Networking skills

Age range: 14-16

BARCLAYS | LifeSkills

Session overview

Time	Key learning outcomes	Resources
105 mins	By the end of the activity students will be able to: • Understand the career benefits that networking can offer • Explain how online social networks can be used to network effectively and how to practice inclusive behaviour • Demonstrate listening, speaking and remembering information about others through face-to-face networking • Understand that there is a network of people around them who could help them in their career or to reach their ambitions	• Networking skills summary worksheet • Networking skills presentation slides

Remember that you can refer to the guiding principles for establishing a safe learning environment in the Appendix section of the **LifeSkills content guide**. This includes suggestions for signposting students to further support.

National Autistic Society

If teaching a lesson including autistic students, here are some key considerations when undertaking the following activities:

• Networking skills may be challenging for autistic people as they require finely-honed social communication skills in order to read the situation and identify appropriate times to network. In this instance, it may be helpful to remind students that although networking is good for some people, it isn't the only way to get a job, and that students shouldn't feel anxious if this style doesn't suit them

• You may need to give additional guidance on what information is appropriate to share in a networking situation and when is an appropriate time to network

• **Small groups:** Some autistic students can find group work challenging and it can cause high anxiety. Students who feel less comfortable and have difficulties working with lots of people may like to work in a smaller group with the Teacher/Support instead. Avoid leaving them out, isolating them or assuming – that they can or can't join in – everyone is different and a lot may depend on the environment they are in and how comfortable they feel. Ask them what would be best to do and help them get the best out of their learning

Contents

Activity one

What is networking?

1. Discuss what networking is

- Ask students to mindmap their thoughts in response to two key questions:

> **What does networking mean to them?**
>
> **How can networking be done online?**

- These activities will help you to gauge students' starting points and enable them to demonstrate the progress they have made by the end of the lesson. It will also offer an opportunity for teaching to be adapted where necessary

2. Introduce the idea of finding a job through contacts

- Show **slide 2**. Explain that while there are lots of places to find advertised jobs, there can be other ways as well

- Ask students to consider a situation where someone their age might get a job without it being advertised, e.g. securing a part-time or holiday job through word of mouth

- Explain that, in fact, some jobs aren't filled through advertising the role

- Show **slide 3**. Ask if anyone can guess what percentage of people look for new job opportunities by asking friends and colleagues if they know of any vacancies. Explain that 45% of people find out about new job opportunities through word of mouth*

> **Can students think of any reasons why businesses might like to hire people who are recommended to them by someone they know?**

- Examples could be that they trust the recommendation and they are more likely to find someone who fits in to their business, or it may bring their attention to an application they may have missed due to receiving large volumes

3. Discuss the benefits of networking

- Introduce the idea of networking and ask if anyone can explain what it means before asking the following question and adding detail to the notes, mindmap or graffiti wall they created earlier:

> **How can networking be used to find a job?**

- Show **slide 4**. Briefly think about the phrase 'It's not what you know, it's who you know' as a group and discuss possible reasons for this becoming a common figure of speech

- Remember to be mindful that some students will have families with varying levels of access to networking opportunities and existing connections to employment opportunities. Distancing techniques should be used to make sure that the activity does not reflect on students' personal lives, particularly for those who may find this emotionally challenging

- Discuss what other benefits students could get from networking, such as becoming more confident in talking about their skills, finding work experience or finding other people who could help them in their career. Ask the group if anyone has already done any networking, for example at a careers event

- Highlight that networking gives us opportunities to talk to a wider circle of people we may not otherwise meet. This helps develop communication skills by learning to include a range of people in conversations

*[LinkedIn Talent Trends](#)

Activity one

What is networking? (cont'd)

4. Use questions to find out information
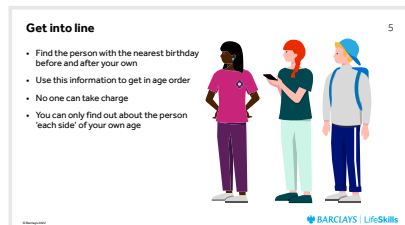
- Split the class into groups of about 10 – students who feel less comfortable and have difficulties working with lots of people may like to work in a smaller group

- Show **slide 5**. Explain that each team needs to sort themselves into a line, from youngest to oldest. No one is allowed to take charge and each person can only find the two people with birthdays either side of their own and then use this information to position themselves. Just give them a few minutes for this

5. Review the birthday task

- Ask students how they had to share information to complete this task

- Help students spot that they had to share their own information (i.e. their birthday) and also listen carefully to other people

- Briefly discuss how the task would have been harder if everyone just spoke but did not listen to each other

