

# Friendly Sabotage to Encourage Communication

## Early Years Team

### What is it?

Friendly sabotage is a language strategy where the professional or parents deliberately creates a problem or difficult situation for the child. The aim is to create a situation where the child needs to communicate to get what they want. Often nursery environments are set up to promote independence so children do not need to ask for things they want they can just get themselves. Often parents know their children so well the child does not have to communicate; a parent will know they prefer a certain snack or specific TV programme.

Some children find it more difficult to communicate; for these children creating a little frustration can prompt them to try to communicate and provide lots of opportunities to practise communication.

Remember communication is not always speech communication, it may be eye contact or eye pointing it may be gestures or signs or vocalisations and sounds.

Frustration may encourage communication but remember failure does not. Children must not be put in a situation where they will fail to get what they want or need. When planning friendly sabotage always ensure the child has the skills to “ask” for the item or have a plan to ensure they can get it before they become too frustrated.

### How to use it

There are a variety of different ways to use friendly sabotage and the ones you choose to use is dependent of the child’s ability and motivation.

First you need to find what is motivating for the child i.e. what do they want? The child is most likely to communicate if the object is highly motivational, this may be a favourite food, toy or activity.

Secondly you need to make that motivational object temporarily unavailable i.e., they can’t access it without help from the adult.

The adult needs to be highly attentive in the situation, looking to the child for any form of communication that they want the motivational object. They need to know the child well and know what methods of communication they use, and be ready to respond quickly as soon as they communicate, to ensure success. They also need to monitor the levels of frustration, so they are ready to step in to provide additional support to prevent failure.

## **Examples**

### **Asking for more**

Lots of play situations encourage children to ask for more. This might be more bubbles, more tickles or more bricks for the tower. In these situations the adult is pausing and waiting for the child to communicate, before providing more of an activity they are enjoying. The child may ask for more by looking at the object i.e. bubbles - they may give eye contact, they may point or sign more they may vocalise, or they may speak to communicate they want more. When the child communicates the adult would say more and continue with the game. There can be lots of short pauses in a game providing lots of opportunities to communicate.

This can also work at snack time. The adult cuts a snack in to small parts, for example cut up an apple and the adult keeps all parts of the snack. The child needs to communicate for each part of the snack, rather than helping themselves or being given the whole apple. Remember, communication could be reaching for it, looking at it, giving the adult eye contact, pointing at it, signing more or apple, vocalising/producing sounds or of course using words.

### **Asking for help**

For some children it may be a good idea to put a snack, or a favourite toy, in a place they can see them but can't access independently. This could be in a clear box they can't open or on a shelf out of reach. The child needs the adults help to get the item; the adults need to be responsive to the child's communication. They may bring the box to the adult to ask for help, or they may take the adult by the hand to the shelf or box. They may point, sign or vocalise. When they do this, the adult needs to reward them with some of the snack or the toy. If they are not allowed any more snacks don't leave it visible.

### **Forgetting what's needed**

For some children you can encourage communication by not giving them something they need to do a task. This might be not giving them a spoon at lunch time and waiting for them to let you know. You may start a painting activity but not give the child the paper or the brushes, so they need to ask for them. Remember this only works if the child is motivated to eat with a spoon or paint a picture.

### Making mistakes

You can make silly mistakes and give them a spoon when they need a knife, or give them the wrong shoes. This makes take a higher level of communication, but again provides a fun opportunity to practice communicating.

### Making choices

Another problem you can manufacture for your child is them having lots of choices to make across their day. You may know the child well, and know they prefer milk to water or they like apples, but hate bananas. You may also know they only like the red bricks, but only offering what you know they like takes away the opportunity for the child to communicate. Whenever possible offer a choice e.g. do you want to sit on the blue or yellow chair? Do you want crisps or a biscuit?

When offering a choice, show the child both options and say what they are as you show them. Then hold them both out, with a small distance between them. As before, the child may use a variety of different ways to communicate which they want, they may look towards the preferred item, they may reach for it, they may point, they may sign, or they may speak.

### Video Links

[Creating Opportunities for Communication: Using Sabotage Strategies - YouTube](#)

[https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=making+choices+speech+therapy+video+uk&sc\\_a\\_esv=556766949&ei=tEjaZN-aOoavhbIPk8CSkAw&ved](https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=making+choices+speech+therapy+video+uk&sc_a_esv=556766949&ei=tEjaZN-aOoavhbIPk8CSkAw&ved)