Module: Prompting

Introduction to Prompting

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A variety of prompting procedures are used to teach learners with ASD new skills. They include:

- *Least-to-most prompts*. This prompting procedure is also referred to as the system of least prompts and sometimes as increasing assistance. With this procedure, a prompt hierarchy is used to teach learners with ASD new skills. The hierarchy is comprised of at least three levels. The first level provides the learner with the opportunity to respond without prompts. The remaining levels include prompts that proceed from least to most controlling or informative amounts of assistance. The last level should be a controlling prompt – a prompt that ensures that the learner responds correctly. This procedure can be used with both discrete responses (for example, single responses of a short duration such as naming pictures, reading words, greeting peers) and chained responses such as dressing and undressing, making a sandwich, and washing hands.

- *Simultaneous prompting*. With this prompting procedure, two types of sessions are needed: instructional sessions and probe sessions. In the instructional sessions, the task direction or cue (i.e., a signal to learner to use target skill) and controlling prompt (i.e., prompt that ensures that the learner will do the target skill successfully) are delivered simultaneously. In the probe sessions, the cue or task direction is delivered without the prompts. The probe sessions are used to determine whether learning is actually occurring.

- *Graduated guidance*. With graduated guidance, teachers/practitioners provide a controlling prompt (i.e., a prompt that ensures the learner will do the skill correctly) and then gradually remove the prompt during a teaching activity. This procedure differs from other prompting procedures because teachers/practitioners make judgments during the teaching activity based upon the learner's response. As learners start to acquire the skills, the prompts are withdrawn but quickly reinstated if they regress, or start losing skills. This procedure should only be used with chained skills which include tasks such as putting on a coat or washing hands. With these types of skills, numerous steps comprise one complete skill. For example, when individuals wash their hands, they get soap, turn on the water, rub their hands together, turn off the water, and dry their hands. This is in contrast to discrete tasks such as saying your name or identifying letters because only one response is required.

All of these procedures help learners acquire skills by systematically providing and removing prompts so that learners begin to perform skills independently. These procedures rely on reinforcing all correct responses – both those that are prompted and those that are not.

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Within these procedures, different types of prompts are used in a variety of ways to help learners with ASD acquire target skills. For example, with least-to-most prompting, a teacher might use gestural, model, and physical prompts. Another teacher might use only physical prompts when implementing graduated guidance. The various prompt types that can be used with all of these prompting procedures are described in the table below.

Prompt Type	Description	Example
Full physical	Teacher/practitioner leads a learner through the task by providing full physical assistance (e.g., hand-over-hand) to ensure correct use of the target skill.	When teaching a learner how to write his name, the teacher takes the learner's hand and guides him through the process of writing his name.
Partial physical	Teacher/practitioner provides minimal physical assistance to help the learner use the target skill correctly. Taps, nudges, and light pushes are used.	When teaching a learner how to write his name, the teacher nudges the learner's elbow so that he begins writing his name.
Full model	Teacher/practitioner models the target skill for the learner with ASD. Full model prompts can be verbal if the skill being taught is verbal, or they can be motor responses, if the skill being taught involves moving a body part.	• When teaching a learner how to raise his hand during class, the teacher raises her hand while saying, "Raise hand." • When teaching a learner how to request more, the teacher says, "More, please. Say, 'More, please'."
Partial model	Teacher/practitioner models only part of the target skill for the learner with ASD – either verbal or motor.	When teaching a learner how to raise his hand during class, the teacher raises her hand part of the way.
Verbal prompts	Teacher/practitioner verbally gives a hint, a clue, or a direction.	When teaching a child to read the word "dog," the teacher might give a hint (e.g., "It says bow wow") or some other clue (e.g., "It starts with d.").
Gestural	Teacher/practitioner makes some kind of gesture to prompt the learner to use the target skill.	When teaching a learner how to write his name, the teacher mimics hand writing for the learner with ASD, or points to the faucet when teaching the child to turn on the water to wash his hands.
Visual	Pictures of events that provide learners with information about how to use the target skill or behavior	Task analysis checklist, transition picture card

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Intervention planning is the key to using prompting procedures effectively. With least-to-most prompts, teachers and other practitioners decide on the hierarchy of the prompt. With the other procedures, they identify a controlling prompt. Finally, reinforcers must be used with all of the procedures if they are to be effective. Reinforcers are delivered as consequences of learners' behavior to make it more likely that they will use target skills in the future. Examples include stickers, pats on the back, and high fives. Of course, teachers or practitioners also must also know how to effectively teach the target skills. Please see resources developed by the National Professional Development on Autism Spectrum Disorders on reinforcement to learn more about reinforcement as an evidence-based practice.

