

Helping “Just Enough”

USING PROMPTS TO PROMOTE INDEPENDENCE





What is prompting?

Prompting is another term for helping or giving direction. If you prompt someone to do something, you are probably giving some kind of reminder or help.

Prompting is more than just telling someone what to do, though. It can also look like helping with a whole or a part of a task/activity.

Walking through each step of a math problem with your child is a version of prompting.

Telling your child to get back on task is also prompting.

It's likely you do this almost constantly with your child, but are you helping them become more independent??

Prompting for Independence

If you are tired of having to tell your child the same thing over and over again (and who isn't?!), you'll be excited to learn that you can actually help your child become more independent through the prompts/help you give them!

Knowing different types of prompts and how much or how little they encourage independence from your child will help you make sure you are not creating dependence on yourself and the help that you give them!

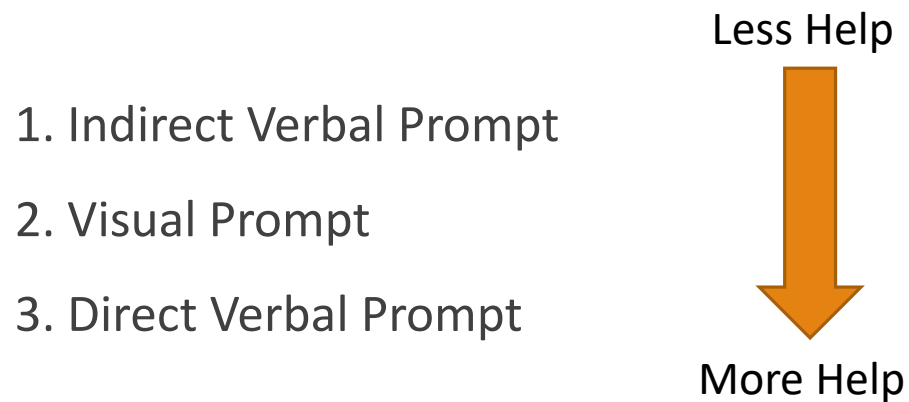
You will learn different levels of prompts, which ones will make your child more independent, and how to fade your prompts by moving through the prompt levels and/or providing fewer prompts overall.



What are the different types of prompts?

There are many different types of prompts. Some prompts are more appropriate for certain children and certain situations than others. These prompts are a guideline you can use to help your child be more independent with their schoolwork.

Each of these types of prompts will be gone over in more detail later. It's important to note that in general, you should move through the prompts starting with 1 and working down to 3, only if needed.





Indirect Verbal Prompts

Indirect verbal prompts are prompts that give your child a little reminder without directly telling them what to do. They are like a verbal hint for your child.

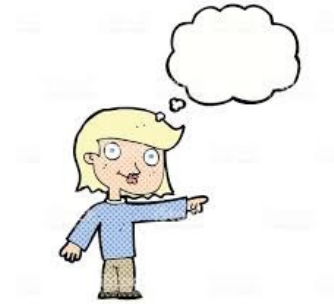
Indirect verbal prompts often end up being questions, meant to make your child think about the answer in relation to their school work.

Indirect prompts are a great way to help your child a little bit, but not provide too much help.

Examples:

- “What page would that information be on?”
- “Where should you be right now?”
- “What problem are you on?”
- “Did you try doing it another way?”

Visual Prompts



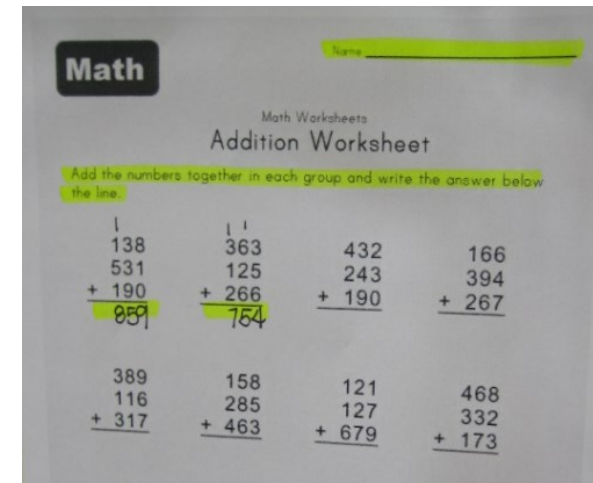
Visual prompts are prompts that use something your child can see to help them.

