



LESSON SEVEN

TOPIC CHANGER PRO

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"There is never a missed opportunity that can't be turned into a great possibility!"



LESSON SEVEN TOPIC CHANGER PRO

GOAL: To demonstrate the ability to transition between topics by using a socially appropriate topic changer word or phrase with a peer or the Conversation Coach while walking along the Conversation Path in four out of five Long Conversations.

MATERIALS:

- CMC Conversation Stones
- Lightening bolt wall and floor pieces
- Cloth ribbon
- Picture cards
- Dry erase marker

NOTE:

Today's lesson focuses on an individual's ability to switch from one topic to another. Topic Changers are the words or phrases that we use to let our conversation partner know that we are about to switch topics. We may use a single word (i.e. Hey, name?) but will typically use a short phrase such as "Oh, by the way..." or "That made me think of..."

If the topic change is going to be drastic (i.e. from a great summer vacation to a loved one's recent health concerns), we will usually inform our listener of this with an equally notable topic changer (i.e. "On a completely different topic, ..."). In the CMC program, we will call these transitions "Extreme Topic Changers."

Without Topic Changers, our conversation partners will be left hanging as they try to catch up to our new topic. This can leave them feeling confused or frustrated. If this type of conversation mishap occurs frequently, it is likely that others will come to view us as being socially awkward! Many children and adults suffer from this social alienation!

In this lesson, a variety of different Topic Changer words/phrases will be presented. The children will then have the opportunity to practice using them through group exercises.

INTRODUCTION

Signs or gestures to consider in this lesson: lightning

Wow! Our Conversation Path looks a little different today, doesn't it? It has lightning bolts right in the middle of it! This is one of my favorite lessons! We are going to have so much fun! We are going to call these lightning bolts "Topic Changers." Let's say that together. The "Topic Changer!"

We all know what a topic is, right? A topic is something that we might like to talk about. What are some topics that we have talked about lately? (Children respond.)

What are some topics that you would like to talk about today? (Children respond. As the children are telling you their suggestions, write or draw a picture of the topics on the small blue Conversation Stones. Place these small stones at the ends of the lightning bolt zigzags.)

The children should be seated in a semi circle in chairs or on the floor if you wish. In front of them will be the Conversation Path. It should look as follows:

1. The Hello stone
2. The Conversation Starter stone
3. The Topic Changer lightning bolt
4. The Conversation Stopper stone
5. The Goodbye stone

BASIC TRAINING

We have our Conversation Path in place, and now we're going to do a role-play. Watch this conversation, and tell me what is wrong with it when we're done. Have an adult do this role-play with you. Try to practice the role-play before doing it in front of the children so that it can be executed smoothly. Explain that you are going to be two children having a Long Conversation. You will both be holding onto the ends of a ribbon. Explain that you will start the conversation by walking along the path and will make it as far as the topic stones. At that point, you are going to start switching the topics without any explanation. As you do this, you will be tugging on the ribbon that he/she is holding.

When you are ready to do the role-play, introduce the situation. Explain that you and the other adult are two children having a Long Conversation. When you start the role-play, give one end of the ribbon to your partner, and hold onto the other end as you walk over to the Hello stone. Greet your partner, and then move on to the Conversation Starter as you ask a few questions by engaging him/her in some light chitchat. Then walk along the first lightning bolt and start talking about the first topic. Engage your conversation partner in conversation on that topic. Let the conversation move back and forth for a few turns, and then give a tug on the ribbon as you head towards the next topic stone. Do this without any social/verbal cues as you move on to the new topic. Repeat this sequence one more time, and then stop the role-play. Ask the children to tell you what is wrong with this conversation.

The following is an example of a possible conversation. The Topics selected include bikes, baseball, and movies.

YELLOW STONE	Hi, Barbara! (Barbara responds.)
GREEN STONE	How's it going? What's new with you? (Barbara responds.)
BLUE STONE	<p>Hey, guess what? (Barbara responds.)</p> <p>I got a brand new bike! It's a brand new 21-speed mountain bike with chrome wheels! It even has a cool rack to hold my backpack! (Barbara comments on the topic. As she is talking, tug on the ribbon and then walk in the other direction toward the next topic stone as you switch the topic.)</p> <p>I'm going to a baseball game next weekend. (Barbara may respond.)</p> <p>It's going to be so much fun. I get to meet the team and get their autographs after the game. And THEN my dad is going to take me out for dinner! (Barbara may respond. As she is talking, tug on the ribbon, and then walk in the other direction toward the next topic stone as you switch the topic.)</p> <p>Wow, I am so tired. I don't think I'll go to the movies tonight. Maybe I'll just stay home and watch something on TV. Maybe I'll ask mom if we can have pizza for dinner! I love pizza! My favorite is the Hawaiian with extra cheese!</p>
RED STONE	You may or may not get to this stone...
YELLOW STONE	You may or may not get to this stone...

Wow! What was wrong with that conversation? (Children respond.)

Now look at your conversation partner, and ask him/her some questions. **How was that conversation for you?** (Adult responds.)

It was pretty crazy, wasn't it? Did you feel confused when I pulled the conversation in another direction? (Adult responds.)

