



Autism Focused Intervention
Resources & Modules

PRT

RESOURCE PACKET: **PIVOTAL RESPONSE TRAINING**

UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute
Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules
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CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE**



OVERVIEW OF CONTENT

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PIVOTAL RESPONSE TRAINING

WHAT IS PRT?

Pivotal Response Training (PRT) combines child development principles with Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), requiring practitioners to consider the learner's developmental level while intentionally applying the antecedent-behavior-consequence (ABC) framework.

Create (Antecedent)

- **Get the learner's attention:** Gain the learner's attention before presenting an opportunity or instruction.
- **Present a clear opportunity:** Ensure the opportunity is easy to understand and appropriate for the learner's developmental level.
- **Use varied instruction:** Vary the opportunities and materials throughout the activity.
- **Include some easy tasks:** Provide a mix of easy and challenging tasks to maintain motivation.
- **Give choices:** Offer choices both between and within activities.
- **Turn-take when appropriate:** Model skills, facilitate back-and-forth interactions, and encourage turn-taking as appropriate.
- **Respond to the learner's interests:** Acknowledge when the learner's interests change and follow their lead when possible.

Pause (Behavior)

- **Observe:** Watch how the learner responds.

Respond (Consequence)

- **Provide contingent reinforcers:** Give immediate, well-timed reinforcement based on the learner's behavior.
- **Use direct reinforcement:** Use reinforcers that are naturally or directly related to the desired behavior or the context of the activity.
- **Reward attempts:** Reinforce goal-directed attempts and effort ("good trying") throughout the activity.

EVIDENCE-BASE:

Based upon the 2020 systematic review conducted by the National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice (NCAEP), Pivotal Response Training is a specific type of Naturalistic Intervention (NI) that meets the evidence-based practice criteria

For more information on Naturalistic Intervention (NI), please visit the AFIRM module.

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STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

This step-by-step practice guide outlines how to plan for, use, and monitor Pivotal Response Training.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN...

Each of the following points is important to address so that you can be sure Pivotal Response Training is likely to address the target goal/behavior/skill of your learner on the spectrum.



HAVE YOU FOUND OUT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT...?

- Identifying the behavior...?
- Collecting baseline data through direct observation...?
- Establishing a target goal or outcome that clearly states when the behavior will occur, what the target goal or outcome is, and how team members and/or observers will know when the skill is mastered...?

If the answer to any of the above questions is 'No,' review the process of how to select an appropriate EBP (<https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/selecting-EBP>).

For more information about Pivotal Response Training and Naturalistic Intervention, please visit <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/>.

Keep in mind that **Pivotal Response Training** can be used to increase target skills/behaviors through adult supported play with typically developing peers.

STEP 1: PLANNING FOR PRT

The planning step details the initial steps and considerations involved to prepare for using Pivotal Response Training with a learner on the spectrum.

1. Identify easy and difficult tasks


Easy tasks, or maintenance targets, are those that a learner on the spectrum can do approximately 9/10 times correctly, whereas a difficult task, or acquisition target, is one that is new or continues to be challenging, such as their current goals. This mixture of task difficulty is important because:

- it reduces failure and increases motivation,
- maintains the learner on the spectrum's experience of success while still allowing the practitioner to help move the learner on the spectrum forward in learning new skills,
- is developmentally appropriate and consistent with how typically developing peers go between easy and difficult activities,
- increases spontaneity and reduces prompt dependence,
- will increase both confidence and natural use of skills, and
- helps the learner on the spectrum maintain skills over time.

2. Select materials

Each PRT activity should be based around materials that can be categorized into at least one of these groupings:

- individually preferred materials,
- play-based materials, or
- enhanced academic materials

 Use the PRT Preference Assessment to identify and select learner preferred materials.

3. Determine motivational strategies

An essential component of a successful PRT session is a learner who is motivated to perform the activity, thereby reaching their target goal. Three motivational strategies include:

- using learner preferred materials
- giving choices
- providing reinforcement

4. Arrange environment

Setting up the environment when using PRT is similar to using other interventions:


- limit distractions
- provide visual supports

Note: For more information about visual supports, see the Visual Supports AFIRM Module.

5. Determine prompts

Writing down what the activity will look like is a helpful process to consider if the lesson makes sense and feels natural.

