



Sabotage

Sabotage is a strategy that you can use to help your child learn how to listen and talk. To use this strategy, you say something silly or unexpected on purpose. The goal is to encourage your child to respond appropriately to what is said when other clues are at odds with what they heard. This is a fun strategy because children enjoy being silly, especially laughing at the adults they interact with. Sabotage could be described as a playful prank to spark a conversation.

Sabotage is used to help children make a connection between what they hear and see. This strategy helps make silly moments purposeful as the child must recognize the difference between what you say and what you do.

For example, if you said to a child, "Here is a fork," while handing them a spoon, we would look for the child to correct us and say, "That's not a fork. That's a spoon."

Here is an example of how the strategy might look in a therapy session. First we'll see an example of a child and clinician playing a game during therapy. Watch how the child reacts when the clinician uses sabotage.

You can use this strategy at any time to create a problem or make a mistake or to block a goal of the child. This creates a need for your child to communicate if he or she wants to overcome the difficulty to complete the activity. Even though this can be a fun strategy, you don't want to use it too often because the child might get frustrated and this could interfere with communication.

To use sabotage, it is important to arrange your environment so that your child is encouraged to ask for what he or she wants. You might give your child paper to draw on and "forget" to include a crayon, so that they will point out your mistake, or you might put your socks on your hands and say, *"Is this where these go?"*

Watch how this parent uses sabotage to engage their child in conversation.

These silly scenarios create opportunities for the child to use their spoken language skills to verbalize what needs to happen, state what the problem is, and to problem solve. The ability for a child to express their thoughts and ideas is an important skill to becoming a strong problem solver.



Parents, family members, therapists, teachers, and anyone who works with or takes care of your child can use Sabotage. This strategy is easy to use and doesn't require a lot of training. Teach your family members how to use this strategy to help them support your child's listening development. It is important to be consistent to help improve your child's listening and understanding of spoken language.

The first step is to identify your reason for wanting to use the sabotage strategy, and the specific issue you would like to work on. For example, this strategy may encourage a child that is feeling shy to get involved in conversation.

Second, a SMART goal will help you take the next step. A SMART goal is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and it has a deadline for you to act on your goal.

For example, if your goal is to use the sabotage strategy. A SMART goal might look like this:

Specific: I want to help my child engage in conversation.

Measurable: I will use the strategy when we are having our afternoon snack.

Achievable: the goal should be something you feel confident you can do.

Relevant: the goal should be relevant to you, for example, I want my child to learn how to engage in communication and learn how to problem solve.

And Time-bound, you have a deadline for acting on your plan, such as I will use the strategy every day, starting today.

Third, think about potential barriers you might experience that could keep you from acting on your goal. For example, do you get distracted or do you have a busy schedule and might this cause you to forget to start using the strategy? Do you need more resources or instruction to help you understand more about using the strategy? Maybe it feels unnatural to you to use the strategy.

Finally, problem solve potential barriers. For example, you can teach family members the strategy so you can support each other, you can incorporate the strategy into everyday activities, you can practice with a friend, or you can discuss your concerns with a professional you trust, such as your speech-language pathologist, early interventionist, deaf educator, or audiologist. This will help you manage challenges more easily if they occur. You can better help your child when you are able to cope with the barriers as they arise.