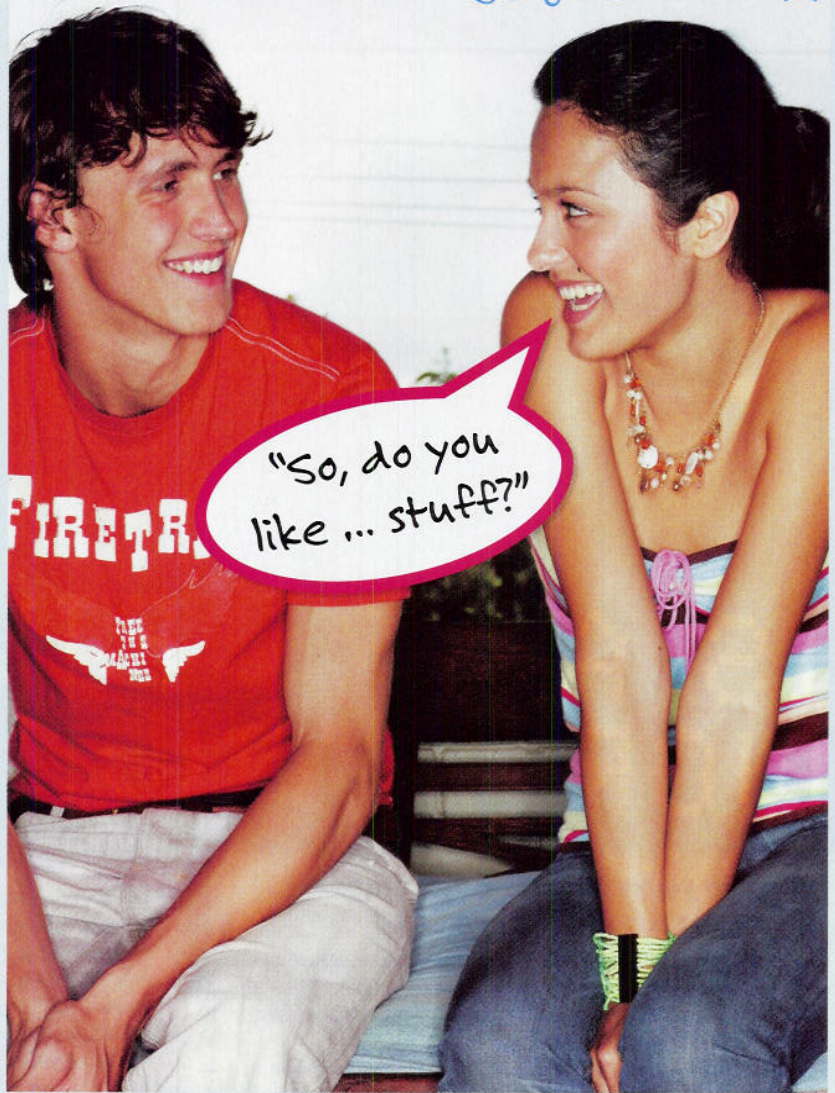


# NINE

## cringe-free conversation starters

Don't freak out when you're lost for words. Try these situation-savers instead ...



### 1 Find a common interest

"People like talking about themselves," says DOLLY psychologist Louise Remond. "So when you're stuck, take a clue from your surroundings." If you're at a concert, ask if they have the band's album. This keeps the convo going and tells you more about their interests.

### 2 Talk about a mutual mate

If you're at a party, bring up a mutual friend – like the one who's throwing the bash. "Say something like, 'So, how do you know Jenny?'" suggests Louise. Then you can add how you know the friend, and share a funny story to kick off some bonding with your new mate.

### 3 Comment on their outfit

Everyone likes to be told they look hot, so Louise suggests admiring an item they're wearing (try, "Wow, that colour really brings out your eyes"), then asking where they got it. Hopefully they'll be flattered (who wouldn't be!) and you can talk about your obsession with fashion.

### 4 Ask if they've ever been to ...

If you've recently been to an interesting place – even if it's just a new shop with cool clothes – ask if this person has been there. If they say no, you can tell them all about why it rocks. Feeling bold? Why not invite them there next weekend?

### 5 Ask what they've been up to today

This is a good general line. "The key to keeping the conversation going is to listen to what the other person has to say, then incorporate their response into the discussion, while dropping in personal things about yourself," says Louise.

### 6 Bring up a safe topic

"Neutral topics like school, family, TV shows and music are good to kick off a conversation," says Louise. So ask what their fave show is or what subjects they're studying. These open the way for you to respond with what your faves are, as well as giving you info about the person.

### 7 Find out their plans for when they finish school

People usually like to talk about their plans for after school, whether it's what they're doing for Schoolies Week or what uni they hope to get into, and you can take the opportunity to tell them what you're hoping to do as well.

### 8 Ask what they think of the ... music/food/venue

An open-ended question guarantees results because the person is forced to think of an opinion, not just answer with a one-word "yes" or "no". It may also spark a longer convo about how you both love mini pizzas or think the music is lame.

### 9 The weather

It's not very original, but kicking off with, "Geez, how hot is it?" can lead to all kinds of interesting topics. You can swap war stories about broken air-conditioning, or puzzle over how cricketers can stand in the sun all day without fainting ... Hey, cricket's always a winner with the boys!

### Things to avoid

- 1 Close-ended questions – anything that can be answered with a "yes" or a "no".
- 2 Bitchy comments – the person will just think you're really nasty and move on to someone who's nicer.
- 3 Questions that are too personal and anything the person might be overly conscious about, such as a disability.
- 4 Talking too much when you're nervous – slow down, ask the other person a question and listen to their response before opening your mouth again.
- 5 Religion, sex and politics, if you don't trust yourself to be open-minded enough to listen to the other person's opinions.