Note: For more information about prompting, see the Prompting AFIRM Module.

 Use the PRT Activity Plan to develop a PRT activity session.

6. Obtain training/supervision

Seeking the appropriate training or supervision is encouraged for those wishing to use PRT to ensure successful goal acquisition for learners.

STEP 2: USING PRT

This step details the process of implementing Pivotal Response Training with a learner on the spectrum.

1. Create an opportunity

The first step of conducting PRT is to create a clear opportunity for the learner to respond. A clear opportunity is understandable, uninterrupted, and developmentally appropriate. To create an opportunity:

- Get the learner's attention
- Use varied instructions
- Use preferred materials
- Give choices
- Follow the learner's lead

 Use the Get Learner's Attention Checklist to gauge the learner's attention.

2. Pause

Some peers may require a longer processing time than expected. Pause and wait 5 to 10 seconds for the learner on the spectrum to respond. Avoid the temptation to repeat the presented opportunity until the learner has enough time to process the phrase. If learner is still unresponsive, consider ways to provide some additional prompting or support for the learner to help them understand that they should respond.


Note: For more information about prompting, see the Prompting AFIRM Module.

3. Respond to the learner

Reward goal-directed attempts, or good trying, throughout the activity, as well as correct or appropriate responses. Ways to provide reinforcers for the learner include:

- Natural Reinforcement
- Continuous Reinforcement
- Intermittent Reinforcement


Note: For more information about providing reinforcers, see the Reinforcement AFIRM Module.

 Use the PRT Appropriate Feedback Guide to determine feedback for the learner.

4. Turn-taking, when appropriate

Incorporate turn-taking into the interaction for two reasons:

- easily regain control of the materials when needed
- model appropriate skills


 For more information about classroom-based PRT, please check out the CPRT Guide in the PRT module. This is a separate resource not included in this resource packet.


STEP 3: MONITORING PRT


The following step details how to monitor the use of Pivotal Response Training with a learner on the spectrum and how to determine next steps based on the data.

1. Collect and analyze data

Plan to collect data on the learner's performance of the target skill throughout implementation.


 Use the PRT Interval Data Collection form to collect data on a target skill/behavior at the end of an interval.

 Use the PRT Group Data Collection form to collect data on target skills/behaviors of group members.

 Use the PRT Open Data Collection form to collect information at the end of the PRT session.

2. Conduct generalization probe

Conducting a generalization probe helps the practitioner be intentional in varying opportunities for the learner in order to obtain a complete picture of the learner's abilities.

 Use the PRT Generalization Probe to probe the learner's generalization of the target skill/behavior across materials, settings, and teachers.



3. Determine next steps based on learner progress

Collecting data will help team members decide about the effectiveness of using Pivotal Response Training and whether the learner on the spectrum is making progress. If a learner is making progress based upon data collected, team members should continue to use the selected strategies.

If team members determine that the learner is not making progress, consider the following:

- Is the target skill or behavior well defined?
- Is the target skill or behavior measurable and observable?
- Do the motivational strategies match the learner's learning style and developmental level?
- Was PRT used with fidelity? (Use the PRT Implementation Checklist to determine fidelity.)
- Are the visuals and activities appropriate to the learner's developmental level and level of language skills?
- Are instructions varied to maintain learner's motivation?
- Are reinforcers used that are motivating to the learner?
- Was the reinforcer applied with fidelity?
- Were learner attempts rewarded with a reinforcer?

If these issues have been addressed and the learner on the spectrum continues not to show progress, consider selecting a different evidence-based practice to use with the learner on the spectrum.



IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST

BEFORE YOU START, HAVE YOU...?

- Identifying the target goal/behavior/skill...?
 - Collecting baseline data through direct observation...?
 - Establishing a target goal or outcome that clearly states when the behavior will occur, what the target goal or outcome is, and how team members and/or observers will know when the skill is mastered...?
- If the answer to any of the above questions is 'No,' review the process of how to select an appropriate EBP (<https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/selecting-EBP>).

