Supporting Language Development with Toy Cars

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Many children love to play with cars! Toy cars can provide many play-based opportunities to grow language skills! Some areas to target include increasing vocabulary skills, expanding utterances, answering questions, and turn taking.

Modeling language for your child can be an effective way to help increase their vocabulary. As you are playing with your child, talk about what you are doing. "My car is driving over here". Describe what the cars look like with your child. When describing use features such as what color, size, type of car, and other distinguishing features. Introduce and use related vocabulary such as "stop", "go", "fast", or "slow". Examples "This car drives fast", while demonstrating the car moving fast, "car stop" "car go", while making the car stop and go. Increase your child's understanding of temporal concepts using terms such as "first", "then", "before", "after", etc. Examples: "Your car won first place in the race", "I will go after you".

Cars are a great toy to use to help expand your child's utterances. Take what the child says and add to it to give a language model. (example: child says: "fast", adult says "The car is fast"). If your child primarily uses one word or less to communicate, teach them related carrier phrases such as "ready set go". Repeatedly using the carrier phrase will increase the likelihood of your child repeating the model. If the entire carrier phrase is difficult for you child, try encouraging them to say part of it. Example: adult says "ready set *pause*", child says "go".

Turn taking is a skill that many children need practice with. Incorporate turn taking into play. Example "It's my car's turn to go", "now it's your car's turn to go".

Asking questions while playing can support understanding of yes/no and WH questions. "Who won the race?", "What car is the fastest?", "How many cars are in the race?", "Where are you driving the car?", "When does the race start?", "Do you want this car?". Asking questions can lead to more conversation, providing even more opportunities to model and support language skills.