

# PROMPTING AND PROMPT FADING

HOW TO INCREASE SKILL ACQUISITION RATES UTILIZING ERRORLESS LEARNING

Presentation and Slides By:

Christa Homlitas, M.S., BCBA, COBA  
Board Certified Behavior Analyst  
Certified Ohio Behavior Analyst  
Knapp Center for Childhood Development

Dr. Julie Knapp, PhD, BCBA - D, COBA  
Board Certified Behavior Analyst - Doctorate  
Certified Ohio Behavior Analyst  
Director, Knapp Center for Childhood Development

## INTRODUCTION: WHY DO WE NEED TO PROMPT?

- When working with children with autism and / or related disabilities and delays, many of the skills that individuals need to learn and utilize in order to live independently are not within the repertoire.
- Many children learn skills through exposure to others and by imitating peers and adults.
  - What happens when a child lacks imitation skills?
  - How do we help children learn a skill if they do not naturally learn it from imitating those around them...? **PROMPTS!**

## INTRODUCTION: WHY DO WE NEED TO PROMPT?

- To teach a new skill, we need to provide our children with frequent and consistent practice of the skill and provide frequent and *immediate* feedback.
- To do this: plan ahead and arrange many opportunities for a skill to be practiced (both during DTT and in the natural environment).
  - It is important to practice skills in multiple environments and it is pertinent that these skills eventually be practiced and taught in the environment which they will eventually be used.

# WHAT IS A PROMPT

- Multiple definitions of a prompt exist:
  - Prompts can be defined as “extra” or “artificial” stimuli that are presented immediately before or after the stimuli that will eventually cue the child to display the target behavior in the expected environment (Foxx, 1982).
  - “Instructions, gestures, demonstrations, touches, or other things that we arrange or do to increase the likelihood that children will make correct responses” (McClannahan and Krantz, 1999).
  - “An instructional technique used to help students make correct responses until they learn to respond to the stimuli that control the behavior of their typically developing peers” (MacDuff, Krantz & McClannahan, 2001).

# WHAT DO PROMPTS LOOK LIKE

- There are many different types of prompts. Prompts can be given individually or multiple prompts can be combined into a “package”.
- The most common prompts are:
  - Gestural
  - Positional
  - Visual
  - Verbal
  - Partial Physical
  - Full Physical
- Additional prompts include:
  - Modeling (peer modeling and / or video modeling)
  - Textual Prompts

# ERRORLESS LEARNING

- What is errorless learning and how does prompting help?
  - Teaching procedure in which the child is prompted to make the correct response immediately, ensuring a correct response each time (and access to reinforcement!). The prompt(s) is then faded in order to teach the child to independently complete the skill.
  - Errorless learning allows the child access to reinforcement, which decreases frustration and takes the “guess work” out of what is expected for the student.

# GESTURAL PROMPTS

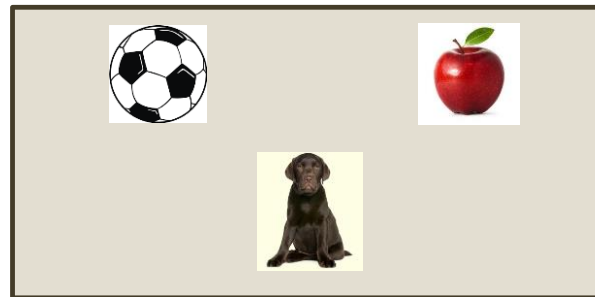
- Gestural prompts include pointing, motioning, or nodding towards students, materials or activities to indicate an action / response is required.
- **Examples:**
  - Therapist asks student, “What is something that plays music?”  
Teacher prompts student by pointing to a picture of a guitar.
  - Therapist says, “Come here” and makes a waving motion towards themselves.
  - While completing a puzzle, therapist points to the spot where a piece should be placed.
  - While teaching student to pack their book bag, therapist points to the next item to be placed inside the bag.



# POSITIONAL PROMPT

- A positional prompt involves the therapist putting the correct response closest to the learner as they are more likely to respond to the stimuli closest to them.
- **Examples:**
  - Therapist shows the child three pictures... a ball, a dog and an apple and asks learner, “Point to the animal.” Therapist places the dog closest to the child.
  - Therapist asks student to put the numbers 1-5 in order. Student places numbers 1-3 correctly and teacher places number “4” closer to the student.

Teacher: “Point to the animal.”



