Prompting Hierarchy

Prompting can be a valuable strategy when teaching someone how to use a communication display or device. To avoid prompt dependence (where child always waits for the prompt first), it is important to use prompting only when necessary, and to fade it as quickly as possible. In the chart below, prompts are listed in order of least to most in terms of prompting support provided to the child. Start with the least intrusive prompt, or if you find this too time consuming, start with the prompt that is one level less intrusive than you usually end up providing. This supports the child to become more independent with using their communication display or device.

Prompt Type	Explanation and Example
Wait	WAIT! Allow time for the child to respond or initiate communication. Use body language to let the child know you are waiting for them to communicate. E.g., Shrug, nod or look between the device and the child to indicate that something is expected.
Open Ended Question	Use an open ended question to let the child know that something is expected. E.g., "Now what?", "What should we do next?"
Verbal Instruction	Tell the child specifically what to do to communicate in that moment. E.g., "If you want the apple, point to the apple".
Gesture	Repeat the verbal instruction while pointing to the symbol or general area of the symbol you want the child to use. E.g., Point to the symbol for apple while saying "If you want the apple, point to the apple".
Model / Show	Demonstrate using the word or phrase on the child's device. Pause and wait for them to imitate.
Physical Assistance	Repeat the verbal prompt and provide partial or full hand-over-hand (or hand-under-hand) assistance.

When the child uses their communication display or device, follow through with the interaction and provide positive feedback.

Keep in mind how motivating the situation is for the child. If the communication interaction is about something that the child really likes or is interested in, you will have more success in fading the prompts.

Make sure to provide enough time for the child to respond to your prompt. Wait up to 10 seconds or more for a response. Some children will need more time than others.

Note: For some children, it can be helpful to use a most-to-least prompting approach when teaching new skills. Please speak with your clinician before trying this approach.