

# The Broken Telephone Fix

GAME

SKILL: IN-PERSON COMMUNICATION

45-50 MINUTES

## RECOMMENDED AGE RANGE

Ages 7-13 — old enough to carry on a real conversation and notice when one breaks down, young enough to find the game genuinely surprising when their words come back changed.

## WHAT YOU NEED

6-8 index cards (topic cards, written before you start)

A bowl or bag to hold the topic cards

3 or more players

A timer

Optional: paper and pen for listeners

## ACTIVITY STEPS

- 01 Write the Topic Cards.** Before the game starts, write 6 to 8 topics on separate index cards and put them in a bowl. Topics should be things your kids know a little about but not perfectly: “why earthquakes happen,” “how plants make food,” “what causes thunder,” “why the ocean is salty.” Keep them short enough to explain in two minutes.
- 02 The Explainer Draws a Card.** One player is the Explainer. They draw a topic card and take 30 seconds to think. No looking anything up. Then they explain the topic to one Listener using only words — no drawing, no pointing. The Listener can ask exactly one clarifying question. Set a two-minute timer.
- 03 The Listener Becomes the Explainer.** A second player who was not in the room comes back. The first Listener now explains what they just learned to this new person, in their own words, from memory. No peeking at the card, no checking with the original Explainer.
- 04 Compare All Three Versions.** After the second explanation, everyone gathers. Read the original topic card aloud. Compare it to both explanations. What changed? What got clearer? What got lost entirely? The Explainer shares what surprised them most about how their words landed.
- 05 Rotate and Debrief.** Rotate roles and play two or three more rounds with different topics. Then spend 10 minutes talking: when you were explaining and the listener looked confused, what did you notice? What did you change? Was it harder to explain to a real person than to just answer a search result? Listen for the moments kids adjusted mid-sentence. That adjustment is the skill.

### THE DEEPER LESSON

*This game makes visible something AI conversations hide: when you explain something to a real person, you have to constantly read them and adjust. AI always understands you. People require you to rephrase, add detail, and try again. That back-and-forth — the breakdown and the repair — is the exact practice that builds in-person communication skills, the skill the US Surgeon General and teachers' unions are warning children are getting less of as screens take up more of the day.*

### CONVERSATION STARTER

*When you were trying to explain something and the listener looked confused, what did you notice in their face, and how did that change what you said next?*

## Raised Nimble

*You cannot out-compete AI. But you can out-human it.*

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