Visual prompts can be gestures, visual schedules, indications of which problems to do, indications of where to start/end, etc.

Visual prompts should be given without verbal prompts. This makes it so your child is relying on what they're seeing rather than what you're telling them with words.

Examples:

- Highlighting all problems that need to be done
- Highlighting the start and/or end point on a worksheet
- Tapping on or pointing to what they should be working on
- Tapping on their pen/pencil
- Showing, pointing to, or tapping their visual schedule
- Pointing to their work area when they are not where they should be



Direct Verbal Prompts



Direct verbal prompts are prompts where you explicitly tell your child what to do.

Direct verbal prompts should usually be used after trying at least one of the other prompts, as they provide more specific help than the others.

Direct prompts usually sound like specific directions. You should be telling your child exactly what you want them to do.

Examples:

- “Start on problem 7 and go to problem 15”
- “Write your name”
- “Get out your history book and go to page 46”
- “Go sit down at your desk”



When should I use each type?

The type of prompting you should use depends on your child's level of independence, their familiarity with the activity, and the activity itself.

Independence: if your child has shown you they can do this activity well and pretty independently, think about using a prompt that fosters more independence, like a an indirect verbal prompt.

Familiarity with Activity: if your child is doing an activity they are familiar with, chances are they know at least some of the steps. Try to either not prompt them on the steps they know, or think about how you can prompt them to be as independent as possible.

The activity: some activities are much harder than others! Even if they are familiar with the activity, they may still have a difficult time. You can still prompt them during these times! If you know your child doesn't know how to do an activity, it's ok to start with a visual or direct verbal prompt.

Moving Through the Prompts- Example 1

Here's an example of how you could utilize the different types of prompts and move through them, going from 1-3:

You have told your child it's time to work on math. They are sitting at the table and have gotten their worksheet out but have not started.

1. Use an indirect verbal prompt- "Which problem are you starting on?"
2. If they still do not start, after giving them about 10-15 seconds, give a visual prompt (point to their first problem or circle it)
3. Wait to see if they start. If they don't, give a direct verbal prompt -"You need to do problem 7".

At each step, you gave your child the opportunity to do their work without offering too much help initially. They showed you they needed it, so you moved through the prompts only when you saw they did not respond to the previous prompt.

Moving Through the Prompts- Example 2

Here's another example of how you may move through prompts when you might not need each type:

Your child is ready with their paper and they are trying to figure out which problems to do.

1. Highlight or circle the group of problems they need to do (visual prompt).
2. If they do not start or start doing the wrong problems, point to the correct problems (visual prompt).
3. If they still aren't starting or doing the right problems, give a direct verbal prompt "Do the problems I circled, 1-5". If they started the problems, you wouldn't need to prompt anymore.

In this instance, an indirect verbal prompt was not needed because they were trying to do their work, but showed they truly needed help with which problems to do. Giving 2 visual prompts gave multiple opportunities for them to do it with less help, but if it was clear they needed more direction, a direct verbal prompt would be appropriate. If not, you could stop prompting.

Moving Through the Prompts- Example 3

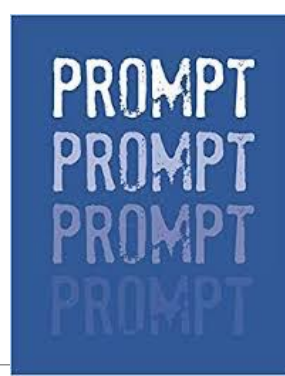
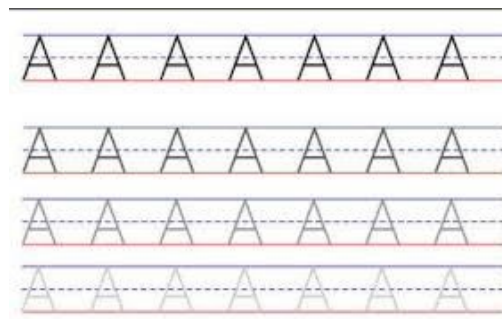
Here's one more example of a way you can utilize and move through the different prompts while focusing on fading.

