

Prompting and Fading

Definition:

Prompts are used to increase the likelihood that a child will provide a desired response.

Fading is gradually reducing the prompt.

(Alberto & Troutman, 2003)

Rationale:

Some children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) may need added support while initially learning a new skill. Prompts are provided to ensure your child will perform the desired response/skill before making any errors (Alberto & Troutman, 2003).

Also Known As:

- Cues
- Hints
- Checklists
- Hand over hand



You're already doing it by...

- Providing a schedule at home
- Reviewing checklists for chores
- Modeling how to initiate a greeting
- Showing completed work (e.g. folded towel)
- Positioning a toy train beside the tracks

Types of Prompts

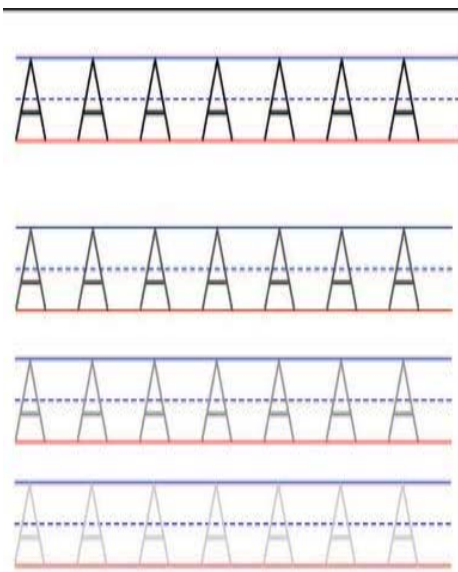
- **Physical:** Physically guiding your child to perform a skill
- **Verbal:** Verbal cues which give information to help your child to respond correctly
- **Model:** When a parent or sibling demonstrates the desired skill
- **Gestural:** Using gestures, such as pointing, to guide your child to the correct response
- **Visual:** Visuals such as pictures, symbols and text that can assist your child to respond correctly
- **Positional:** Placing materials in a location or sequence that ensures successful completion of an activity

(Alberto & Troutman, 2003)

Consider this if/when deciding to prompt...

- Gather information to determine your child's current abilities
- The type of prompt used will depend on the skill being taught and the child
- All prompts need to be faded over time or when your child is successful to prevent prompt dependency (always needing you to say, "Say hi to Mrs. Smith.")
- If prompts are faded too quickly, errors may occur
- Verbal prompts can be the most difficult to fade.

Example of fading a visual prompt



Example of prompt fading waving

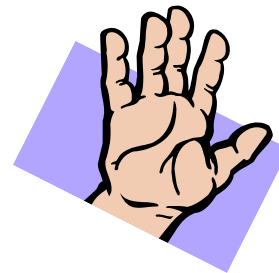
Full physical = hand over hand assistant to move the child's hand to wave



Partial physical = guide your child's hand at his/her wrist to wave



Gestural = pointing to your child's hand to wave



Rules for prompting:

- Avoid unintentional prompts such as positioning of materials, voice inflection, facial expressions and not changing the order of concepts or instructions.
- If it is not possible to prompt simultaneously with the instruction, prompt IMMEDIATELY following the instruction.
- Reinforce unprompted responses more than prompted responses.
- Do not allow your child to fail repeatedly.
- Fade prompts gradually.
- Make the prompts less intrusive (e.g. move from full physical to partial physical).
- As prompts are faded, remember to reinforce more independent responses.
- Provide more/longer access to reinforcers for unprompted skill responses.

REMEMBER: Highly reinforce all unprompted correct responses!

F.A.Q.

What is the difference between a verbal prompt and an instruction?

An instruction informs your child what the task is whereas verbal prompts are verbal hints or clues that help your child perform the task. All added instructions after the initial instruction are considered verbal prompts (Alberto & Troutman, 2003).

E.g. You tell your child “Put your coat on” (instruction). If your child doesn’t respond to your instruction and you need to repeat it to him/her again this is considered a verbal prompt. As previously noted, verbal prompts are difficult to fade so you may choose to use another type of prompt for your child to be successful in putting on their coat such as pointing to their coat.

Do visual prompts need to be faded?

Some children with ASD are described as “visual thinkers” (Grandin, 2006), which means they can be more successful at processing information that is presented visually rather than verbally. Providing a child with visual prompts may reduce anxiety and confusion and as such, some children may always require the use of visual prompts.

Some visual prompts
may NEVER be
eliminated but can be
modified

How do I ensure my child doesn’t become prompt dependent?

Prompt dependency occurs when too many prompts are in place or are not being faded quickly enough. When the desired skill is occurring reliably with the prompts given, it is time to gradually fade the support.

When fading support, it is essential to monitor your child’s performance carefully to determine whether supports are being withdrawn too quickly or not quickly enough.

If prompts are removed too quickly your child may begin to make errors. If this occurs, return to the prompt level that your child was successful with for a while longer then try fading the prompts again. (Alberto & Troutman, 2003).

Getting Ready for Bed

- Have a bath
- Brush my teeth
- Put on pajamas
- Find a book
- Call mom or dad to read to me

How do I teach my child to prepare for bedtime without constantly telling him what to do?

Verbal prompts are one of the most difficult prompts to fade. By replacing verbal cues with a different type of prompt (visual, gestural, positional), assistance can be removed more easily as the skill is acquired.

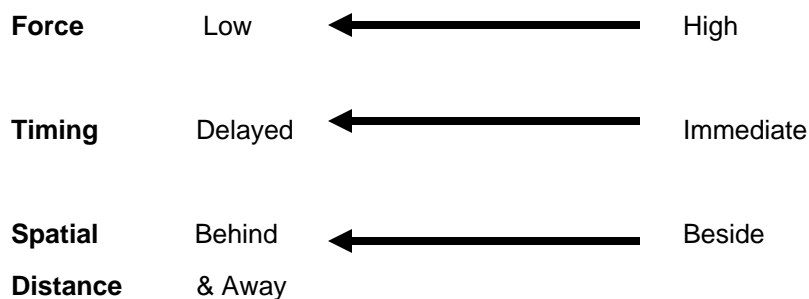
As an example, your child may benefit from a checklist, similar to the one on the left, which can help encourage independence and reduce the need for verbal reminders.

Steps in Fading

Force: *How much help is being provided?* For example, you may begin by using full physical prompting (hand over hand) and as your child becomes successful reduce the prompt to guiding the forearm, then the elbow, etc.

Time: *Between instruction and prompt.* For example, you may immediately prompt your child to respond correctly and as he learns the task you wait for gradually longer periods of time before prompting.

Space: *Between the child and parent.* For example, you may begin teaching sitting in front of the child then move behind, gradually increasing distance over time.



(Earles, Carlson, & Bock, 1998)

It is important to think about fading your prompts along these three dimensions!

The most important aspect of prompt fading is monitoring your child's progress to ensure the pace is right. Please remember to review the data on a regular basis to determine when you need to fade the prompt level for the skill you're teaching.



References:

- Alberto, A.A., & Troutman, A.C. (2003). *Applied behaviour analysis for teacher*. (6th edition). NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Earles, T., Carlson, J., & Bock, S.J. (1998). Instructional strategies to facilitate successful learning outcomes for students with autism. *Educating Children and Youth with Autism*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.
- Grandin, T. (2006). *Thinking in pictures: My life with autism*. Knopf Publishing Group.