

Prompting Techniques to Support AAC Use

Prompts help children remember what to do and are adapted to their needs. They ensure that learning takes place and goals can be achieved. As a child's abilities improve, the amount and type of prompts needed decrease. Therefore, we often follow a hierarchy of prompts to ensure we are always working towards maximising the child's independence with that skill (if possible).

Some of these prompts have already been discussed as part of the AAC teaching method called aided language stimulation (ALS) in sheet 6.2. However, in ALS our focus is more about our input as the communication partner than prompting for output from the child.

As part of the learning experience we do want the child to produce messages using his AAC system. If a child does not have the experience because someone always does it for him, then he will not learn. The prompting hierarchy presented can be used to encourage a child to perform a desired behaviour (eg. requesting using his communication device) *without* becoming stimulus dependent (i.e. only communicating in response to "point to the ___" commands).

If the child is always requiring cues at the end of the hierarchy (eg. direct models and physical assistance), then you may need to review your goal or teaching strategies.

KEY POINTS

- The child must experience to learn.
- Following a prompting hierarchy allows children the opportunity to perform a desired behaviour without becoming prompt dependent.
- But don't forget that input is just as important as output!

PROMPTING HIERARCHY (Senner, 2010; YAACK, 1999)

1. Pause

- Give the child time to respond or the opportunity to initiate communication.

2. Indirect Nonverbal Prompt

- Use your body language to indicate to the child that something is expected (eg. expectant facial expression, questioning hand motion with a shrug, etc).

3. Indirect Verbal Prompt

- Use an open-ended question that tells the child that something is expected but nothing too specific (eg. "Now what?", "What should we do next?").

4. Request a Response

- If there is still no response, you can try to direct the child more specifically (eg. "Tell me what you want." ; "You need to ask me.").

5. Gestural Cue

- You can point to the symbol or leave/tap your finger there for several seconds to get the child started with his message.

6. Partial Verbal Prompt

- If there is still no response, give them part of the expected response (eg. "You went to the").

7. Direct Model

- If the child still does not respond tell the child what to say (eg. "The bear is sad."). Pause and wait for the child to imitate or respond in some way with his device.

8. Physical Assistance

- Provide hand-over-hand assistance to help the child to form the message using their device.

Communication Partners and Communication Assistants – What’s the Difference?

(DynaVox Mayer-Johnson, 2008)

Using a prompting hierarchy is ideal when you have more than one person available. This allows one person to be a communication assistant and the other to be the communication partner.

A communication partner is anyone the child interacts with in any environment. A communication assistant is an individual who helps the child interact as successfully and independently as possible. Often at school this would be an education assistant and at home and in the community it is likely to be a family member.

The key difference between the two roles is that a communication partner is an equal partner in the interaction, talking and responding to the AAC user. A communication assistant supports the interaction by prompting the AAC user and helping them form appropriate messages. See the illustration below.

It is important to remember that neither the communication partner nor the communication assistant ever talks **for** the AAC user.



References

- DynaVox Mayer-Johnson (2008). *Communication partner/communication assistant: roles defined*. Retrieved July 6, 2010, from <http://uk.dynavoxtech.com/training/toolkit/details.aspx?id=33>.
- Senner, J. E. (2010). *Evidence-based AAC strategies for school-aged children*. ISHA. Retrieved June 29, 2010, from http://www.ishail.org/isha/uploadedFiles/Educational_Development/2010%20Session%2050%20-%20Senner.pdf.
- YAACK (1999) *Prompting and prompt-free strategies*. Retrieved June 29, 2010, from <http://aac.unl.edu/yaack/d3.html#d3b3>.

This handout is part of an information package, funded by a NGCS grant, to assist local teams in supporting children who require augmentative and alternative communication - particularly communication devices. Augmentative and alternative communication, or AAC, refers to other methods of communication people may use when they have difficulty speaking. These methods may supplement what speech they do use or may become the primary form of communication in the absence of speech.

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