Your child is doing a worksheet they are struggling with. You have helped them for the last 5 problems, giving indirect verbal prompts, visual prompts, and direct verbal prompts. You just gave them a direct verbal prompt and they were very successful with this problem. They're starting on a new one.

1. Try to fade your prompt- use one that provides less help. This time, instead of giving the a direct verbal prompt, give them a visual prompt by pointing to the next step they need to do.
2. If they are successful with the visual prompt, then try an indirect verbal prompt- "What do you do next?"

This is an example of prompt fading (which will be gone over in detail later), and it shows that the different levels of prompting can be fluid, moving up and down them in whichever way is right for the situation.

Prompt Fading



Prompt fading is the process of starting to use fewer prompts and/or using prompts that promote more independence than before. The goal of prompt fading is to make sure your child does not continue to rely on prompts from you and can do things independently.

Prompt fading can look like trying to get to the point where you're using an indirect verbal prompt or no prompt instead of a visual or direct verbal prompt.

Prompt fading can also look like giving fewer prompts overall. This means giving your child time to think and process before prompting again!

- We all need time to think about activities that are more difficult for us, so giving your child time to do the same is an important piece to consider with prompting.

Prompt fading can also be giving your child more space which may give them the opportunity to figure things out on their own before having help! Walking away and waiting can help with this.

Wait a Minute!

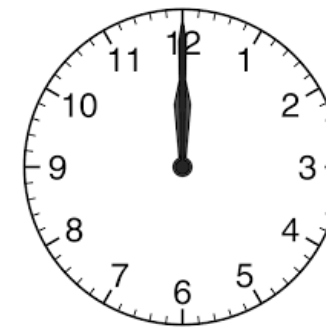


One of the most efficient ways to fade your prompts and decrease dependency on yourself is to WAIT!

It's easy for us to give 3-4 prompts back to back with no time in between for the child to actually think! It's possible they only needed the first prompt though!

Waiting to both give your initial prompt and to give another prompt will provide your child with an opportunity to think about what they need to do and how to do it.

Try waiting 10-15 seconds before giving your child a prompt, whether it's an initial prompt or a follow up prompt. Giving your child that time lets them take in the information they just got, think about what to do with it, and then start acting on it.



The Value of Waiting

What happens often: “Ok John let’s get started on your next assignment. Get out your book. Look it says right here to go to page 23. Ok see it says to read those two sections right there. Make sure you have your pencil to write notes”.

What would be better: “Ok John, check your assignments and see what’s next”. THEN, if John does not know what to do after about 10-15 seconds (remember, he needs time to read!!), you can try asking him where his book is (indirect verbal prompt) or sliding it over to him (visual prompt). Then, you guessed it, wait!! Provide another prompt if needed.

If John can read, he should not need much more than your initial prompt to get started! Waiting will probably make him think to look at his sheet to see what to do. Waiting and letting him take direction from his assignment sheet rather than you eliminates the need for 4 prompts!

Consider Proximity



Proximity, or the space between you and someone else, is also something that's important to think about!

Being close to your child makes it easier for them to get help from you. It also makes it easier for you to see what they are doing (or not doing) and might actually make you be quicker to prompt!

Being farther away from your child will make it a little harder for your child to get help from you, which might help them to make the decision to do something without help! If help is readily available, we usually take it even if we don't truly need it.

Of course there are times when you should be close- a new or extra hard task. But walking into the next room or moving your hand away for even 15 seconds can make your child much more independent!



