

What is prompting?

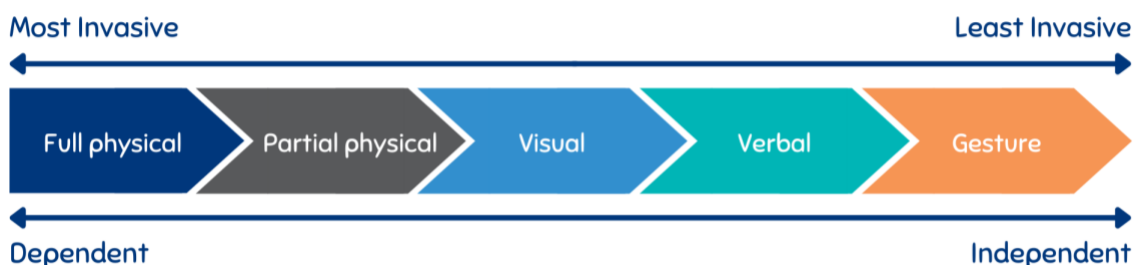
Prompting is another word for helping or assisting a child. Educators can provide this assistance physically, visually, or verbally. Educators use prompting to help the child complete a skill, task or sequence as independently as possible. Educators assist children using different types of prompts in daily routines and activities, such as hand washing, toileting, following instructions (especially during transition times), engaging in learning experiences, and interacting with friends. The aim is always to support the child to engage and participate as independently as possible.

Types of Prompts

Types of Prompts	
Physical 	Physical prompting involves helping a child to perform a behaviour, action or task. Physical prompts are most useful for helping a child to do a motor/movement task (e.g., cutting with scissors, pulling pants up). You can use either a full physical prompt (e.g., hand-over-hand support to help a child use a spoon) or a partial physical prompt (e.g., supporting the child's arm under the elbow to assist them to hold their arm steady while they eat with the spoon).  You should use caution when using physical prompts. Know the difference between prompting and restrictive practice. Restrictive practice is defined as being any action that has the effect of limiting a persons freedom of movement.
Visual 	Visual prompts are something that we all use to help us understand or recall what is expected or what will come next. Visual supports in the form of images or pictures are commonly known as 'visuals'. There are many different types of visuals that can be used to support the learning of children with disabilities or delays (for more information, see the resource 'Tips for using visual supports').
Verbal 	Verbal prompts are spoken instructions/directions, rules, or 'hints'. They are one of the most commonly used forms of prompting. You are likely to find that you often use verbal prompts at the same time as other prompts such as physical and visual prompts.
Gesture 	You can use natural gestures or Key Word Signing to prompt children (e.g., pointing, waving, signalling with your hands, tapping your head to communicate 'hat'). You might use lots of gestural prompts in your work with children without even realising it. If they are used on their own (without verbal prompts, for example), gestures can be very subtle.

Levels of prompting

Some prompts are more invasive or 'heavy-handed', while others are less invasive and more naturalistic, enabling the child to complete the task more independently. The prompt hierarchy below shows one way that prompts can be ordered in terms of the level of invasiveness and the level of dependence on the prompt or person providing it.



Tips for using prompts effectively

1. Start where the child is at. For example, if a child can do part of a physical task themselves, then a partial physical prompt is likely to be sufficient- you won't need to provide full physical assistance. Aim for the least invasive prompt needed for that child in that situation.
2. Always aim for independence. When planning to use prompts, also plan how to increase the child's independence by *fading out* the prompt as soon as possible.
3. Use caution when using physical prompts. There is a difference between 'assisting' a child's movement and 'restricting' a child's movement. When using physical support, you and your team should be aware of why you are doing it and how the physical prompt will be faded out. Ask the child's permission before using a physical prompt (e.g., "Can I help you hold the spoon?", "Can we draw this together?", "We are going inside now. Would you like to hold my hand or my finger while we walk there?"), or at least talk through how you are guiding the child (e.g., "I'm going to help you down. One, two, three, down", "I'll help you with the scissors... Open and close").
4. Include peers where practical. Peers are great models, and prompting can be very naturalistic within early learning environments (think of how many gestures, verbal and visual prompts you already use in your work with children!).
5. Be careful not to over-prompt. Prompting a child too frequently, using a more invasive prompt than necessary, or continuing to use prompts when a child could start to do part or all of the task themselves can lead to prompt dependence. Prompt dependence occurs when a child will only do the task when prompted to do it. Over-prompting can also lead to learned helplessness (where the child believes they cannot do the task without help and, therefore, will not try to do it independently).