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**CENTER FOR AUTISM  
AND RELATED  
DISABILITIES**



# FACT SHEET - PROMPTING

## Prompting

A prompt is any additional assistance presented immediately before or after an instruction to promote a desired response. Prompts can come in many different forms and be used to achieve many different things. They can be as subtle as a quick glance and as intrusive as physically moving someone across a room. They can be used to help someone with physical tasks such as brushing teeth or getting dressed, or they can be applied to facilitate verbal responses like answering a question or interacting socially with peers.

The goal of using prompts is to help a child learn a desired response so that it will be given independently in the future. Children who receive prompts often can become dependent on those prompts to provide responses. When children become prompt dependent, they respond to the presence of the prompt as opposed to the instruction or natural cues that ought to direct the response. To promote independent responding, prompts should be faded as soon as possible.

## Prompt Fading

A prompt should provide adequate assistance to ensure success. Once consistent success is displayed, the intrusiveness or intensity of a prompt should be decreased, to promote independent responding and avoid prompt dependency.

Data should be collected on a child’s performance and analyzed to determine when to decrease or increase prompting. Prompts may be faded by a) progressively using less intrusive prompts, b) by increasing the delay between instruction and prompt or c) by decreasing the intensity of a prompt.

## Types of Prompts:

### 1.) Physical prompts

- Full manual guidance – hand-over-hand or complete physical manipulation (most intrusive of all prompts).
- Light physical assistance - gently touching or guiding towards the correct response.
- Shadow – maintaining a very small distance from child throughout response.

### 2.) Verbal prompts

- Full verbal model – presentation of the entire desired response. Example: “Purple!”
- Partial verbal model – presentation of the beginning sounds

or first words of the desired response. Example: “Purr...”

- Direct verbal – directly stating what the student is to do. Example: “Now, put on the toothpaste.”
- Indirect verbal – indicating to the student that something is expected. Example: “What’s next?”

### 3.) Visual prompts

- Modeling – demonstrating the exact response the child is to perform.
- Gesturing – pointing or motioning to the desired response.
- Positioning – arranging materials so the desired response is easily accessed by the child.
- Permanent prompts - artificial environmental reminders.

## Permanent Prompts

A permanent prompt is a fixture in the environment which serves as a reminder to perform specific behaviors. Examples of permanent prompts we see and use everyday are reminders written on sticky notes, bathroom signs reading, “wash hands before returning to work,” or a blinking seatbelt light on the dash board of a car.

Children with autism also can benefit from permanent prompts in their environment. Visual schedules of activities can provide structure to a child’s day and offer predictability for upcoming events; communication pictures can be strategically placed to prompt a child to request desired items, or the individual steps of a complex task may be posted to guide a child through an activity, such as brushing their teeth.

As with all prompts, permanent prompts should be faded as soon as possible to promote independence. Permanent prompts can be faded by gradually decreasing the size (Example: making pictures smaller and smaller), fading prompt proximity (Example: having pictures for requesting be further and further away from desired items), or by decreasing the complexity of a prompt (Example: removing steps from a posted complex task).

## Communication

A child should always receive the lowest degree of prompting necessary for success. The level of prompts a child requires should be communicated and implemented consistently across everyone who works with that child. Prompting strategies will continuously change. Having everyone who works with a child *on the same page* with those changes will accelerate independent performance.

## Suggested Readings

Maurice, C., Green, G., Foxx, R.M. (2001). *Making a Difference: Behavioral Intervention for Autism*. Austin, Texas: Pro-Ed.

Alberto, P.A., Troutman, A.C. (2005). *Applied Behavior Analysis for Teachers*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall

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