What to print

- **Once, for yourself:** run.pdf, 1 page. Hold it while you run the session.
- **One copy per girl:** sheets.pdf, 2 pages. Sheet A and Sheet B. That is 2 pages per girl.
- **You do not need:** pages 6 to 9 of this guide, the key. The session runs without it.

Guide, I Can Ask

Group 4 to 20 · Materials: paper, pencil, one found object per pair to pass, too big to swallow, such as a palm-sized stone or a paper ball · SDG 4, 5 · EN edition · Released · Nameet Potnis, author and English editor

Before you enter the room

- **Every situation is a made-up game that you supply. Nobody tells the group about home, and nobody is coached to stand up to an adult.**
- In the practice the answer is always yes. When you must say no in the real round: "Not now. And you asked that well."
- Decide before the session what each girl may really ask you for at the end.
- Up to 20 girls. Above twenty, the pairs get no turns.
- The thing to pass must not fit inside a ring made by your thumb and first finger. A crumpled paper ball is safest.

Read this once at home, and read the next section before you run it. In the room you only need the run sheet. Where this says "you", it means whoever is running the session: a teacher, a volunteer, an older sister.

Who it is for

- **For ages 4 to 7.** Girls who can say a short sentence out loud. No reading and no writing are needed anywhere in this session.
- **Life skills.** Not the same as My Turn, Your Turn, which uses the same passing game: there the skill is waiting, here it is asking.
- **Group size.** 4 to 20 girls. Above twenty, the pairs get no turns and the room gets loud.
- **Different levels in one room.** A four-year-old and a seven-year-old practise the same four asks in the same pairs. A girl who says three words, "Can I turn", has asked, and you answer her exactly as you answer anybody else. A girl who is ahead says the whole sentence, adds the name of the person she is asking, and takes the harder turn in step 7, where she holds the thing and says "I am not finished yet" before she hands it over. Nobody gets a different sheet.

What this pack asks of a girl, and what it does not

Read this before you run it. This session is about ordinary asking, inside this room, in a made-up game: a turn with a stone, help reaching something, joining a game, a minute more to finish. That is all it teaches and all it claims.

It does not ask a girl to talk about anything that has really happened to her. It does not ask her to tell the group anything about home. Every situation in the session is invented and you supply it, so no girl has to bring her own. Nothing in this pack asks a girl to stand up to anybody, and you never set asking as something to go and do outside the room.

In the practice, the answer to an ask is always yes, because what is being learned is the asking. Outside the practice, in the real round at the end, say yes to as many girls as you can. When you have to say no, say it in two parts: "Not now. And you asked that well." Never promise a girl that asking always works, because it does not, and a four-year-old who is told it always works will decide next week that she asked wrongly.

What you need

- One learner sheet A and one learner sheet B per girl
- One pencil per girl, or one shared between two
- One thing for each pair to pass, too big to fit inside a ring of your thumb and first finger: a stone that fills a palm, a folded paper strip, a crumpled paper ball, a leaf. Anything already in the room
- Something you can put just out of easy reach for step 5: a paper on a high shelf, a book on a cupboard
- **Free and optional:** nothing
- **Nothing here costs money.**

Why the session is shaped this way

The whole room says it before anybody says it alone. Girls this age will not go first. So every ask is said by the whole room together, three times, before any pair tries it. A girl who is frightened of her own voice has already used it by then, inside thirty other voices, and nobody looked at her.

The four asks are short, and they are the same all session. Four sentences, said many times, beats twelve sentences said once. Learn them by heart so you are never reading while a girl is waiting for you to answer her.

Something real has to move. A pretend ask with nothing in it is an empty exercise. The stone goes across the table when she asks, and it does not go across when she reaches. That is the lesson, and it is in

your hands, not in your explaining.

The answer in practice is always yes. This pack does not rehearse being refused. At four, being told no in a game feels like being told no, and the point of the session is that asking is safe to try. Step 7 is the one place a girl hears "I am not finished yet", and even there the thing is handed over straight afterwards.

