



COMPANION GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

Use the Companion Guide for Families to assist with using prompting in your home.

The AFIRM for Paras modules were developed for paraprofessionals at elementary schools. However, the practices outlined in the modules can be helpful for families to use at home and can be used with a variety of ages. This companion guide is designed to offer a brief description of steps for prompting and provides some ideas of how you might use it in your home.

What Is Prompting?

Prompting is a cue or signal provided to guide and assist a child with performing a specific skill or behavior. Prompts can be verbal, gestural, physical, visual, or a model.

Least-to-most prompting

Gradually providing prompts to help the child be as independent as possible is key when using least-to-most prompting. At least three different levels of prompts are used to teach new skills. At the first level (usually the independent level), the child is given the opportunity to respond without prompts. The remaining levels include prompts that proceed from least to most amounts of assistance until the child responds correctly.



Types of prompts (Note: The list below is alphabetical and does not represent a least-to-most order)

- *Gestural prompt* – A movement that provides the child with information about how to perform the target skill/behavior (for example, pointing to the top of the paper to remind the child to write their name).
- *Model prompt* – Showing the child the correct way to perform a skill/behavior (for example, demonstrating how to put toys away in the basket to show the child how to pick up toys).
- *Physical prompt* – Hands-on assistance given to a child to successfully perform a skill or behavior.
- *Verbal prompt* – Any words said to the child to help them perform a skill correctly.
- *Visual prompt* – A picture, icon, or object used to give the child information about how to perform a skill or behavior.



What are the steps for using prompting?

1. Identify the behavior or task

Choose the behavior that you will focus on while using prompting with your child. Think about what you want the child to do, how you would like them to demonstrate the behavior, and when this behavior or task would be performed.



WHAT	HOW	WHEN
Completing chores	Choose a chore from a list (washing dishes, putting toys away, making bed, laundry)	At least 1 time per day
Brushing teeth	Follow steps to brush teeth at bathroom sink (may need visual or list of steps)	Each morning & evening
Completing homework math problem	At the table with help from family if needed	Late afternoons
Getting dressed	Put on coat	Before going outside
Feeding a pet	Provide food and water to pet (may need a visual or list of steps)	Each morning
Taking turns	Play a game with parent, sibling, or friend	Family game night or play date
Joining a remote learning meeting	Logging in to the remote learning session	At the beginning of remote learning meetings for school

TIP: Start by selecting a behavior or skill that your child needs help with to start or complete.





2. Choose types of prompts to use

Select two or three different prompts to use with your child while you are helping them learn a skill or behavior. Consider the type(s) of prompts you are currently providing your child to learn a similar skill or behavior.

TIP: Think about what types of prompts will work best for your child and for the specific task to maximize your child's independence. It is easy to rely on verbal prompts but consider using visual or gestural prompts that may be easier to remove as your child gains independence.

TIP: You can use different levels of verbal or physical prompts, partial or full prompts. A partial verbal provides a spoken clue or giving a part of the answer while a partial physical would be to touch the child to help them start the task.

EXAMPLE: Here are examples of full and partial prompts that could be used when helping your child learn to brush their teeth:

- Partial verbal prompt: Say: "What do you do next?"
- Full verbal prompt: Say: "Put the toothpaste on the toothbrush."
- Partial physical: Tapping your child's hand or elbow to get them to pick up the toothpaste.
- Full physical prompt: Helping your child brush their teeth by putting your hands over their hands to pick up their toothpaste.



3. Put prompts in least-to-most order

Think about how to use the prompts in a least-to-most sequence (independent → little assistance → little more assistance → full assistance).

TIP: See **Home Companion Prompting Hierarchy Examples** for more examples for home settings.

TIP: Try using the least amount of assistance for your first prompt. For example, if you are helping your child learn to brush their teeth independently, after the instruction is given, a picture (visual) or a gesture (pointing to toothbrush) would be less intrusive than telling them to brush their teeth (verbal); a verbal prompt would then be considered less intrusive than using hand over hand to help them brush their teeth (physical).



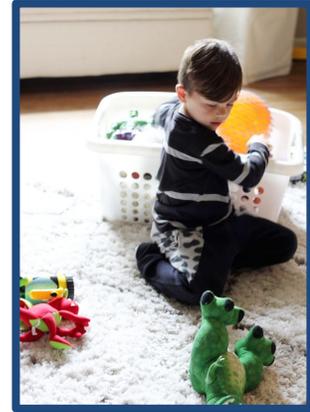
TIP: Add gradual amounts of support between each of the prompt levels. If the prompt levels make too big of a leap at one time you may have to adjust the prompts to provide more support.

TIP: The final prompt should provide enough support that your child is consistently successful with completing the task.

EXAMPLE:

Task: Clean room by picking up toys

Direction: Say “Clean up your room, please.”