- Explain that networking is like this: it is a two-way process. Ask students if anyone helped someone else by pointing out who they needed to speak to complete the task. It's important to try and help each other and not just look out for your own interests

6. Explore how students can network online

- Explain that networking can also be done online through social media. Ask the group which types of social media might be most effective. Show **slide 6** and explain that people often post jobs on social media and your contacts might tag you in things they think you would be suitable for

- Discuss how some types of social media are more appropriate for networking than others and can create a better impression to employers. To support students' understanding of giving employers a positive online impression, you could show one or two clips from **Is your social media profile employment-ready?**

- Ask them to share ideas on how they might want to consider the information they share through their social networking so it can help in a job search rather than hinder it

Activity summary

- Show **slide 7**. Ask students what they think is meant by 'building relationships'. What's the difference between that and simply knowing someone?

- Use their ideas to reinforce how networking is a two-way process of helping one another

- Highlight to students that if they do find a role through a friend, or another contact, it's likely they would still need to go through the organisation's usual hiring procedure but their contact might be able to help them prepare

- At this point, you may wish to revisit the questions answered at the start of this activity to review the progress students have made throughout the session

Activity two

How do I network?

1. Recap what networking is

- If you didn't complete activity one of this lesson, you may want to look at the baseline questions at the start of this activity, which will enable you to gauge students' starting points and track progress later

- Remind students that networking is a two-way communication process that builds relationships and allows people to help each other

- Explain that understanding this process will impact how they communicate when networking. This includes being able to listen, retain and process information before responding appropriately. Ask if they can think of anything else they should pick up on when communicating aside from the content of what is being said e.g. verbal cues, like body language and tone of voice

- Show **slide 8**. Help students identify that they must listen carefully so they can help others as well as speak clearly so others can help them

- **National Austitic Society guidance:** Bear in mind that some autistic students may struggle with verbal cues, maintaining eye contact and understanding and interpreting body language and tone of voice. It can help autistic people to learn to self-advocate more for themselves by clarifying and being assertive about their own needs, realising that it's okay to ask questions to check their own understanding e.g. 'what is it that you need me to do?' or 'can you clarify that for me?'

- You might want to note that networking doesn't mean just asking for a job. By sharing information they can find out whether a job is available, whether they could get some work experience or get the details of someone else who could help them

- Explain that networking is a key skill that can help students grow their personal contacts outside of their immediate circles. This can help them find more work opportunities, and so is an important factor in improving their prospects in the working world

- Remind students that networking can also develop communication and listening skills, meaning it helps us to connect with others and develop an inclusive mindset towards a wider range of people

---

2. Students learn something new about their classmates

- Explain to the students that they are going to take part in a quick networking activity and must find out three things about three people they don't know so well. If it's possible to arrange, challenge students by getting them to talk to another class or year group, or other adults in the school so it is people they are less familiar with

- Show **slide 9**. Review the three facts that students need to discover and then give students around ten minutes to circulate within their group and network

- Remember that some students may find it more emotionally challenging to talk about their personal experiences or attributes with others

Activity two

How do I network? (cont'd)

3. Make connections between students

- Remind students that networks help people connect, and to find out key pieces of information that you wouldn't have known otherwise

- Show **slide 10**. Explain that students now need to help each other by introducing them to other people who gave a similar answer to one or more of the questions. The idea is that they can't do this for themselves but must rely on others to help

- Students need to remember what they learned about others and may need to network with people they didn't speak to during the first part of the task. Students should stay close to anyone they become connected to

- After a few minutes, ask students to comment on how easy or difficult they found it to find people with similar responses to the networking questions. Again ensure you are sensitive towards students who have found this activity difficult

---

4. When else is networking useful?

- Ask students what the benefits of communicating well to build a network might be, aside from helping a job search

- Use the example of someone founding a business or starting a community project to demonstrate how networking is a valuable skill e.g. to help when researching your competition or target audience, promoting your product or service, and negotiating with supporters or suppliers

Activity summary

- Ask if anyone wants to share what it felt like to network like this and find out how they felt about listening and speaking to help one another

- Help them identify that often an answer wasn't important for their own connections but it was helpful for someone else. Help students link this to how they can network for their own career but also help other people in their careers

- Show **slide 11**. Review the dos and don'ts of networking. If required print a copy of this slide as a summary for students to take away and ask young people to add their top tips and key messages from today's lesson to their mindmaps

- If students need further support with developing their communication skills visit **here** to find more activities

- If applicable, students could be asked to revisit their mindmaps or graffiti walls from Activity one: What is networking? to demonstrate progress in their skills, attitudes, knowledge and understanding

Extension

- Discuss how inclusive behaviour can be incorporated into networking and what the benefits would be. For example, being open to making new contacts which could lead to more opportunities. Ask students to suggest ways they could show inclusive behaviour when networking; for example, approaching a range of people when at an event, or practising active listening with others so they feel comfortable sharing information

Activity three

Who can help me?