		Observation:	1	2	3	4	5
		Date:					
		Observer's Initials:					
STEP 1: PLANNING							
1.1	Identify easy and difficult tasks						
1.2	Select materials (individually preferred, play-based, and/or enhanced academic)						
1.3	Determine additional motivational strategies (choices and rewards)						
1.4	Arrange environment						
1.5	Determine prompts						
1.6	Obtain training and/or supervision, if needed						
STEP 2: USING							
2.1	Create an opportunity:						
2.1a	Get the learner's attention						
2.1b	Use varied instructions (50/50 mix of easy and difficult)						
2.1c	Use selected materials						
2.1d	Give choices (between and/or within activities)						
2.1e	Follow the learner's lead						
2.2	Pause 5 to 10 seconds						
2.3	Respond to the learner:						
2.3a	Give reinforcement (natural, contingent, and/or intermittent)						
2.3b	Reward attempts						
2.4	Turn-take, when appropriate						
STEP 3: MONITORING							
3.1	Collect and analyze data						
3.2	Conduct a generalization probe						
3.3	Determine next steps based on learner progress						



PREFERENCE ASSESSMENT

Learner's Name: _____ **Date/Time:** _____

Observer(s): _____

Target Skill/Behavior/Goal: _____

Directions: Prior to formally beginning the assessment, introduce each of the items to the learner. Then start a timer and allow the learner to interact with the materials of their choosing. Mark the items the learning is playing with at 10-second intervals. Rank the items from most often selected to the least often selected.

Item	Tally	Total
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		

Item	Preference Level	Item	Preference Level
1.	High	6.	Medium
2.	High	7.	Low
3.	High	8.	Low
4.	Medium	9.	Low
5.	Medium	10.	Low



ACTIVITY PLAN

Learner's Name: _____ **Date/Time:** _____
Observer(s): _____
Target Skill/Behavior/Goal: _____
Activity Scheme: _____ **Setting:** _____
Frequency: _____ times a week **Length:** _____ minutes
Directions: Use this form to develop and follow an activity plan for a PRT session.

GET LEARNER'S ATTENTION

PRESENT A CLEAR OPPORTUNITY WITH TASKS & VARIED INSTRUCTIONS:

Easy:	Difficult:
--------------	-------------------

USE PREFERRED MATERIALS:

- Individually preferred materials:
- Play-based materials:
- Enhanced academic materials:
- Other materials needed:

GIVE CHOICES:

- Choices between activities:
- Choices within activities:

MODEL TURN-TAKING

PAUSE FOR 5-10 SECONDS

RESPOND TO LEARNER:

- Direct reinforcement:
- Contingent Rewards (how to earn and frequency):
- Reward attempts (what does a good attempt look like):



ACTIVITY PLAN EXAMPLE

Learner's Name: _____ Date/Time: _____

Observer(s): _____

Target Skill/Behavior/Goal: _____

Activity Scheme: _____ Setting: _____

Frequency: _____ times a week Length: _____ minutes

Directions: Use this form to develop and follow an activity plan for a PRT session.

GET LEARNER'S ATTENTION

PRESENT A CLEAR OPPORTUNITY WITH TASKS & VARIED INSTRUCTIONS:

Easy:

1. Say greeting
2. Ask, 'How are you?'
3. Respond to 'How are you?' with verbal/gestural prompts and visual cue cards

Difficult:

1. Identify expected and 2. unexpected behaviors in social situations with verbal/gestural prompts and visual cue cards

USE PREFERRED MATERIALS:

- Individually preferred materials:
- Play-based materials: Social skills board games
- Enhanced academic materials:
- Other materials needed: 2-3 peers, emoticon stickers (reinforcer)

GIVE CHOICES:

- Choices between activities:
- Choices within activities: Choose game piece

MODEL TURN-TAKING

PAUSE FOR 5-10 SECONDS

RESPOND TO LEARNER:

- Direct reinforcement: Use the natural rewards in the board game (moving piece)
- Contingent Rewards (how to earn and frequency):
- Reward attempts (what does a good attempt look like): Provide emoticon stickers when a learner begins to share a story, discuss whether the behavior in the story is a social behavior