Prompt Sequence	Type of Prompt	Example
Independent	No prompt	Child picks up toys without help
1st Prompt	Gestural	Point to toys
2nd Prompt	Verbal	Say “Pick up your toys”
3rd Prompt	Full physical	Hand over hand to help child pick up the toys

4. Determine wait time

Determine how much time to wait for your child to respond before giving the next prompt.

TIP: Everyone processes information at a different rate. The amount of time needed can be different depending on the task. Think about how long it generally takes your child to respond to a request or direction.

TIP: After giving a prompt, try counting the number of seconds in your head or tap your fingers while you quietly count to remember to give enough wait time.

5. Choose rewards/reinforcers that will be motivating to your child

Choose rewards that will be motivating to your child. These can be a variety of things such as a specific item, time to do a preferred activity, or special praise from you and/or other members of your household.

TIP: See **Home Companion Guide for Reinforcement** for more information about reinforcement.





SOCIAL	ACTIVITIES/ITEMS
Tickles	Computer game
Hugs	Time to play outside
Praise (“Good job finishing homework,” “I love how you helped our sister clear the table”)	Favorite game
High-fives	Pokémon© cards
Clapping	Legos
Cheering	Drawing
Tight squeezes	Movie
	Swinging on a swing
	Preferred snack
	Tokens for token reinforcer

TIP: For rewards that are activities/items, try to avoid using rewards that your child can use at any time.

6. Give your child a direction and wait for a response

PROMPTING RESPONSE:



Child Responds Correctly

- Give child a reward



Child Responds Incorrectly

- Interrupt incorrect response
- Give first prompt in sequence (wait)
- Continue with next two prompts (wait between each one) until child responds correctly
- Give child a reward



Child Does Not Respond

- Give first prompt in sequence (wait)
- Continue with next two prompts (wait between each one) until child responds correctly
- Give child a reward



TIP: Give each prompt only one time. Too many prompts can cause you and your child to become frustrated.

TIP: Remember to use the same wait time (usually 3-5 seconds) between each of the prompts.

7. Give reinforcement

Each time your child uses the behavior or skill, remember to give the reward even if prompts were needed.

TIP: Be consistent – if your child sees that you are not following through with the reward, then they may not be motivated do what is expected.



What are the key points to remember when using prompting?

1. Start small

Choose one task, activity, or behavior to focus on when starting with prompting. Wait until your child has shown success with that behavior before using prompting with other activities or tasks.

2. Be patient

Remember learning a skill or changing a behavior takes time. Once you start using prompting, it may take time to see the changes. Keep trying and stay consistent and you should see your child use the expected behavior more often.

3. Try not to over prompt

If you constantly prompt your child for all tasks, your child may develop prompt dependency (the need for prompting for tasks that your child has shown they know how to do). It is easy to rely on verbal prompts, but try to use less intrusive prompts such as visual or gestural prompts to help build independence with a skill.

4. Give enough time to respond

Everyone needs a moment to process a request or direction, and children with autism can have slower processing times. Choose a wait time that will help your child be successful not just based on the amount of time you want them to respond. A general starting wait time is at least 3-5





seconds before giving the next prompt. However, some children may need more time (10 seconds or longer).

5. Remember to give reinforcement

A reward may help your child be even more motivated to perform the task. It does not need to be a big reward – sometimes social praise is a big motivator.

6. Time to fade

When your child can consistently perform a task with the prompt order that you have in place, at least three different times, it is time to gradually fade support. You can fade support by using less intrusive prompts, and eventually fading prompting entirely. When fading support, check your child's performance. If prompts are removed too quickly, your child may begin to make more errors. If this happens, go back to using the same prompt order that your child was successful with for a longer period of time before fading.



What are common challenges when using prompting?

Below are examples of what you can do if prompting is not working exactly the way you expected.

Your child will wait until prompted to do a task.

- a) When a child knows how to do a task but will only do it when prompted, they may be developing prompt dependency. To reduce prompt dependency, try:
- increasing response wait time – sometimes a little more time to process the directions can help a child start working on the task
 - increasing reinforcement for positive behaviors – when your child does what is expected, give some type of motivating reward
 - fade prompting – once your child starts to make progress, begin fading the prompts

You have to give multiple verbal prompts for your child to do a task

- a) Try different types of prompts. Verbal prompts can be difficult to fade. Using a different type of prompt at the beginning, such as visual or gestural prompt, may help your child become more independent with the skill. If this does not work, you could also try using a verbal and visual or gestural prompt together – then gradually move to visual or gestural only.
- b) When using least to most prompting, remember to give each prompt only one time.





Your child will not perform the task when prompted

a) Try to determine the cause. Some possibilities are:

Cause	Suggestion
The task is too difficult	Break into smaller steps and focus on one step at a time
Child is not motivated	Change reward and/or give a choice of rewards
Prompts do not provide the level of assistance needed	Change your final prompt to provide the type of assistance your child needs to perform the task successfully (e.g. full physical such as hand over hand or a model prompt).