



Topic Maintenance Railroad

Introduction:

Children with social language delays may have trouble maintaining a topic of conversation for very long. They may change the topic abruptly or say something that seems to make no sense with what was previously said. For these children, it can be helpful to talk about staying on topic in relation to the train cars on a train track.

Instructions:

Tell the child that talking with someone else, called a conversation, is a lot like a train. Everything we say in the conversation must be connected to the other things that have been said (just like all of the train cars are connected) and everything we say must stay on topic (just like the train cars must stay on the track).

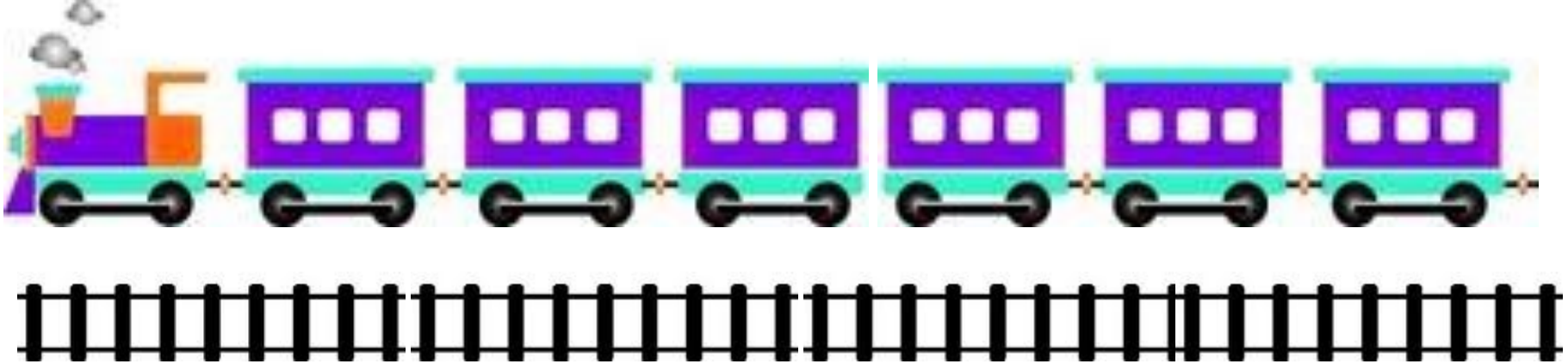
Show the child the train and tell the child that you are going to say six things about the same topic. Write the topic at the bottom of the page (you can put this in a plastic sheet protector and use a dry erase marker so you can use it again later). Then, put your finger on the first train car after the engine and say something about that topic. Then, move your finger to the next train car and say something else about the topic. Do this for all six train cars and then point out to the child that everything you said was about the topic so you stayed on topic and your train cars stayed on the track. Now, do this again but this time, say one thing that is not on topic. Point out to the child that this was not about the topic so that train car fell off the track. Then, think of something else you can say to get back on topic.

Have the child practice having a conversation with you where you each say one thing about the topic. You can point to the train cars for each thing that someone says and if the child doesn't stay on topic, remind him using the train visual.



The Topic Maintenance Railroad

Decide on a topic of conversation with your child. At first, choose topics he/she enjoys. As he/she becomes better at topic maintenance, you can begin to choose topics that interest him/her less. Show the child the train and remind him/her that each of the train cars represents what we say about that topic. If you say something that isn't about the topic, then the train car falls off the track. Try to keep all of the train cars on the track. If your child is struggling, write what the child says above each train car and then discuss whether they are about the topic or not.



Topic: _____

Extra Practice: Once your child begins to understand this analogy, you can begin to use it in other settings as well. For example, when your child changes the subject unexpectedly, you can say something like "Wait a minute! We were talking about pizza. You changed the topic. Did your train fall off the track?"

<https://www.speechandlanguagekids.com/topic-maintenance/>