GET LEARNER'S ATTENTION CHECKLIST

Learner's Name: _____ Date/Time: _____

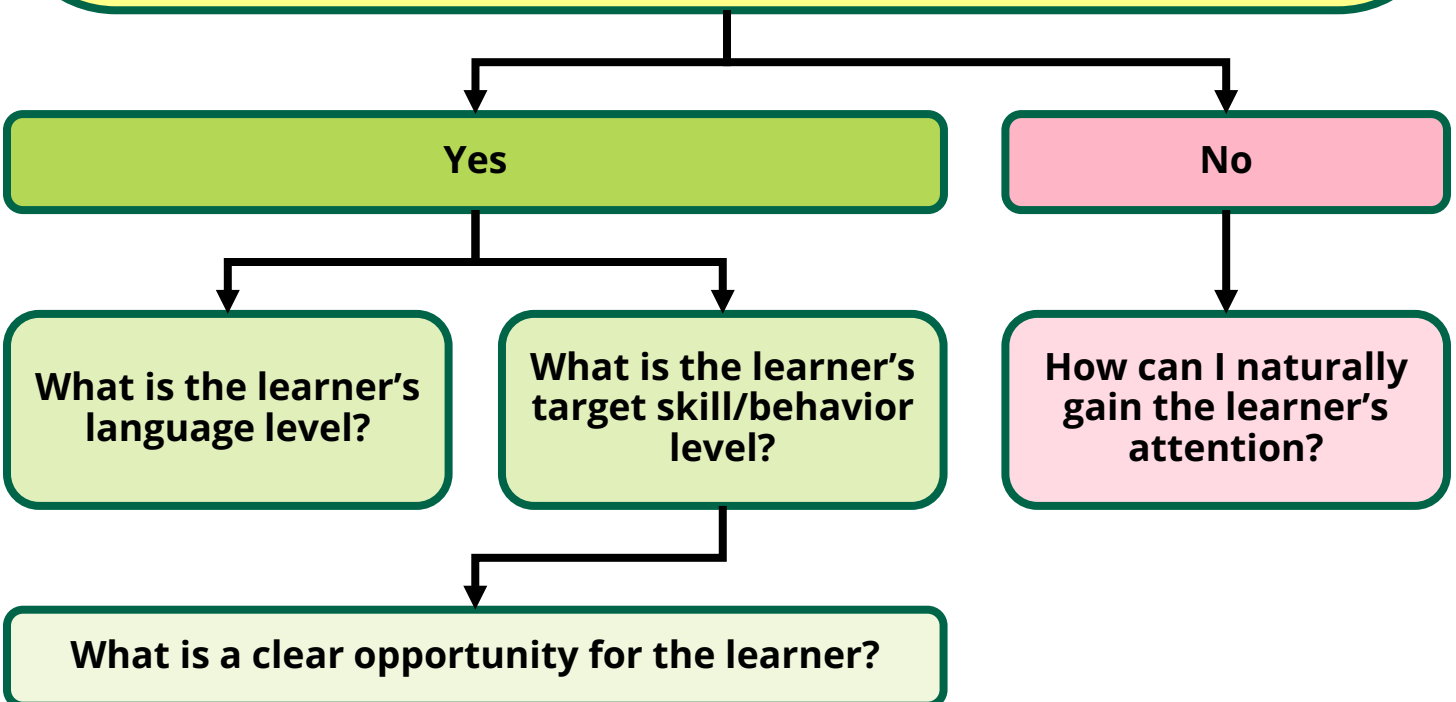
Observer(s): _____

Target Skill/Behavior/Goal: _____

Directions: Learners on the spectrum may exhibit unique ways of showing their attention. It is possible that the learner will demonstrate other indicators of attention. Use the checklist below to look for possible indicators of attention.

Do I have the learner's attention?

- The learner is looking towards me (may be through the corner of the eye).
- The learner is looking towards the teaching materials.
- The learner's body is oriented towards me or materials
- The learner is not engaged in self-stimulatory behavior.
- The learner is not actively engaged with another object.
- The learner is reaching for teaching materials or toy.