Student



## VERBAL PROMPT

- Involves the therapist providing the student with a spoken model of the response to a question just asked.
- Verbal prompts should **ONLY** be used when a verbal response is expected.
- **Examples:**
  - Therapist asks student, “What comes after Thursday?” Therapist prompts learner by stating “Friday.”
  - Therapist asks student, “Where do we go when we are sick?” Therapist prompts learner by stating, “The doctor.”
  - Therapist shows student a picture of a mailman and asks, “Who is this?” Therapist prompts learner by stating, “Mailman”.

# VISUAL PROMPT

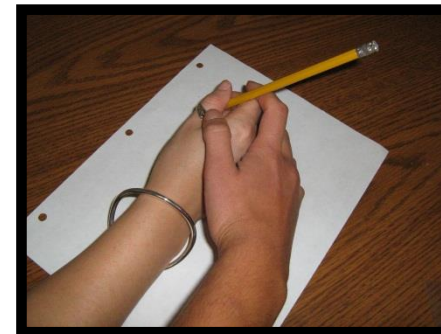
- Involves the therapist providing the student with a video, photograph or drawing on a medium like paper, a whiteboard, or an electronic device that demonstrates for the individual what to say or do.
- **Examples:**
  - Therapist asks, “What is your address?” and provides the learner with a written visual of their address.
  - Therapist is teaching appropriate conversation skills, and shows learner a video clip of peers engaging in conversation.

## PARTIAL PHYSICAL PROMPT

- Involves the therapist providing some physical assistance to guide the student through part of the requested activity / task.
- **Examples:**
  - Therapist says, “Clap your hands.” Therapist prompts student by gently touching each of the student’s hands and nudging them closer together.
  - Therapist says, “Zip your coat.” Therapist prompts student by gently touching their elbow, guiding their hand towards the zipper.
  - While teaching child to eat with a fork, therapist prompts student by gently touching their arm and guiding their hand toward the food.

# FULL PHYSICAL PROMPTS

- A full physical prompt involves the therapist providing hand over hand physical contact to guide the student through the entire requested activity.
- **Examples:**
  - Therapist says, “Clap your hands.” Therapist prompts student by taking both of their hands and clapping them together.
  - Therapist says, “Zip your coat.” Therapist prompts student by taking their hand and completing the zipping action.
  - While teaching child to eat with a fork, therapist prompts student by taking their hand and prompting the child to stab food and place the food in their mouth.
  - Putting your hand over a child’s hand to teach writing skills.



## PROMPTING TIPS

- Use prompts when the individual has responded incorrectly (or not at all) to the initial directive (SD). When representing directive (SD) **immediately** provide them with the appropriate prompt so they do not have a chance to respond incorrectly.
- Providing your student with prompts not only increase their acquisition skill rate, but also decrease frustration on their part. Prompts allow the student to understand what is expected of them.
- Vary your praise and rewards: when a student is first learning a new skill, you want to provide them with reinforcement even on a prompted trial so they begin to associate the response with gaining access to reinforcement. When a child responds correctly with a prompt provide them with a lesser or smaller amount of reinforcement than when they respond independently. For example: if they respond independently reinforce them with 3 M&Ms and when they respond to a prompt reinforce them with 1 M&M.