The Value of Proximity

What happens often: you are sitting right next to your child. They look for an answer one time and don't see it. You see it, and without them even asking, you say "Look in the third paragraph towards the middle. It starts with the word "Interesting"." Your child has just gotten the answer without really doing much work.

What would be better: you are in the kitchen while your child is at the table. They do not find their answer at first, so they go back and re-read. You were not right there so you did not offer help just because you saw the answer and they did not automatically turn to you for it. You are still close enough that your child can ask for help if they need it.

Being near your child and being farther away from your child both have benefits! Knowing when to do each will help you decrease your child's dependency on you.

Have you noticed that often, if you're right by your child when they're doing basically anything, they ask for ideas and help? But if you are farther away or somewhere else completely, they often figure it out on their own? The same is true with prompting! And just like with anything else, if they really need you, they'll let you know!



When to Prompt

It's also important to know when to prompt. While we want to create independence for our children, we don't want to set them up for failure!

Prompts are very valuable and really help a lot of children learn when they're used correctly!

Here are some things to think about when deciding if you should prompt:

- Have I given my child some **time** to figure it out on their own?
- What do they actually need help with? (We often over prompt by prompting extra things they didn't need help with).
- Has my child done this before? Do they need just a reminder or a full lesson on how to do this?
- Am I prompting just because I am right here or am I seeing that they really need help?
- Can I use a prompt that promotes more independence instead of one that makes my child more dependent on me?



To Prompt or Not to Prompt?

I just gave my child a prompt but they haven't started yet.

- Don't prompt yet! Give them time, 10-15 seconds, to process.

My child is doing something new and seems to be struggling.

- After giving them a little time, give them a prompt. Start off small, then give more if they need it.

I notice my child is doing something incorrectly, but they have not asked for help.

- Is this a new skill for your child? If so, prompt them. This is a good chance to teach.
- Are they still trying to work on it? If so, wait a little! They may realize their own mistake. If not, you may want to prompt.

I notice my child is off task.

- Wait to see if they get back on task quickly. If not, prompt them only to get back on task. Do not assume they need prompting with the activity right away! If it appears they do, refer to suggestions above.



Decreasing Dependence on You

The best way to change your child's behavior of being dependent on you is to change your own behavior! Fading your prompts will help your child become more independent.

It's natural to want to help your child, but doing so too much can sometimes create prompt dependency, which means they wait until they are prompted to do something. They come to rely on the prompts.

In order to make sure this doesn't happen, it's very important for you to really think about your prompts. Doing some reflection and planning, although it may feel unnatural at times, will help you be more aware of your own behavior!

Again, the goal is NOT to make your child struggle or fail. The goal is to make them more independent, which can be done by being strategic about your prompts!

Focusing on Independence



The biggest thing to remember when prompting is that you are attempting to make your child more independent.

Continuously giving them direct verbal prompts on steps or tasks they know how to do will probably not make them more independent, but will actually make them dependent on your prompts.

Try to be conscious of the number of prompts you are using and which kind you are using.

If you try a prompt that offers more independence and your child still needs help, you can always go back to a different prompt to help teach them!

Sometimes, less is more! Start out using fewer prompts, and if you need to start using more then you can!



Other Prompting Tips

You do not have to go through each type of prompt! In certain cases you may, but in other cases you may not need all of them. It is ok to move through them in whichever way seems appropriate for your child and the specific task.

Remember to give them time to process! One common mistake is giving too many prompts without actually letting your child have time to take in what you have said/done. This happens especially with verbal prompts. Depending on your child, they may need anywhere between 10-30 seconds to truly process what you said and act on it.

You can still give your child verbal instructions. Fading your prompts doesn't mean you can't still say "Time to start school!" or "Ok, time for math.". Focus more on prompt fading within each of these. Remember- prompts are kind of like extra help for your child while working on something or for getting back on task!

Resources

For more information on visual schedules, check out the “Visual Schedules” resource on the behavior resources page.

There are also other behavior resources available to help with motivation, behavior basics, and tools you can use on that page!