The last round is real, and it is small. She asks you for something you can actually give: to stand by the door, to hand out the sheets, to choose how the group says goodbye. One real ask that really gets a yes is worth more than twenty pretend ones, which is why you decide the list before the session rather than in front of the girls.

Nothing on her sheet has to be written. Most of this group cannot write, and some cannot yet write their own name, so you write the names as you hand the sheets out, before anybody has to ask for help with it. Her marks in the boxes are her record, and your handwriting on her card is her words.

Including everyone

A girl who cannot yet read. She reads nothing in this session. The four asks are spoken and repeated by the whole room. The words on Sheet A are read aloud by you, once, pointing at each box as you say it, and she puts a mark in the box. On Sheet B she draws, and if she wants words on her card she tells you and you write them for her. She ends the session holding the same two sheets as everybody else.

A girl who joins late. Put the thing to pass in her partner's hand and give her one sentence at the door: "Say 'Can I have a turn, please?' and she will give it to you." She joins at whichever ask the room is on, and she catches the others up simply by hearing them. Never ask her in front of the group where she was, and do not ask her to catch up on the asks she missed.

Boys in the room. Boys do the same activity, in the same pairs, on the same sheets. Two things keep the session centred on the girls, and neither excludes anybody. The girls ask first in the real round at the end, so the yeses go to them while you still have things to say yes to. And you watch for the boy who asks on a girl's behalf, which is kindly meant and takes her turn away: put your hand up gently and say, "Thank you. I am waiting for her voice."

A girl who will not speak at all today. She may mark her sheets, hold the thing, say the asks silently with her mouth, or say them with her partner at exactly the same time. All of that is taking part, and you record nothing about it. Ask her first next session, when the room is quieter.

If it goes wrong

One girl will not say it out loud, and the room is now watching her. This will happen, usually to the same girl every time. Do not wait her out and do not encourage the group to encourage her, which turns twenty faces towards her. Move on within five seconds, and give her three easier ways back in: the

whole room saying it together, saying it to you alone while others are busy, and saying it at the same time as her partner so no single voice is hers. A whisper counts on the first day. Never name her as shy, and never explain her to the group.

The practice turns into grabbing, or a pair falls out over the thing. Somebody takes instead of asking, or two girls both hold on and the stone becomes a fight. Take the thing back into your own hand at once, calmly, and say the rule again in six words: "The thing moves when somebody asks." Then hand it to the girl who asks first. If a pair cannot share one object, give each of them her own and let them ask each other for a turn with something they already have, which works just as well. Do not make a girl apologise in front of the group: at this age it teaches her that asking led to trouble.

Adapting it

- Use the four asks in the language the girls speak at home, and in the words they would really use. Short and familiar beats correct.
- Swap the thing to pass for whatever is already in your room. It has to be worth wanting and worth nothing.
- Use the names your girls know for each other. Asking a person by name is a step up for a girl who is ahead.
- If your room is full and loud, do steps 4 to 7 with the whole group in one circle instead of in pairs, passing one thing round.

Running it shorter or longer

30 minutes. 0 to 4 the quiet voice and the asking voice, 4 to 18 can I have a turn, can you help me and can I play too, 18 to 24 I am not finished yet, 24 to 30 one real ask each and close. This is the real version of this pack for a new group. What it gives up: each girl gets one turn at each ask instead of two, and the cards on Sheet B get drawn but probably not cut out, so put them aside and cut them at the end of the day. If the room is large, the real round at the end reaches volunteers rather than everybody, so start it with the quietest girls.

45 minutes. 0 to 6 the quiet voice and the asking voice, 6 to 27 can I have a turn, can you help me and can I play too, 27 to 35 I am not finished yet, 35 to 45 one real ask each and close. The extra time buys a second turn at every ask and a real ask for every girl, not just the volunteers.

60 minutes. 0 to 8 the quiet voice and the asking voice, 8 to 35 can I have a turn, can you help me and can I play too, 35 to 45 I am not finished yet, 45 to 60 one real ask each and close. Use this length only with a settled group that already sits for half an hour. The extra time adds turns, time to finish and cut out the card, and a slow closing round where every girl asks and every girl is answered. It adds no new ask and no new sheet, because a longer session at this age means more practice, not more content.

