

A Joint Statement on the Use of Prompts with Learners

Alt+Shift, Michigan Alliance for Families, and START have heard questions and concerns from the field about the use of prompting, which has led to discussions about best practices from related associations and research literature. Many resources exist to inform educators and families about prompting and differing approaches. These resources on their own may inadvertently send mixed messages, leading to confusion for educators, families, and learners. We offer this joint statement to provide guidance on what to consider while developing an individualized, learner-focused prompting plan as we work together for positive learner outcomes.

Definition

Prompting is listed as an evidence-based practice by the National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice (NCAEP) and defined as the “verbal, gestural, or physical assistance given to learners to support them in acquiring or engaging in a targeted behavior or skill.”

The absence of undesired behavior should not be the focus; engagement and independence is the goal.

Essential Considerations

Prompts must be carefully and intentionally planned to minimize prompt dependency and promote independence and engagement in all areas (e.g., communication, socialization, engagement, self-management and regulation, behavior, self-care, and employment). The following are non-negotiable when using prompting:

- **Compliance vs Cooperation**: When determining which prompt(s) to use, it is important that compliance (the act of obeying an order, rule, or request) is not the goal. Rather, cooperation (the process of working together to the same end) serves as the goal to build trust and promote engagement and independence.
- **Learner Assent**: Gaining assent honors the learner as a person by asking and waiting for clear agreement and approval to be touched. Learners can also remove consent at any time. It is imperative to have a clear understanding of what assent and assent withdrawal looks like for each individual learner.
- **Decision Making for Prompting**: Decisions about prompting are based on several variables including the goal, the task being taught, the learner’s skill and experience, safety, and data. As a team, decide which approach staff will use with each learner for various tasks and situations.
- **Fading Prompts**: A systematic plan to fade prompts as quickly as possible should be developed when the use of prompting is initially determined. To do this, plan the criteria and process to fade prompts, train all staff, and collect and review data. *Consistency between team members will be critical.*
- **Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)/Communication**: For individuals with complex communication needs, autonomous communication is the goal. Prompts intended to elicit and support communication need to be carefully considered so they do not interfere with the right of the individual to communicate in different ways (e.g., sign, point, say, write) as well as to refuse to say something.
- **Development and Documentation of the Plan**: All decisions the team makes regarding prompting should be carefully documented and shared with all applicable stakeholders. Plans should include data that identifies the specific skills requiring prompting, the plan to fade prompts, and a description of what assent looks like for each learner.

Conclusion

The overall goal of using prompts is for the learner to *independently* perform the desired behavior. As with any intervention, it is important to individualize any prompting plan. For additional information, review the [Prompting Statement Supplemental Materials](#). If you have questions about prompting, consult your local special education administrators or contact [START](#), [Alt+Shift](#), or [Michigan Alliance for Families](#) for further information.