



## Prompting Hierarchy: Part 1

Parents of children with limited language want to better understand ways to elicit language from their children. It is sometimes difficult to know how much help to give your child during therapy sessions and at home. It is also hard to know exactly when to prompt your child for more language.

*What is prompting?* Prompting is a technique that the adult uses to encourage the child to communicate. Communication includes verbal language (talking), sign language, or using picture/icon exchange. There is a hierarchy of prompts from the most to the least supportive – in other words, from giving your child maximum help to letting him or her be the independent with minimum help – during a communication event.

*What are examples of prompting?* Examples of prompts that give the most assistance to your child include physical assistance, such as hand-over-hand when signing a word, and direct modeling of a word or phrase for him/her to imitate. An example of providing the least amount of help would be an open-ended question. A 5-second delay, to give your child an opportunity to respond on his own would be somewhere in the middle of the hierarchy. In the Prompting hierarchy: Part 2, we go into further detail about the specific prompting techniques. We also discuss *which* prompts to use – and *how much* – during specific interactions with your child.

*Why do we use prompting?* Prompting encourages children to use words when they are only communicating with gestures, or to use gestures when they are only vocalizing. Prompting takes the child to the next step to more complex language. You may or may not be aware that every interaction between your child and the therapist is done with a specific intention. For example, when the therapist offers a choice with picture icons and waits for the child to respond, she is giving him a chance to initiate his own communication. Some children need more prompting and more support, while others need less. By the same token, a child who initially requires a lot of help may progress to a more independent level, consequently needing less prompting.

*What age is it used for?* In the context of this article, we are mostly discussing prompting with younger children who are part of the Early Intervention program. However, prompting of more advanced forms can be used for all ages. If you have an older child who receives therapy at CSLOT, your therapist can help you determine appropriate prompts to use with your child.