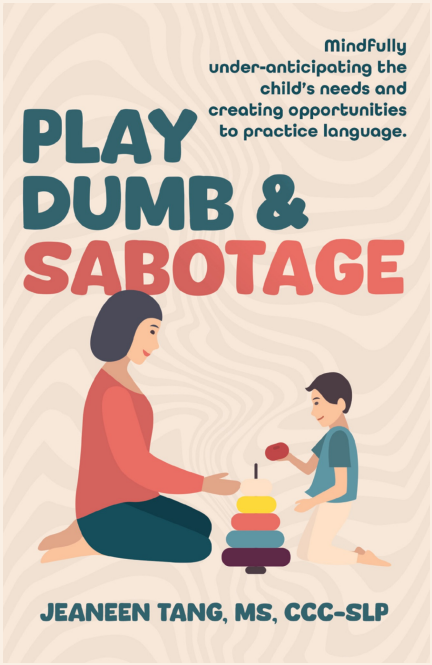
READING GUIDE

PLAY DUMB & SABOTAGE

Reading Guide

Chapter-by-chapter takeaways, discussion prompts, and everyday practice.



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Everyday moments.
More opportunities to communicate.

For parents, caregivers, educators, and readers supporting young communicators.

A companion to the book. Read each chapter before exploring its prompts and activities.

Before you begin

Read at your own pace. Use this guide individually, with a partner, or in a parent or educator discussion group. Each chapter page includes two discussion questions and one small activity.

Start with curiosity: What does this child enjoy? How do they already communicate? Which routines feel easy, and which feel rushed?

Look for communication in gestures, facial expressions, sounds, signs, words, pictures, and AAC (augmentative and alternative communication). Choose activities that fit the child's understanding, access needs, and comfort. Keep care and connection at the center.

These are original companion activities based on the chapter themes, rather than reproductions of every exercise in the book. Chapter 2 retains the book's title; its focus here is listening to distress and responding thoughtfully.

Discuss before reading: When do adults anticipate a child's needs? When is that helpful? Where might there be room for the child to take a turn?

CHAPTER 1

You’re a Good Parent

The takeaway

Over-anticipation can make everyday life run smoothly while leaving fewer opportunities for a child to initiate. Mindful under-anticipation means noticing a chance to communicate and responding thoughtfully.

Talk it through

1. When do I step in before my child has a chance to show me what they want?

2. What small change would make room for their participation without making the routine stressful?

Try it in everyday life

During play, pause before handing over the next piece. Notice a look, reach, sound, sign, word, or AAC message; respond and model a short phrase.

Language to model

You want the block. Here’s the block.

After trying it

What did you notice? What would you keep, simplify, or change next time?

CHAPTER 2

No Child Has Ever Died of Crying

The takeaway

This chapter explores crying as communication, adult discomfort, and the difference between stretching a skill and asking for something beyond the child’s ability. Observe, assess, and adjust your response.

Talk it through

1. What happens inside me when my child cries, especially around other people?

2. What might the child be communicating, and what support would help them feel understood?

Try it in everyday life

Think back to a difficult moment. Identify the possible need, your response, and one gentler or clearer response to try next time. Attend to comfort and basic needs first.

Language to model

You’re upset. I’m here. Let’s figure it out.

After trying it

What did you notice? What would you keep, simplify, or change next time?

CHAPTER 3

Don’t Ask Yes or No Questions

Unless you’re willing to honor the no.

The takeaway

The chapter’s qualifier matters: ask a yes-or-no question when you are willing to honor the no. For necessary routines, use clear language and offer genuine choices within the routine.

Talk it through

1. Which question do I ask even though I already expect a particular answer?

2. Where can I give my child a choice I am actually prepared to honor?

Try it in everyday life

Rewrite one routine question. Change “Do you want to get dressed?” to “It’s time to get dressed. Blue shirt or green shirt?” Keep both options available.

Language to model

Blue shirt or green shirt?

After trying it

What did you notice? What would you keep, simplify, or change next time?

CHAPTER 4

Slow It Down

The takeaway

Slower, expressive models help make language easier to notice and process. The chapter includes rhythm, clapping or tapping syllables, and pacing words with visual or touch cues.

Talk it through

1. When do I speak too quickly or give too much information at once?

2. Which familiar song, word, or phrase could we explore at a slower pace?

Try it in everyday life

Choose a favorite short phrase. Say it clearly and a little more slowly; optionally tap its rhythm together. Pause for a response without requiring imitation.

