

What is Sabotage?

Sabotaging is a strategy to teach a child how to request either verbally or nonverbally by setting up situations so that a child can get what he wants.

- It's best to use motivating items - things he likes: bubbles, food, favorite toy, sippy cup, phone, etc.
- Here are a few examples of fun motivating ways to sabotage:
 - playfully guard a plastic, see-through bag full of snacks and teasingly say, "What do you want?"
 - set up a race track but don't provide race cars and then act surprised until a child asks for "Cars."
 - At home you might put a child in a bathtub and not run the water yet to see if he will ask for it.
 - give him an empty cup
 - give everyone else but him a cookie.
 - put one sock and one shoe on him and then proceed to go outside.
 - stand in front of him and visibly eat his favorite Skittles.
 - Play tickle games
 - Push him on the swing. When the swing stops...wait for him to make a request
 - Blow bubbles and wait when all of the bubbles have popped.



- Some of these examples may seem "mean" but if they are done in a fun and lighthearted way, it's not mean. But to encourage a child to request - an object must be motivating or very desirable.
- The ultimate goal is for the child to say the word for the targeted item. But if he doesn't or can't - model the word. Wait with a look of anticipation on your face for a few seconds. Model the word again, and wait. After a few attempts, hopefully he will vocalize or verbalize something. ALWAYS reward his effort! After doing this for a while, eventually you can begin to shape his vocalizations into more accurate words.
- You should also find more eye contact with your child and something called JOINT ATTENTION. This is when your child looks at the object he wants and at you. You are both engaged in a nonverbal communication event.
- Words of Caution: well meaning parents and professionals have used these techniques in the wrong ways. For example, a father standing over a screaming child withholding his cup telling him, "You can't have it until you say it," when the child has never used the word milk.

Here are the basics for effectively and correctly using these techniques with children –

1. Approach the situation with a FUN attitude, not, “I-am-going-to-make-you-ask-for-this-or-else!”

Purposefully make yourself look and sound FUN and HAPPY before, during, and after you’re using this technique. If you feel yourself crossing over the line to not-fun, not-happy, stop the game immediately and just give the child what he wants.

2. Hold out for your intended word, sign, or gesture only 3-5 times.

This is according to research done by the National Institutes of Health. According to this information, no learning takes place after this point. This may be true even earlier for a kid who is borderline hysterical after just one “try.” If the child you are trying to entice to communicate is DONE, then you need to be done too.

3. If the child attempts to use the target word or sign, but it’s not perfect... reward the effort.

Effort counts, especially for late talking toddlers. When you reward the effort, he’s going to continue to try again. Remember practice makes perfect. You can still give the child the object if he uses an all-purpose word like “more” or “please” . You are rewarding the communicative intent.

4. Don’t overuse sabotage so that he feels like he shouldn’t even try.

If you find your child walking away or giving up, you’re not being flexible enough or starting at a place when he can succeed.