This introduction provides teachers/practitioners with information to help them identify the most appropriate prompting procedure for individual learners, skills, and tasks. The required steps for each prompting procedure (i.e., least-to-most, simultaneous prompting, graduated guidance) are described in separate documents, along with implementation checklists for each type of prompting. Once teachers/practitioners determine which prompting procedure is most appropriate, they should use the steps for implementation for that particular procedure.

Key Components of All Prompting Procedures

All prompting procedures include the following three components:

- the antecedent (i.e., target stimulus ***and*** cue/task direction) that tells the learner to use the target skill,
- the target skill (i.e., learner response), and
- the consequence (i.e., feedback/reinforcement provided by teachers/practitioners).

These three components are critical to implementing prompting procedures effectively. When teachers use all three components during a teaching activity, this is called a trial.

Target Stimulus (Antecedent)

The target stimulus is the "thing" or "situation" to which we want the learner to respond by performing the target skill.

EXAMPLES

- If a learner's hands are dirty from finger painting, messy hands should be the target stimulus to wash hands.
- If the child wants a toy a peer has, the target stimulus is the toy and the peer. The target skill is asking for the toy.
- If the goal is for the learner to name a picture, then the picture is the target stimulus.

Cue (Antecedent)

A cue or task direction/question tells learners the skills or behaviors they should be using. For example, a teacher might give a learner a picture card to go wash hands, saying, "Time to wash your hands." The target stimulus is the dirty hands; the cue or task direction is the picture and verbal command. When using prompting procedures, the cue should be consistent so that

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learners know exactly when they are supposed to do something. The target stimulus also is important because it helps learners recognize that they should be using a particular skill even when teachers/practitioners are not present and providing a cue or task direction.

Learner Response (Target skill)
Learner response is essentially the target skill teachers and other practitioners want the learner to acquire. Learners are more likely to use the target skill accurately when the cue and target stimulus are clear and consistent. However, learner responses and use of target skills are not always successful. Therefore, learner responses are classified as either correct or incorrect.

Feedback (Consequence)
The reinforcement and feedback provided after a learner's response are critical for teaching the target skill. When learners use skills successfully or respond accurately, feedback should be highly positive and descriptive so that learners know exactly what they did that was correct. Positive feedback (i.e., reinforcement) increases the likelihood that the target skill will be used correctly in the future. With the prompting procedures, correct responding should be reinforced even when it is prompted. Feedback for incorrect responding (i.e., incorrect use of target skill) is delivered either through ignoring the incorrect response or by applying a correction procedure. The latter type of feedback generally consists of either interrupting learners when they begin to respond incorrectly or by repeating or stopping the trial.

Identifying a Prompting Procedure

Teachers and other practitioners identify a prompting procedure that is most appropriate for the learner with ASD to acquire the target skill. Because the purpose of a prompt is to give learners information about how to complete the task and to help them use the target skill successfully, only the necessary support should be provided by teachers and other practitioners. The following table outlines the various prompting procedures that are most appropriate for particular learners, skills, or tasks.

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Prompting Procedure	**Learner/Skill/Task Characteristics**
Least-to-most	*Learner may be using the target skill, but not with consistently* (e.g., uses the skill during free play, but not at snack; uses the skill correctly one time during English, but incorrectly for the remainder of the class) **OR** *learner may be regressing* (i.e., learner had mastered the skill, but is now making errors in situations where it had been used it correctly) This procedure can be used to teach: (1) *discrete skills* – single responses of short duration (e.g., saying words, naming picture or objects, reading words), (2) *chained skills* – a series of behaviors put together to form a complex skill (e.g., washing hands, eating a meal, putting on a coat, cleaning up a play area), and (3) *response classes* – skills that can be accomplished with many different behaviors. Examples of response classes include: • *imitating peers* (the behaviors vary by what the peers do, but the real skill being taught is to do what the peer does), • *having conversations with peers* (the behaviors are the different words said, but the response class is the idea of taking turns while talking with a peer), • *initiating social interactions* (the behaviors could be speaking to a peer, getting closer to a peer, or offering a toy to a peer; however, the real skill is getting an interaction started), or • *pretend play* (the behaviors would vary by the toy, but the response class is using an object as though it were some other object, acting as though something is present when it is not). When learning new skills, this procedure is highly effective, but time delay procedures (constant and progressive) often result in more rapid learning with discrete and chained behaviors. **Please refer to *Time Delay: Steps for Implementation* (National Professional Development Center on ASD, 2008) for more information about time delay.**
Simultaneous prompting	• *Used to teach learners with ASD new target skills* (e.g., teacher has just started working on a new target skill with a learner with ASD) • This procedure can be used with both discrete and chained skills, and results in learning that is about as rapid as constant time delay.
Graduated guidance	• *Easily embedded within ongoing routines and activities* (e.g., working on requesting at snack time, putting on coat to go outside) • This procedure should only be used with chained behaviors.

Once teacher/practitioners have identified an appropriate prompting procedure for a learner with ASD, they should then follow the corresponding *Steps for Implementation*.