Language to model

Big… red… truck!

After trying it

What did you notice? What would you keep, simplify, or change next time?

CHAPTER 5

That’s Absurd!

The takeaway

A playful mistake can invite a child to notice, correct, and join a conversation. Familiar concepts and manageable language make the joke easier to understand.

Talk it through

1. What does my child know well enough to recognize a silly mistake?

2. How do they show that something is funny, surprising, or wrong?

Try it in everyday life

During relaxed play, put a sock on your hand and wonder aloud whether it belongs there. Welcome any correction; then model the useful words. Stop if the joke feels confusing.

Language to model

A sock on my hand? Oh! It goes on my foot.

After trying it

What did you notice? What would you keep, simplify, or change next time?

CHAPTER 6

Set Expectations

The takeaway

Predictable structure helps children understand what is happening and what comes next. Visual schedules, first/then boards, timers, reviewing progress, and celebrating completion are tools explored here.

Talk it through

1. Which transition feels unclear or difficult for my child?

2. What visual support would make the next step more understandable?

Try it in everyday life

Draw or photograph a simple two-step routine. Show it before starting, point to each step as it happens, and acknowledge completion. Adjust the pace to the child.

Language to model

First shoes, then the park.

After trying it

What did you notice? What would you keep, simplify, or change next time?

CHAPTER 7

When Should You Be “Teaching”?

The takeaway

Everyday interactions can carry language learning. Choose a clear target and introduce familiar vocabulary in manageable pieces rather than trying to teach every concept at once.

Talk it through

1. Where does language practice already fit naturally into our day?

2. Which one word or concept would be useful and meaningful right now?

Try it in everyday life

Pick one routine and one target, such as “open” during play. Model it in a few natural moments, follow the child’s interest, and keep the interaction enjoyable.

Language to model

Open the box. It’s open!

After trying it

What did you notice? What would you keep, simplify, or change next time?

CHAPTER 8

In Sight, But Just Out of Reach

The takeaway

The book defines sabotage as deliberately creating opportunities for practice. A wanted play item that is visible but needs adult help can invite a request; many forms of communication count.

Talk it through

1. Which play item or activity genuinely interests my child?

2. How can I make an opportunity easy enough for them to succeed?

Try it in everyday life

Hold a favorite toy nearby or place it in an easy-to-help-open container. Pause briefly, notice their message, model a request, and help promptly. Keep it safe and within their abilities.

Language to model

Help open. Let’s open it.

After trying it

What did you notice? What would you keep, simplify, or change next time?

CHAPTER 9

Which One?

The takeaway

Show and name real choices. Separating the options helps you see a child’s selection, including a glance or reach. Match your words to the item and respond to their choice.

Talk it through

1. Which two choices would my child enjoy making?

2. How does my child show a preference before using words?

Try it in everyday life

Hold two preferred books apart so each is clear. Name each, ask which one, and notice a look, point, sign, word, or AAC selection. Confirm and honor the choice.

Language to model

The animal book or the truck book?

After trying it

What did you notice? What would you keep, simplify, or change next time?

CHAPTER 10

Sequencing

The takeaway

First, next, and last make routines and stories easier to follow. Visuals and familiar activities support moving from simple sequences toward longer ones.

Talk it through

1. Which daily routine has a clear beginning, middle, and end?

2. Could photos, drawings, or objects make the steps easier to understand?

Try it in everyday life

Draw three pictures for a familiar routine. Describe the steps, do them together, and review what happened. Let your child help arrange or explain them in their own way.

Language to model

First wash. Next dry. Last put the towel away.

After trying it

What did you notice? What would you keep, simplify, or change next time?

CHAPTER 11

Keep the Conversation Going

The takeaway

Conversation grows through connected comments and questions. Observe clues, clarify when needed, use expression, and model language without demanding that every correction be repeated.

Talk it through

1. When do I end an interaction because I cannot understand every word?

2. How could I add a comment that connects to my child’s interest?

Try it in everyday life

Spend a few relaxed minutes following your child’s play. Notice their message, make a related comment, and leave room for a turn. Use a question when clarification is helpful.

Language to model

That car is fast! It went down the ramp. Your turn.

After trying it

What did you notice? What would you keep, simplify, or change next time?