm up.

The first time you meet with your group, take a moment at the beginning to explain what you will be doing together. Give the participants an idea of what they can expect.

You can say:

- *This is a conversation group. We are here to practice speaking English together.*
- *We will meet once (one time) a week for 10 weeks to watch a TV show together. The name of the show is We Are New York.*
- *The people in the TV show We Are New York come from all over the world, and live in New York City. They speak slowly to help us understand.*
- *Together, we will learn new words and good information. Let's get started.*

STEPS:

- a. Arrange the chairs in a circle so everyone faces each other. The first time the group meets, introduce yourselves (you and your co-leader). Slowly and clearly, say your name, where you come from, where you live and one thing you like about New York City. Then have the group members introduce themselves, following your example.

Example: My name is _____.
I come from _____.
I live in Jackson Heights, Queens.
I like _____.

(To build people's confidence and comfort level, have them first introduce themselves to a partner, then have them introduce themselves to the whole group. If you wish, you can split the whole group into circles of five or six people each for this activity.)

- b. The next time the group meets (and at each subsequent meeting), have people say their names and something new. You can ask them to say a word they learned in the previous meeting, a character they liked from the show, something they did that day or week...

2 Picture Discussion (20 minutes)

This activity gets everyone talking, using words they know, learning new words from each other and making predictions about the episode. (Use the pictures in the Materials Packet for this activity. Collect the pictures at the end of the meeting.)

STEPS:

- a. Make small groups of two or three people each.
SAY: *Turn to the person (or two people) sitting next to you.*
- b. **SAY:** *Let's talk about today's story. I have three pictures from the show.* (See the Materials Packet.) Hold up the pictures so everyone sees them. Hand out only one picture to each small group of 2-3 people. Each group will talk about one of the three pictures.
- c. Read the questions at the bottom of the picture out loud.
SAY: *Talk about the picture with the people in your small group. Who do you think the people are? Where do you think they are? What do you think is going on? Make up any story you can about the picture!*
- d. Give the group members a few minutes to talk freely with each other about their picture. Encourage people to make up any story idea they can. **SAY:** *There's no right or wrong answer!* (See tips on next page.)

- e. Get everyone's attention for full-group discussion.
SAY: *I want everyone to hear your ideas.* Ask the questions printed below each picture. Give everyone a chance to talk.
- f. Be encouraging. **SAY:** *Those are great (interesting, cool...) ideas! We'll watch the show and see what happens. But before we watch, let's talk about some important words you'll hear in the show.*

Picture Discussion Tips:

- Let people talk about the pictures with their partners first before you lead a discussion with the whole group.
- Give people time to get talking. Go around the room to encourage people to face one another and talk with their partners. Use hand gestures and body language to encourage people to face one another. Encourage them to use English, but it's fine if they use their native language to help each other get the idea.
- **If you have a group with more limited English skills**, ask people to name things they see in the picture. Use the pictures in this way to build basic vocabulary. Go around the room and help partners make lists of things they see.
- **If you have a more advanced group**, when people give opinions in whole-group discussion, **ASK:** *What do you see that makes you say that?* This question gets people to look carefully at the picture, to use words they know or need to learn, and to give specific reasons for their opinions. Rehearse this question ahead of time so it becomes natural to you!
- Don't give away the plot of the show! Encourage ideas and possibilities. **SAY:** *Those are very good/interesting ideas. We'll watch the show and see what happens!*

3 Important Words (15 minutes)

This activity introduces people to important words and themes in the episode.

STEPS:

- a. **SAY:** *This page has some important words you will hear in the show.*
- b. Hand out a copy of the “Important Words” sheet to everyone. (Everyone can keep this handout.) Have people look it over with a partner.
- c. Point to the episode title at the top of the handout. Lead everyone in saying the title together. **ASK:** *What do you think the show is about?*
- d. Point to the first word. **SAY:** *Look at the first word on the list.* **ASK:** *Where have you seen this word before? When did you see it? What do you think it means?* Help build the meaning of the word by piecing their answers together. Think of it like putting a puzzle together; each answer is a clue to build upon.
- e. **SAY:** *Let’s say the word together.* Lead the group in saying the word together. Then have people practice saying the word with a partner.
- f. Point to the example sentence. **SAY:** *Let’s look at the example sentence. Let’s say it together.* Lead the group in saying the sentence. Then have partners turn to each other and take turns saying the sentence.

Alternative Steps for the “Important Words” Activity

Instead of handing out the “Important Words” sheet at the beginning of the activity, use a blackboard to introduce the words. Write on the board and lead discussion about only one word at a time. After the group has practiced and discussed all the words, hand out the sheet for review.

- g. **Point to the question.** Ask the question in the question column. Encourage people to suggest possible answers. Then **SAY:** *Turn to the person next to you. Ask the person next to you the question.* Give people a moment to practice asking and answering the question (or just asking the question).
- h. **Repeat the process** with the other words, sentences and questions on the list.

“Important Words” Tips:

- Have people use gestures, actions and drawings to help express the meaning of a word.
- Using dictionaries is fine, but see if people can figure out a word or phrase before opening their dictionaries. Have people teach each other the words.
- Have people talk about their own experiences related to the words on the sheet. For example, for a phrase such as “parent-teacher conferences,” **ASK:** *Who has gone to a parent-teacher conference? What happened in the conference? Tell us about it. What else happened? Who else has gone to a parent-teacher conference? Tell us about it...*
- If someone asks about a word or a related topic, instead of answering it yourself, ask the group what they think. Toss questions back to the group to encourage people to learn from each other. Clarify ideas when helpful.
- **If you have a group with more limited English skills,** you can skip a sentence or question on the handout if the language seems too difficult.
- The episode will provide answers to some of the questions on the handout. **SAY:** *We’ll watch the show and talk about these questions after the show.*

Show and Discuss the Episode

(1 hour)

After talking about the pictures and practicing the words, people are ready to watch the show. Pause between scenes and have people talk about it.