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Keeping it safe

One thing gets passed hand to hand all session. Nothing goes in the mouth. Before you hand anything out, check it cannot fit inside a child's mouth: if it fits inside a ring made by your thumb and first finger it is too small for this room. Seeds, beads, coins and small bottle caps are out. Count what you handed out back in at the end. With four-year-olds a crumpled paper ball is the safest choice, and it is also the easiest to replace.

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Key and facilitation cues

Answers and what to say, I Can Ask

Answers

There is no single correct answer in this pack. Accept any ask a girl says out loud, in any words, in any language she has. "Can I turn" is an ask. Three words are an ask. A whisper is an ask on the first day.

What counts as having asked:

What she does	Counts as asking
Says the whole sentence to a partner	Yes
Says three words of it	Yes
Says it at the same time as her partner, or with the whole room	Yes
Says it only to you, quietly, while the others are busy	Yes
Mouths it with no sound, then holds her hand out	Yes, and ask her first next session
Reaches for the thing and takes it	Not yet. Hand it back, wait, and say "Ask me for it"

The four asks, in case you want them in front of you: "Can I have a turn, please?" "Can you help me reach it?" "Can I play too?" "I am not finished yet."

Situations you supply, all invented, all inside this room. Your partner has the stone and you want a turn. A paper is on a high shelf and you cannot reach. Two girls are playing with the stone and you want to join. You are still drawing and somebody wants your pencil. You want to be the one who hands out the sheets. You want one more minute before the group says goodbye. Never ask a girl for a situation from her own life, and if she offers one, thank her and go back to the pretend one.

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What you might see

What is on the page	What to offer next
No marks in any box, and she has been holding the thing all session	Sit beside her pair and be her partner for one turn. You ask her first, so she hears the sentence coming towards her before she has to send it
Marks in one or two boxes, drawings in them	Read the other boxes aloud again and do those two asks with her, in a pair, while the room is busy. Two asks said out loud is a finished session
All four boxes marked, a card drawn, words asked for	Give her the harder turn: she holds the thing and says "I am not finished yet" to her partner. Then let her be the one who hands the sheets out

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Sticky points

What happens	What to say or do
She reaches or takes instead of asking	Hand flat over the thing. Wait. "Ask me for it." Then give it straight away
She will not speak, and the room is watching	Move on within five seconds. Offer her the whole-room voice, or her partner's voice alongside hers, or you alone. Never name her as shy
Two girls hold on to one thing	Take it into your own hand. "The thing moves when somebody asks." Then give each girl her own thing
She asks and asks and asks, all session	Answer every one. She is practising. Give her a turn at being the one who says yes
She asks for something you cannot give	"Not now. And you asked that well." Never say "you should not ask for that"
She says her ask wrongly, in the wrong words	Answer the ask, not the words. Then say the sentence back to her once, in your ordinary voice, and move on
She tells you about something real from home	Say thank you, answer nothing, and go back to the pretend situation. See the line below
She cannot write her name	You write it as you hand the sheet out, before she has to ask
She does not want to take her card away	Keep it somewhere she can ask for it. Do not ask why

Say "I am waiting for her voice", never "she is too shy". Say "not now, and you asked that well", never "no, stop asking". Never hold one girl up as the one who asked best: the girls who most need this pack are the ones who would hear that as a ranking.

If something serious comes up. A girl may use the word "ask" to tell you something real. If she does, do not interrogate her, do not ask her to say more in front of the group, and do not let the group ask her anything. Listen, thank her, keep the session running normally so she is not marked out, and speak to her alone afterwards, briefly, with no pressure to say more. Follow whatever safeguarding route your school or organisation already has, the same day, and if there is none, tell somebody senior the same day. This pack teaches four ordinary sentences and it does not replace that route. Write nothing about it on her sheet: the sheet is not a record.

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After the session

The cards go home with the girls who want them to. If you keep the sheets, the next life skills session can open with "what did you ask for this week?" Answer every ask that comes at you in the days after, because a girl who asked once and was not heard will not ask twice. Nothing in this pack is graded, counted or reported.

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