

Prompting with purpose: Supporting growth over time

Use this tool to guide consistent prompting practices across clinics, classrooms and homes.
Prompting is a way of supporting someone to complete a task or skill – with the goal of building confidence, independence and long-term success.



least
to most
intrusive



- **Visual supports**
Task breakdowns, schedules, choice boards, icons or photos
- **Gestural or Environmental Cues**
Pointing, placing objects in sight, setting up the space
- **Modelling / Imitation**
Showing what to do without direct instruction
- **Verbal Prompt**
Direct verbal prompt “put your shoes on” / indirect “what do you need?”
- **Physical Prompt**
Hand-over-hand assistance or physical guidance

Strategies to consider when using the prompt hierarchy

Consider with the environment.

Set the environment up to invite participation and engagement. Consider visual clutter, furniture, lighting and access to visual supports.

Offer processing time.

Allow space for processing – a pause isn't resistance, it's thinking time.

Use visuals as your first language.

Support initiation, memory and sequencing through visual schedules, task breakdowns or photo-based instructions.

Model before prompting.

Show the step rather than saying it – imitation is often safer than instruction.

Shift from “telling” to “checking in.”

Use open-ended cues like “what's next?” or “what do you need?” before giving direct verbal prompts.

Fade prompts intentionally.

As skills build, reduce support gradually (not abruptly) and celebrate steps toward autonomy.

Collaborative space:

Connect with your team and review this document, action areas and missing supports.