Did you feel safe talking to me, or did you wonder what I was going to do next? (Adult responds.)

Exactly! And that is how we make other people feel when we change the topic without using a Topic Changer. People can feel confused and even frustrated! A Topic Changer has as much power in a conversation as a real lightning bolt has when it comes out of the sky! Did you know that a lightning bolt could actually break a great big tree in half? (Take a minute to either show pictures of lightning bolts, or allow the children some time to reflect on their experiences with them. As they talk about lightning bolts, you will want to emphasize the power and energy that they hold. You want the children to grasp the concept that our Topic Changers hold the same kind of power and energy in our conversations as lightning has in its affect on nature!)

Just like a real lightning bolt, our Topic Changers have power and energy to affect our conversations. When we forget to use them, we can leave others feeling confused, frustrated, or even a little nervous and uncertain. However, when we use our Topic Changers well, they can become brilliant and powerful conversation movers. Just like Comments and Questions, Topic Changers allow our conversations to move along smoothly!

Before you start to practice a Long Conversation, let's think of some different Topic Changers that you can use to help you. (On the white board, write Topic Changers. Underneath it, write down some examples of common Topic Changers. Then repeat the first conversation your adult conversation partner, but, this time, transition smoothly between the topics as you demonstrate the use of appropriate Topic Changers. Ask your conversation partner how that conversation felt compared to the first one. Reinforce the concept that the appropriate use of Topic Changers is essential for a good Long Conversation to occur.)

PRACTICE RUN AND ROLE-PLAYS

Now it's your turn. I want you to get into pairs and come up with 4-5 topics you would like to talk about. You can decide the order of the topics. You can decide who starts the conversation. Remember, if you are the one walking the Conversation Path, it is your job to use some Topic Changers. You can look at the white board to give you some ideas of what to say. (The children can cut out their own Conversation Path with lightning bolts using construction paper. They can lay the pieces on the floor and practice using the topic changers with their partners. They can then role play their conversations for the group. As the Conversation Coach, you will be there to support and advise the children as needed.)

HELPFUL HINTS...

1. When engaging in a conversation with the child, remember to make Meaningful Eye Contact with him/her. The exception to this rule will be when you are doing the role-play at the beginning of this lesson.
2. You will notice that there are two types of lightning bolts. For the child who is just learning about Topic Changers, the lightning bolts will not be differentiated. You will write basic words and phrases on both of them. However, for the more adept conversationalist, you will be teaching the difference between basic and extreme Topic Changers. With these children, you will use the yellow trimmed lightning bolts to represent the extreme Topic Changers. This applies to both the wall display cards and the lightning floor strips.
3. The following descriptions provide the differentiation between basic and extreme Topic Changers:
 - a. Basic (Normal) Topic Changer: If the topic shifts from a new car your friend bought to a road trip that you are planning, a basic Topic Changer (i.e. "...on a related note..." or "speaking of which...") would suffice.
 - b. Extreme Topic Changer: If the topic shifts from your friend's new car to your Auntie Suzie's hip surgery, an equally extreme Topic Changer (i.e. "on a completely different topic..." or "changing the topic...") would be preferred.
4. Though this lesson is intended for children who are in the late primary to intermediate grade levels, the Conversation Coach can simplify the use of the lightning bolts (Topic Changers) for younger children. To do this, put the lightening bolts onto the path and show the children how to use some very basic phrases to transition between their topics.

WRAP UP AND HOMEWORK CHALLENGE

Well, that was a lot of fun! For this week, I want you to think about what Topic Changers you use when you talk with others. We often use them without even realizing it. Remember, the better that you get at using Topic Changers, the more brilliant and powerful your conversation skills will be!

KEEP IT FUN

1. **Wall Display:** You will write down Topic Changer words and phrases that are appropriate to the child's level of functioning or "need to know." As stated in the Helpful Hints section, if the child is just learning about Topic Changers, you will write basic words/phrases on the lightning cards. However, if the child is a more adept conversationalist, you will add a variety of basic or extreme Topic Changers to your wall display. You will put the extreme examples on the yellow trimmed bolts. The cards will go on the right side of the comments.
2. **Worksheet:** Do the TOPIC CHANGER PRO worksheet with the children, or send it home as an assignment.
3. **Conversation Recipes and Scripts:** Look for images of people having Long Conversations, and have the children practice their conversation recipes and scripts. Consider looking for pictures that show the conversation partners exhibiting more complex emotions. For example, the expression one might have when reflecting on a happy memory about a past loved one. In this case, one might have an expression that is both happy and sad.
4. **Walk the Conversation Path:** Continue having the children practice their Long Conversations, on the Conversation Path as they incorporate Topic Changers into their conversations. Here is how it can be done:
 - a. Select two children to practice a conversation with Topic Changers. Lay the Short Conversation path on the floor. Select 2 blue stones, and place them in the middle of the path. Leave enough space between these stones so that there is room to add the lightning bolts. Select your topic cards, and place them on the blue stones.
 - b. Ask the children some questions about the topics selected. For example, are these topics related, or are they quite different? Decide on what type of Topic Changer is going to be needed to transition between the topics. Connect the topic stones with an appropriate lightning strip. You may write the Topic Changer word/phrase on the strip or leave it blank.
 - c. Then go to the Conversation Starter stone, and help the children think of a Topic Changer they could use to move to the first topic. When you think about it, some of us might simply pause. Or, we might slowly say a word such as, "So...." Or, we might use a short phrase such as, "Hey, name?" Once the Topic Changer has been selected, lay it on the path.
 - d. Walk over to the last topic stone, and help the children think of a Topic Changer they could use to move from their final topic to the Conversation Stopper. When you think about it, we might pause or sigh. We might slowly say a word such as, "Well..." Or, we might use a short phrase such as, "So anyways..." Once the Topic Changer has been selected, lay it on the path.
 - e. Lastly, have the children practice their Long Conversation with Topic Changers. Once the children are showing success with this task, the Conversation Coach can increase the level of difficulty by increasing the amount of topic cards and lightning bolts on the Conversation Path or by asking the children to plan out their conversation on their own.