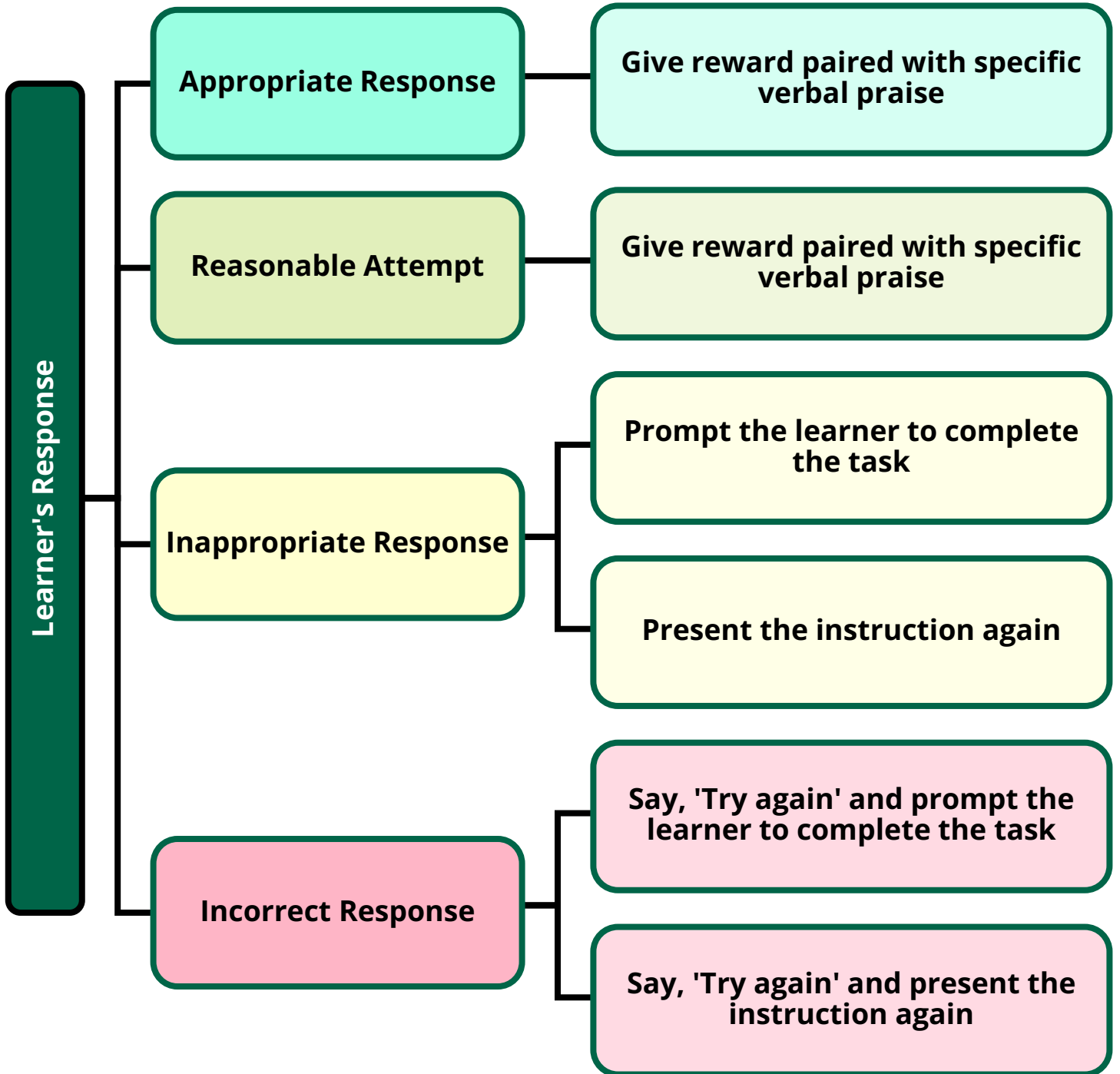
APPROPRIATE FEEDBACK

Learner's Name: _____ Date/Time: _____

Observer(s): _____

Target Skill/Behavior/Goal: _____

Directions: Provide rewards immediately when the learner responds appropriately. Provide correction or prompting when they respond inappropriately or incorrectly. Rewards should be delivered frequently enough to encourage the learner to respond.





DATA COLLECTION: INTERVALS

Learner's Name: _____

Date/Time: _____

Directions:

Before beginning PRT: Enter the target skills to be addressed, mark how the skill is measured, and define how maintenance (easy tasks) and acquisition cues (difficult tasks) are provided for each interval.

