

15 VISUAL CARDS

Prompting in Everyday Practice

Small steps towards
greater independence

A practical guide for
early intervention teams



Choose help



Reduce help



Notice progress

Prompt types / Everyday cases / Simple checks



What Is a Prompt?

Extra help added to the usual instruction or natural cue to support a child's response.

- Plan to **reduce** temporary teaching prompts.
- **Independence** can include AAC, visual schedules and other access supports.
- **Independence** is the outcome, not a prompt type.
- Choose help for the child and task, not a fixed order.





Type vs Method

The type is the help we give. The method is when we give it, and how we reduce it.

- **Least to most:** allow a response, then increase help as planned.
- **Most to least:** start with enough help for success, then reduce it.
- **Time delay:** plan the interval between the cue and prompt.
- **Graduated guidance:** adjust physical guidance as the child moves.



Before You Prompt

Check the cue, the task and the child's readiness before adding help.

- **Is the cue** clear and accessible?
- **Can the child** understand and carry out this step?
- **Has the child** had the planned time to respond?
- **Are they comfortable and willing?** If already trying, allow time.



Verbal Prompts

Extra spoken help added after or alongside the usual cue.

- **Direct:** an added hint such as 'Your tiffin goes in next' after 'Pack your bag.'
- **Indirect:** a question or hint, such as 'What next?'
- Indirect is **not automatically easier** for every child.
- **Use words the child understands;** consider visual support if needed.



Gestural Prompts

A movement that guides attention without physically moving the child.

- **Point, nod or look** towards the relevant object or step.
- **Check** that the child understands the gesture.
- **Reduce** the gesture as the child succeeds.
- **Example:** point towards the shoe rack when putting sandals away.



Visual Prompts

Pictures, symbols or written words that help guide a response.

- **Picture schedules and checklists** can guide the next step.
- **Moving the correct choice closer** to make it stand out is a positional prompt.
- **Moving an item within reach** for access is different.
- **An ongoing visual support** does not always need to be faded.



Model Prompts

Demonstrating an action so the child can see how it is done.

- **Demonstrate the step**, then let the child try.
- **For AAC**, model messages without requiring the child to copy.
- **After demonstrating**, allow time to respond.
- **Reduce the demonstration** as the skill develops.



Physical Prompts

Hands-on guidance needs assent: the child's willingness, shown through words or actions.

- **Ask first** and explain before touching.
- **Use only** the agreed physical assistance needed.
- **Hand-under-hand** is not automatically appropriate for every child.
- **Stop** for refusal, pulling away or distress. Reassess before continuing.



CASE CARD

Packing a Bag

Goal: put the tiffin in the bag using a picture checklist.

- **Starting cue:** packing time, with the checklist available.
- **Help offered:** after the planned pause, point to the next picture if needed.
- **Fading it:** make the point smaller, then omit it as the child succeeds. The checklist can remain.
- **Watch and pause:** if the child starts the step, allow time.



CASE CARD

Asking for Help

Goal: communicate a need for help through speech, gesture or AAC.

- **Starting cue:** a natural need for help, with AAC within reach.
- **Help offered:** model 'help' on an accessible board or device, then allow time.
- **Fading it:** reduce extra response prompts; continue natural language modelling.
- **Respond to the request.** Do not require a button press or guide the child's hand to a message.





CASE CARD

A Matching Task

Goal: match a sample picture to one of two choices.

- **Starting cue:** show the sample and say 'Match.'
- **Help offered:** if planned, place the matching choice slightly nearer.
- **Fading it:** gradually return both choices to equal distance.
- **Check learning:** vary left and right positions to check genuine matching.



CASE CARD

Washing Hands: One Step

Goal: rub soapy hands together.

- **Starting cue:** hands are wet and soap is on them.
- **Help offered:** demonstrate rubbing. Use physical guidance only if individually planned and accepted.
- **Fading it:** reduce the chosen prompt as the child takes over.
- **Watch and pause:** stop if the child pulls away or seems uneasy.





After an Error or No Response

Pause, check what is difficult, then use the agreed teaching plan.

- **No response:** allow the planned time, check understanding and access, then offer agreed help.
- **Error:** calmly demonstrate or support the step; offer another opportunity when ready.
- **Avoid repeated instructions** or several prompts at once.
- **Repeated difficulty** means review the task and teaching plan.





Track Progress Simply

Observe one agreed step across sessions,
without heavy paperwork.



- **Record:** On own / With help / Not yet / Not observed.
- **Note** the help used, if any.
- **Compare** the same step over several sessions; note any changes in context.
- **On own** means no extra adult prompt, with agreed access supports available.



What Research Tells Us

Research supports prompting with careful selection, fading and monitoring.

- **Prompting is an evidence-based practice** for autistic children and youth.
- **Small studies show** that effective approaches can differ between children.
- **A recent single-participant study found** faster independent word identification with alternating stimulus prompts.
- **Promising findings are not universal rules.**
Try, observe and adjust.



Start with one routine.

Small, thoughtful changes in everyday practice.

01 Choose one meaningful step.

02 Agree the help.

03 Allow time.

04 Notice what the child does
with less assistance.

**Keep the supports that make
participation possible.**

sessionmate.ai/prompting-guide

Save it. Revisit it. Share it with your team.