Conversation Path – Table Top Version: The children can do the activity as previously described while seated at a table. To do this, simply use the pieces from the wall display to build the Conversation Path on a table instead of on the floor. The child will touch the conversation pieces as they move through their conversations. The added benefit of this version is that the children can practice their conversations with others on their computers, because the path is compact and movement is not required.

5. **Topic Changer Drill:** For this activity, put your deck of topic cards face down on the table. Turn the top two cards over, and ask the child if he/she would need a common or an extreme topic changer to transition between the topics. Then ask the child to think of a Topic Changer that they might use to segue between the two topics.

6. **Role-Plays:**

a. **Pre-select the Demonstration Role-Play**

Choose role-plays that are appropriate to the age of the children and their level of “need to know.”

b. **Implement the Demonstration Role-Play**

- The role-play should be done by the adults and should demonstrate what “not to do” in a conversation.
- Try to practice the role-play before doing it in front of the children so that it can be executed smoothly.
- When you introduce it to the children say, “Watch this conversation, and tell me what is wrong with it when we’re done.”

c. **Discuss the Demonstration Role-Play**

Once the role-play is finished, ask follow-up questions, and then redo the role-play to see how it could look:

- *What did Person A do wrong in that conversation?*
- *What would Person B think about Person A?*
- *How would you feel if that happened to you?*
- *What could Person A have done differently?*
- *How would that have made Person B feel?*

d. **Raise of Wisdom**

Consider a “Raise of Wisdom” motto that might match what the children have learned throughout the lesson activities and/or through the individual role-plays. For example, “Topic Changers Build TRUST.”

Role-Play (Examples)

The following is a list of some role-plays that could be considered for the Topic Changer Pro Lesson. These are only examples. They can be modified as best seen fit for the child’s age and/or the learning environment:

- a) For all children: CHILD is starting a conversation with another student. CHILD is initiating some Conversation Starter questions when the other student unexpectedly leaps to the first topic without using a topic changer (i.e. “Do you like goldfish?”). CHILD looks confused.
- b) For all children: A child comes up to the school SECRETARY who is working at her desk. When the adult starts to initiate some natural chitchat, CHILD introduces a topic unexpectedly (i.e. “I’m going mountain biking!”). SECRETARY looks startled and confused.
- c) For all children: TEACHER is having a discussion with her class about a new lesson that she will be introducing. The child keeps raising his hand and taking the discussion off topic. TEACHER looks frustrated.
- d) For all children: PARENT and a child are having a nice conversation when, unexpectedly, the child announces that he wants to change the topic (i.e. “Okay, now we’re going to move to another topic...”) PARENT looks confused.
- e) For older children: Two students are talking about movies. STUDENT is telling the other one about the most recent movie he saw and enjoyed. The second student keeps pulling him off of the topic to talk about her very favorite movie ever! STUDENT looks confused and slightly annoyed.

DISCUSSION:

1. What key words might sum up Lesson Seven? They would be RESPONSIBILITY and TRUST.

In Lesson Seven, you want the children to grasp the understanding that we have RESPONSIBILITIES as conversationalists. We need to think about the needs of our conversation partner. One need that our partner will have is to be able to TRUST that we are going to follow the conversation in a somewhat predictable manner. When we use our Topic Changers appropriately, this level of trust is developed seamlessly. However, when we flip between topics without informing our conversation partner, the level of trust is diminished. The individual's concentration may be broken as they try to figure out what just happened. From there, the conversation partner may feel more on guard, because they are unsure of where the conversation is headed next.

2. What key areas might be focused on in Lesson Seven? The Conversation Coach may choose to focus on many areas including the following:
 - a. Improving awareness for the concepts surrounding the topic of topic changers. This will be accomplished through group discussions (i.e. What are topic changers? Why do we use them? What happens when we forget to use them?).
 - b. Increasing the ability to use topic changers to transition between topics.
 - c. Increasing the ability to decide whether to use a common or a more extreme topic changer – INTENDED FOR OLDER CHILDREN WHO ARE ADEPT CONVERSATIONALISTS.



LESSON 7 TEACHING TOOLS

Topic Changers