During the activity: After each interval, record the materials and the type of prompt used most often to elicit the acquisition skill(s). Record sample student responses for the acquisition skills at the prompt level indicated. At each interval, rate the learner's performance of maintenance skills for that goal based on the scale below.

Maintenance Target Performance (MTP):

1. No response/maximal prompting required at all opportunities
2. Maximal prompting required at most opportunities
3. Most responses prompted; sporadic independent responses
4. Some independent responses (at least 50%), some prompted responses
5. Mostly independent responses (more than 75% of responses independent)

Target Skill/Behavior/Goal: _____

Maintenance Targets: _____

Acquisition Targets: _____

Observer(s): _____

Material/Activity	Prompts	Learner Response/Notes	MTP
Least supportive prompt needed for response to acquisition cue:		Average of Maintenance Target Performance (MTP):	

Prompt Key: VB = Verbal; VS = Visual Support; G = Gestural; M = Model; FP = Full Physical; PP = Partial Physical; I = No prompts needed/Independent



Target Skill/Behavior/Goal: _____
Maintenance Targets: _____
Acquisition Targets: _____
Observer(s): _____

Material/Activity	Prompts	Learner Response/Notes	MTP
Least supportive prompt needed for response to acquisition cue:		Average of Maintenance Target Performance (MTP):	

Target Skill/Behavior/Goal: _____
Maintenance Targets: _____
Acquisition Targets: _____
Observer(s): _____

Material/Activity	Prompts	Learner Response/Notes	MTP
Least supportive prompt needed for response to acquisition cue:		Average of Maintenance Target Performance (MTP):	



DATA COLLECTION: GROUP

Date/Time: _____

Observer(s): _____

Directions:

Before beginning PRT: Write several target skill areas relevant to the activity across the top. Note the current acquisition skill (difficult tasks) for each learner in each column.

During the activity: Rate the learner's performance of the acquisition skill from 1 to 5 at three points during the activity. At the end, rate each student's motivation from 1 to 5.

Acquisition Target Performance (ATP):

1. No response/maximal prompting required at all opportunities
2. Maximal prompting required at most opportunities
3. Most responses prompted; sporadic independent responses
4. Some independent responses (at least 50%), some prompted responses
5. Mostly independent responses (more than 75% of responses independent)

Motivation:

1. Minimal motivation, many negative behaviors
2. Poor motivation, moderate negative behaviors
3. Good motivation, some negative behaviors
4. High motivation, few negative behaviors
5. Optimal motivation, minimal negative behaviors

Learner	Task & Skill Rating	Task & Skill Rating	Task & Skill Rating	Task & Skill Rating	Motivation
	Task: Rating: 1. 2. 3.	Task: Rating: 1. 2. 3.	Task: Rating: 1. 2. 3.	Task: Rating: 1. 2. 3.	
	Task: Rating: 1. 2. 3.	Task: Rating: 1. 2. 3.	Task: Rating: 1. 2. 3.	Task: Rating: 1. 2. 3.	
	Task: Rating: 1. 2. 3.	Task: Rating: 1. 2. 3.	Task: Rating: 1. 2. 3.	Task: Rating: 1. 2. 3.	
	Task: Rating: 1. 2. 3.	Task: Rating: 1. 2. 3.	Task: Rating: 1. 2. 3.	Task: Rating: 1. 2. 3.	

Adapted with permission from: Stahmer, A. C., Suhrheinrich, J., Reed, S., Schreibman, L., & Bolduc, C. (2011). *Classroom pivotal response teaching for children with autism*. Guilford Press.



DATA COLLECTION: OPEN

Learner's Name: _____

Directions: Record data only one time at the end of the activity, so there is one data point for the whole interaction. The information recorded at the end of the session includes an example of the learner's best response during the activity, the most frequent prompt level used to promote responding, and an estimation of how the learner performed the target skill with a '+', '√', or '-' designation.

