

## CURRICULUM SPOTLIGHT:

# The Conversation Train

A Visual Approach to Conversation  
for Children with Autism by Joel Shaul

## Overview of the Book

Many children, especially those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), struggle with basic social conventions in conversation such as greeting, saying goodbye, taking turns, staying on a shared topic, and shifting topics smoothly.

The Conversation Train uses a train theme that many children with ASD find motivating and fascinating as a visual metaphor to teach these social rules. Through this familiar framework, children gain structure and clarity while learning how conversations work.

## Concepts Taught in the Curriculum

The book introduces children to the “building blocks” of conversation through story, discussion, and practice. Using train elements as visual cues, children learn:

- Starting a Conversation (Engine): Learning how to greet and initiate interactions.
- Taking Turns (Freight Wagons): Practicing balanced conversational exchanges.
- Staying on Topic (Avoiding Derailment): Recognizing when a conversation drifts and maintaining focus.
- Changing Topics (Switch Points): Using transition phrases to move naturally to new subjects.
- Ending a Conversation (Guard’s Van): Learning polite ways to conclude interactions.

The book also provides hands-on worksheets and visual exercises that help children connect abstract social skills with concrete, motivating images, such as:

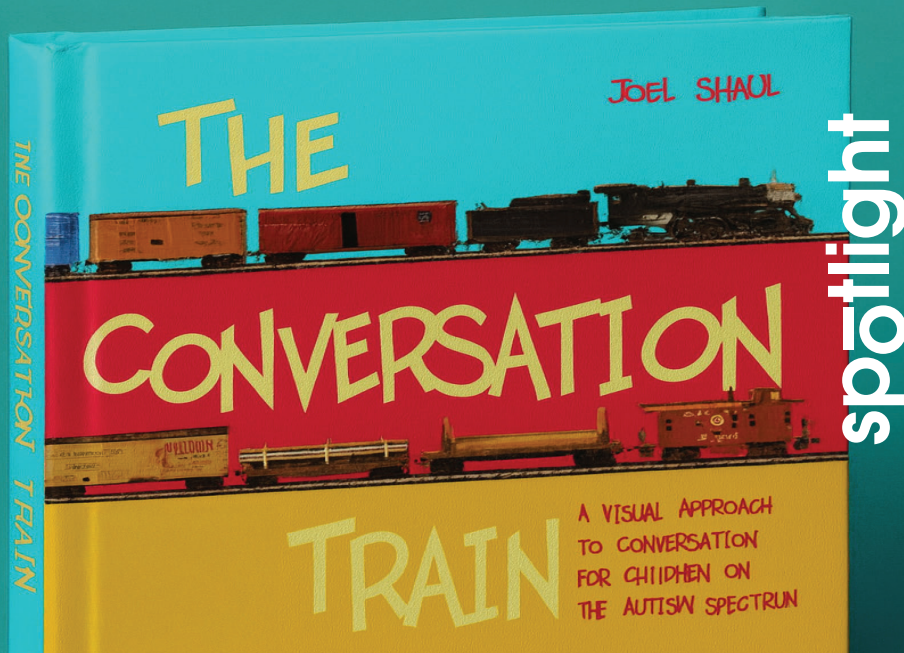
- Practicing greetings, “how are you” , switch-track , and goodbyes phrases and words
- Identifying personal “off-track” triggers (for ex. favorite toys, foods, or hobbies) and practicing strategies to stay on topic

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## Goals to Target Using This Curriculum

- Initiate conversation with peer/adult using appropriate greetings
- Will take turn during interactions/conversation
- Sustain conversation for a set number of exchanges
- Stay on topic during conversation
- Identify and self-monitor when going “off track.”
- Shift topics during conversation using transition phrases.
- End conversation using words such as “goodbye, talk to you later, nice speaking to you”

By framing conversations like train journeys with a beginning, middle, and end, children develop the structure, flexibility, and confidence to engage more successfully with peers and adults.



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