STEPS:

- a. Make sure everyone can see the screen and is close enough to read the subtitles.
- b. **SAY:** The name of the story is _____. While you watch, look for the pictures we talked about. (Hold up the pictures.) Listen for the important words. (Hold up the “Important Words” handout.) We’ll talk about the show afterwards.
- c. Pause the video after a scene in one of the pre-viewing pictures. Have people turn to a partner or a small group of three people. **SAY:** Look at the picture. **ASK:** What’s going on? Who are these people? Talk about it with each other.
- d. After a few minutes of paired or small-group discussion, **SAY:** Let’s talk together as a big group. **ASK:** What’s going on in the story? Who are these people? Where are they? What else did you learn? What do you think? What questions do you have?
- e. Have people look at the “Important Words” handout. **ASK:** What words did you hear? When did you hear it? Who said it? What did (name of character) say? What other new words did you hear? What questions do you have?
- f. **ASK:** What problem does (name of character) have? What does s/he do? What else does s/he do? What does his/her friends do to help? What else can s/he do? What services (help) does the City provide (give)? What else did you learn? What questions do you have?
- g. **ASK:** What do you think is going to happen next? What else? Who has a similar or a different idea? **SAY:** Okay. Let’s continue the show and see what happens.
- h. Pause after the next key scene and have people talk about it with a partner or in small groups first, then with the whole group. Follow this pattern of pause and discuss till the end of the episode. At the end of the show, use the **Sample Discussion Questions** (on page 15). Give people time to form and practice asking their own questions about the episode topic. Have people practice asking questions that characters in the episode ask (for a doctor to slow down, to get help for a child in school, to get information about bank accounts...).

Discussion Tips:

- Have people use the pictures and “Important Words” handout to help them talk about the story.
- Each time you pause and discuss a scene, refer to the group’s pre-viewing discussions. See what new ideas and information people have about the topic.
- Encourage everyone to participate. Ask people by name to respond to each other’s ideas. SAY: What do you think about that, Sumi? Who has another idea? What do you think, Xuang?
- Remind people that they can get answers and advice from professionals by calling 311. You do not need to answer all the questions that come up in discussion. Don’t try to play the expert on a topic.
- Ask who can remember important questions that a character in a particular situation asks or words that a character in the situation says.

Sample Discussion Questions:

To support and further the whole-group discussion, choose some of these questions:

Questions about characters (people) in the story:

- *Who is your favorite character? Why?*
- *What does she or he do that you liked?*
- *What does she or he say that you liked?*

Questions about solving problems:

- *What is the problem in the story?*
- *What do people in the story do to solve this problem? What do friends do? What does the family do? What does New York City do?*
- *Have you or someone you know had a similar experience? (Or: Do you know anyone who has a problem like this?) Would you like to tell us about it? What happened?*
- *What things can you do to try to solve a problem like this?*
- *What things can people do together—with friends, family or other people?*
- *What questions do you have about... (topic of the show)? Give people, in pairs, time to practice making questions.*
- *Where can you get more information about some of these questions? What did you learn from the video about this?*

Wrap-Up (15 minutes)

This activity brings everyone together before you break up until the next meeting. It reinforces the importance of everyone's contribution to the group and encourages people to take action, individually and with others, to achieve important goals.

STEPS:

- a. Bring everyone together in the circle.
- b. **SAY:** *Before we go, say your name and where you come from again, so we all know each other. Then say one thing you liked or learned today or something you think was important. It could be a word or an action, anything you want to say.* Give an example yourself to get the conversation started.
- c. Have everyone write down the time and date of the next meeting. **SAY:** *See you at (time) on (date). We'll watch another episode and practice more English together.*

Wrap-Up Tips:

- Look for opportunities to ask people what they can do (with a friend, a family member, a neighbor) to take action like the characters in the show. (See "For Your Reference" in the Materials Packet for ideas relevant to particular episodes.)
- Let people know about the **We Are New York** website. Tell everyone that they can watch the show again, practice English and get good information on the website. Write the web address (www.nyc.gov/LearnEnglish) in a place where everyone can see and copy it. If someone doesn't have Internet access, ask where they can get access.

More Ways for Getting Everyone to Talk

- Call on people by name to involve everyone in the discussion. For example: *Maria, what do you think?* (Don't avoid calling on someone just because s/he is quiet or has difficulty speaking. Calling on people by name, in a friendly and encouraging way, is especially important for getting the quieter people to participate in the conversation.)
- In conversation about a particular topic, ask specific follow-up questions based on what people are saying. For example:
 - *Lin, you told Jorge that you have a library card. What do you need to get a library card in New York City? Hamid, how did you get your library card?*
 - *Carmen, Ming says that people in New York talk too fast. What can you say when someone talks too fast?*
- Start the activities with partners or groups of three people talking to each other. Pair and small-group discussions create opportunities for everyone to talk and help build confidence. (To make pairs or small groups, tell people to turn to the person or people sitting next to them. Go around the room to encourage people to face and talk to each other.)
- Give time for people to get started talking with their partners. Encourage people to use English, but it's fine (in both small and whole-group conversations) if they use their native language to help each other understand.
- When you call on people in whole-group discussion, give them time to gather their thoughts and find the words they want to say in English.

WE ARE NEW YORK

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**You can make a difference
by being a Conversation Group Leader!**

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Immigrant Affairs**

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