Response Level:

- + - Responds independently to all or almost all (at least 80%) opportunities
- √ - Responds independently to most opportunities (50%), but requires support for some opportunities
- - Responds to support to respond to all or almost all opportunities

Motivation:

1. Minimal motivation, many negative behaviors
2. Poor motivation, moderate negative behaviors
3. Good motivation, some negative behaviors
4. High motivation, few negative behaviors
5. Optimal motivation, minimal negative behaviors

Date					
Initials					
Activity/Materials & Length Of Time					
Task/Skill Area					
Acquisitions Skills (Difficult)					
Difficult Response Level					
Sample Best Response					
Prompts (If Applicable)					
Maintenance Skills (Easy)					
Easy Response Level					
Motivation					

Prompt Key: VB = Verbal; VS = Visual Support; G = Gestural; M = Model; FP = Full Physical; PP = Partial Physical; I = No prompts needed/Independent

Adapted with permission from: Stahmer, A. C., Suhrheinrich, J., Reed, S., Schreibman, L., & Bolduc, C. (2011). *Classroom pivotal response teaching for children with autism*. Guilford Press.



DATA COLLECTION: GENERALIZATION PROBE

Learner's Name: _____

Target Behavior Domain: _____

Benchmark: _____

Directions: Identify three different materials (should be learner preferred materials), settings, and teachers for the purpose of the probe.

Materials/Activity: 1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____

Setting: 1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____

Teacher: 1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____

Circle the number that corresponds with the specific materials, setting, or teacher listed above. Circle the child's response to the probed skill target as: Correct (C), Incorrect (I), or No Response (NR).

Date	Materials			Setting			Teacher			Student Response		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	C	I	NR
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	C	I	NR
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	C	I	NR
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	C	I	NR
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	C	I	NR
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	C	I	NR
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	C	I	NR
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	C	I	NR
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	C	I	NR
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	C	I	NR
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	C	I	NR
Total												

Adapted with permission from: Stahmer, A. C., Suhrheinrich, J., Reed, S., Schreibman, L., & Bolduc, C. (2011). *Classroom pivotal response teaching for children with autism*. Guilford Press.



GLOSSARY

- **Acquisition task** – A task that is hard or new and still challenging for the learner.
- **Antecedent** – The activity or event that happens right before a behavior.
- **Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)** – A way of teaching new skills using behavior techniques.
- **Attempt** – A behavior that tries to do the right skill but isn't quite right or complete.
- **Consequence** – What happens after a behavior or the result of it.
- **Continuous schedule of reinforcement** – A reward is given every time the behavior happens.
- **Direct rewards** – Rewards that are connected to the task or behavior being done.
- **Generalization** – When a skill keeps happening even after teaching is over, in different places, and with different people.
- **Gestural prompt** – A movement or gesture that gives the learner a clue about what to do.
- **Incorrect/inappropriate response** – A wrong answer or behavior that doesn't fit the situation.
- **Intermittent schedule of reinforcement** – A reward is given only sometimes when the behavior happens.
- **Material reinforcers** – Items that the learner enjoys; these should be changed often so the learner doesn't get bored.
- **Maintenance targets** – Easy tasks that the learner can do correctly about 9 out of 10 times.
- **Model prompts** – Showing the learner how to do the skill when words or pictures aren't enough.
- **Modeling** – The learner watches someone else do the skill the right way.
- **Most-to-least prompting hierarchy** – Starting with the most help needed and slowly giving less help as the learner improves.
- **Natural reinforcer** – A reward that happens naturally after the skill is used.
- **Peer** – Another student in the learner's class.
- **Physical prompts** – Helping by moving or guiding the learner's body to show how to do the skill, used when other prompts don't work.



- **Pivotal Response Training (PRT)** – A teaching method that uses both child development and ABA techniques.
- **Positive reinforcement** – Giving a reward after the behavior to make it more likely the learner will do it again.
- **Prompt** – Any help given to the learner so they can use a skill. Prompts can be words, movements, or touch.
- **Reinforcement** – A reward or feedback that helps the learner use the behavior or skill more.
- **Reinforcer sampling** – A way to find out what activities or items the learner enjoys.
- **Reinforcers** – Rewards that help the learner want to use the skill again.
- **Room arrangement** – Setting up the space in a planned way to support learning.
- **Tangible reinforcers** – Physical items the learner can get and enjoy.
- **Target behavior** – The skill or behavior the team is working on, which may need to happen more or less.
- **Verbal prompts** – Words or spoken cues that help the learner do the skill correctly. These can be mild or very direct.
- **Visual supports** – Pictures or objects that give the learner clear clues about what's expected or what comes next.



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