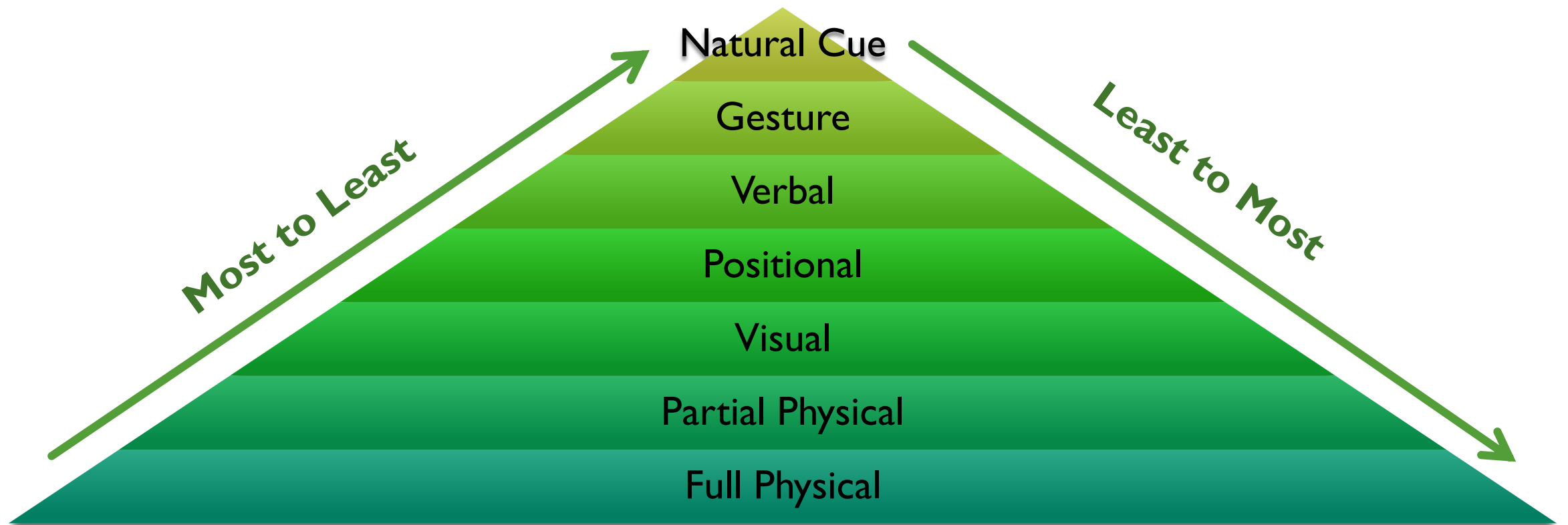
## PROMPTING TIPS

- Avoid saying “no.”
  - If your student errs or makes a mistake, do not say, “No” or “That’s not correct” or “Try again.” Simply ignore the response, clear the field (if necessary) and represent the directive (SD). When representing the directive, immediately provide the necessary prompting.
- Whenever possible, **try using mechanical prompts instead of human prompts.** Research has demonstrated that for individuals with Autism, mechanical prompts are easier to fade and are less likely to create prompt dependency than those that are delivered by a person. An example would be to choose an alarm instead of your own voice as a reminder to clean up or a visual instead of a verbal.

# PROMPTING HIERARCHY

- What is a prompting hierarchy?
  - Response prompts exist on a continuum, or what we call the prompting hierarchy.
  - Defined by the amount of assistance (i.e. the intensity of the prompt) that each prompt requires from the teacher for the student to present a correct response.
  - A more intensive prompt (i.e. partial physical) would be described as being more intrusive than a less intensive prompt (i.e. gestural).

# PROMPTING HIERARCHY





# LEAST TO MOST PROMPTING

- The system of least to most prompting describes the prompting strategy where the therapist progresses through the prompting hierarchy from the assumed least intrusive prompt to the most intrusive prompt necessary to obtain a correct response from the child.
- If a child does not respond correctly when a lesser intrusive prompt is given, the therapist should *immediatey* utilize a more intrusive prompt, without stating the directive again.
- The ultimate goal of using least to most prompts is for the child to provide a correct response before a prompt is given.
- By using least to most intrusive prompting, the therapist is able to assess what level of prompting is needed and gives the child the opportunity to respond to a less intensive prompt.

# EXAMPLE OF LEAST TO MOST PROMPTING

Natural  
Cue

- Place food item and fork in front of student and see if they respond independently. If not...remove food and fork and represent, immediately utilizing least to most prompting procedure.

Gesture

- Upon placing food and fork on table, point to the fork.

Positional

- Move the fork closer to the child.

Visual

- Model / demonstrate what the child should do with the fork.

Partial  
Physical

- Guide the child's hand to the spoon.

Full  
Physical

- Using hand over hand guidance to fully assist the child in stabbing the food with the fork and placing food in their mouth.

# PROMPT DEPENDENCY

- What is prompt dependency?
  - Prompt dependency occurs when a therapist / parent / caregiver / educator, utilizes prompts in an effort to teach a new skill and the child becomes reliant on the prompt. In other words, the child will not attempt to complete the skill independently, but will wait (or depend) on a prompt to complete the task.
- To help reduce the likelihood of a child becoming prompt dependent, therapists utilize prompt fading.

# PROMPT FADING

- When therapists use the prompting hierarchy correctly in least to most prompting, the prompts are almost self-fading.
- This means, that as a child begins to learn how to perform a skill correctly, the therapist will not be required to continue to move up the prompting hierarchy, but the child will demonstrate the skill at the lower level with a less intrusive prompt. This will continue until all the previous prompts utilized are no longer necessary and the child is independently completing the skill.
- It is important that the therapist make sure they are consistently assessing to see what level of prompt the child can complete at a skill at. For example, if last time you ran “eating with a fork” you needed to provide the child with a full physical prompt, next trial, probe to see if they will respond with only a partial physical prompt, if they do not, THEN utilize a full physical prompt.