1. Recap what students have learned about networking so far

- Review what students can recall about networking, the ways it can help them, and some networking tips and things to avoid. Use the mindmap, graffiti wall and/or notes gathered so far at the start and end of each activity to help tailor the activity to the skills, knowledge and experience of the class

- Explain that this activity will help students get ready to apply these ideas by helping them identify who could be in their career network

2. Create ideas about building a network
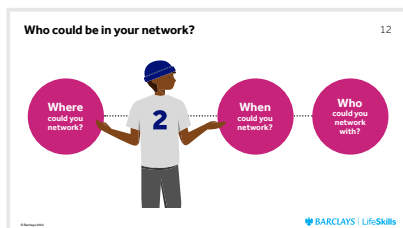
- Explain to the students that they first need to generate some ideas and share them with the group

- Show **slide 12**. Ask students to work in groups and think about one of the following:

  Why might people want to network?

  What types of people or groups could someone network with?

  Which places are good for networking?

  What times or situations might present the chance to network?

- Explain that students should think in general terms (e.g. 'a relative') rather than specifics ('my Uncle Paul'). Invite students from each table to share their ideas

3. Ways to improve a network

- Help students recall that networking is about both listening and speaking – it's a two-way process. There may be people you could help through networking, as well as those who could help you

- Ask students to think about each person in their network and add two details to each one: what they might ask this person, and what that person might want to know

- Remember to be mindful that some students will have families with varying levels of access to networking opportunities and existing connections to employment opportunities

- Ask students in pairs to think about ways they could successfully make their network larger, remembering the two-way process. For example, you may have a friend with skills that would be helpful to someone you have met, so you introduce them via LinkedIn

- Remind students that networking can arise in many situations, not just 'networking events'. Like one young person, LifeSkills spoke to, recommends if you are at an event, 'the most valuable networking can be speaking to people who have similar interests and goals. Therefore, focus on people who you know through your background research or simply asking well-intentioned questions to find people you can truly make an impact with

Activity three

Who can help me? (cont'd)

4. Taking networking to the next step

- Discuss ways to follow up a meeting when networking, such as a phone call, email, or online message, and what might go in it, e.g. 'Further to our recent conversation,'/'Your details have been passed on to me by,'/'Is this a convenient time to call?'. Also ask for suggestions about what might not be appropriate in some situations, such as a text message. Inform students that networking outside normal social circles can help them progress professionally but ensure that students are mindful of their personal safety when networking, particularly in new places or with people they do not know well

- Ask students to imagine that as a result of networking they have secured work experience or been offered a volunteering opportunity. They might be feeling nervous or unsure about how to make the best impression

- Explain that in a new workplace, there will be lots of people to meet, all of whom could become members of their professional network. In small groups, ask students to think about how they could go about approaching and building relationships with contacts

- Show **slide 13** to see some tips on networking from young people. Discuss whether there are any ideas that the group hadn't thought of

5. Look for information that lots of people might need
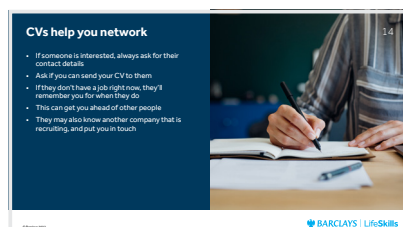
- Help students to realise that there will be common things they might need to share with people in their network. This might be their skills and experience or any other information that an employer might want to know

- Ask if anyone can remember how they could have this organised for when they need it. The answer is in their CV, which is a vital tool when networking as well as when applying for an advertised job

- Show **slide 14** and check students understand the different ways in which a CV is useful when networking

Extension

- The **Tactics for approaching contacts tool** is a great way to put what they've learnt in this lesson to the test

- Explain that having a LinkedIn profile provides another way to create networks which can lead to job opportunities. Why not encourage students to learn how to make a winning LinkedIn profile with the **Top tips for your LinkedIn profile interactive** which demonstrates how to make the most of a profile to impress potential employers

Activity three

Who can help me? (cont'd)

Activity summary

- Ask if anyone wants to share how they are going to start using their personal network
- See how many examples the group can suggest for who they will contact, and encourage them to start taking steps straight away
- Congratulate students on their creativity
- Encourage them to continue adding new connections and ideas to their concept maps
- Give out the **Who can help me? summary worksheet** as a summary of what you have covered in this activity
- If applicable, students could be asked to revisit their mindmaps or graffiti walls from Activity one: What is networking? to demonstrate progress in their skills, attitudes, knowledge and understanding