Prompt Dependency

Students with autism are faced with deficiencies in independent functioning for various reasons. Their deficits in communication and social skills, as well as their deficits in joint attention, make it difficult for them to initiate tasks or communicate when they are finished with a task and ready to move on to something else. These skills also prove difficult due to the “executive function deficits that impact initiation and generalization” (Odom, 2007, p.1170). These deficits are the reasons students with autism are provided with ample adult support, and classrooms generally consist of a small adult to student ratio. However, the presence of extra adults and certain intervention strategies that use a prompt hierarchy can lead to “poor long term outcomes for adults with ASD in employment, housing, and relationship development” (Hume, Loftin & Lantz, 2009, p. 1329).

Many adults that work with students with autism assume that they need to help the students as much as possible because the students “can’t do it independently.” However, adults working with these students owe it to them to fade prompts in a way that promote independence. For example, if a student requires hand-over-hand assistance when writing his or her name, the teacher should create a prompt-fade plan that reduces the prompting from hand-over-hand, to a less intrusive physical prompt, to a verbal prompt (such as, “stay on the lines”), to eventual independence. While it is important to keep in mind that some students will never reach independence on certain tasks, use of the least intrusive prompt should be the goal when aiming for independent functioning.

Individual Work Systems
An individual work system is defined as “a visually organized space where children practice or perform work previously mastered under the direct supervision of an adult” (Hume et al., 2009, p. 1333). According to Hume and Odom (2007), the work systems contain four pieces of information: 1) the task, 2) the amount of work to be completed, 3) a signal that the work is finished, and 4) instructions for the next scheduled activity. Individual work systems, as well as self-monitoring and video modeling, “emphasize a shift in stimulus control from continuous adult management to an alternative stimulus and have proven successful in addressing executive function deficits and increasing independence [in the areas of] adaptive behavior, socialization, and organizational skills” (Hume et al., 2009, p. 1336). Individual work systems can also help students with autism play with toys and objects in ways that are conventional and appropriate (Hume & Odom, 2007, p. 1167).

Guidelines for an individual work system, as defined in the study done by Hume and Odom, 2007, are described below:

- All play materials are located in a location that is familiar to the student.

- After each work/play activity is completed, the student places the finished material into the designated location for finished work.

- When all activities are completed and placed in the finished location, a visual cue directs each student to their next scheduled activity, which varies each day depending on the student schedules.

- All other classroom components remain constant.
Examples of visual cues to be used when students complete activities.

This visual could be used for verbal students as a reminder to inform their teacher they are finished and ready for the next task.

Nonverbal students could present this card to their teacher when they are finished their work.
This could be used as a schedule for students to help them prepare for their next task. The “X” indicates they are finished with their independent work.

First, then boards could be used to help students prepare for the next task on a step-by-step basis.

In the above examples, familiar play materials could be used because it allows the student to complete an activity without requiring a teacher prompt. For example, a student could complete a puzzle, then (using their schedule) put pattern blocks together, or whatever the next assigned task may be. A schedule acts as an effective visual to tell the student what to do next. Therefore, the teacher does not need to be closely watching the student (in terms of task completion), and the student is able to move on to the next activity without asking or alerting the teacher.

Task Analysis

“Task analysis is the process of breaking a skill down into smaller, more manageable components. Once a task analysis is complete, it can be used to teach learners with ASD a skill that is too challenging to teach all at once. [Task analysis] can be used to teach the individual components, building one upon another, until the skill is complete” (Szidon & Franzone, 2009, p. 1).
The steps for creating a task analysis are described below:

1. Teachers identify the targeted skill.
2. Identify skills and materials necessary to teach the task.
3. Break the skill into components.
4. Confirm steps are accurate and all are included.
5. Determine how skill will be taught.
6. Implement intervention and monitor progress.

Before beginning any task analysis, the teacher must start by modeling the task. After modeling, the teacher can begin to teach the steps of the task analysis through whichever teaching method is appropriate for the student. As discussed in a previous section, prompts should be faded over time to promote independence. Specific fade plans should be implemented and individualized based on the student and the given task.

An example of a lesson plan using a task analysis format to describe how to teach a student to start work, work persistently and finish a task can be found on the next page!

Lesson Plan

STUDENT: __________________________________________

SKILL: Brushing teeth.

CHAINING SEQUENCE: Forward.

MATERIAL SET-UP: Sink with working faucet, toothbrush, toothpaste, washcloth.
REINFORCER: For completion of brushing teeth in correct order.

PREREQUISITE SKILLS:

- Ability to turn sink on and off, take toothpaste cap off and put it back on.
- Ability to hold toothbrush and move it back and forth.
- Ability to spit, and not swallow toothpaste.
- Awareness of different sides of mouth.

INITIAL STIMULUS: “Brush your teeth!”

TRIAL: 1 completion.

SESSION: 10 trials (over 10 consecutive days)

SPECIFIC STEPS:

1. Take cap off toothpaste.
2. Put toothpaste on toothbrush.
3. Replace toothpaste cap.
4. Turn water on.
5. Wet toothbrush.
6. Brush left outer surfaces
7. Brush front outer surfaces.
8. Brush right outer surfaces.
12. Brush upper right chewing surfaces.
15. Brush lower left inside surfaces.
16. Brush lower front inside surfaces.
17. Brush lower right inside surfaces.
18. Spit toothpaste into sink.
19. Rinse toothbrush with water.
20. Rinse mouth with water.
21. Wipe hands and mouth with washcloth.
22. Turn water off.

*Blank Template for Lesson Plan*

STUDENT: ____________________________________________

SKILL: ____________________________________________

CHAINING SEQUENCE: Backward  Forward

MATERIAL SET-UP:

___________________________________________________________________________
REINFORCER: _______________________________________________________________

PREREQUISITE SKILLS:

• ______________________________________________________________________
• ______________________________________________________________________
• ______________________________________________________________________
• ______________________________________________________________________
• ______________________________________________________________________
• ______________________________________________________________________

INITIAL STIMULUS: ________________________________________________________

TRIAL: ____________________________________________________________________

SESSION: __________________________________________________________________

SPECIFIC STEPS:

1. ______________________________________________________________________
2. ______________________________________________________________________
3. ______________________________________________________________________
4. ______________________________________________________________________
5. ______________________________________________________________________
6. ______________________________________________________________________
Data Sheet to Monitor Progress

Prompt Key: H-Hand-over-hand, F-Hand on forearm, U- Upper arm, LT- Light touch/shadow, V-Verbal, I-Independent.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Take cap off toothpaste.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put toothpaste on toothbrush.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replace toothpaste cap.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn water on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wet toothbrush.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brush left outer surfaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brush front outer surfaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brush right outer surfaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brush lower right chewing surfaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brush lower left chewing surfaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brush upper left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chewing surfaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brush upper right chewing surfaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brush upper front inside surfaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brush upper left inside surfaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brush lower left inside surfaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brush lower front inside surfaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brush lower right inside surfaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spit toothpaste</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
into sink.

Rinse toothbrush with water.
Rinse mouth with water.
Wipe hands and mouth with washcloth.

Turn water off.

(Szidon & Franzone, 2009)

**Blank Template of Data Sheet**

**Prompt Key:** H-Hand-over-hand, F-Hand on forearm, U- Upper arm, LT- Light touch/shadow, V-Verbal, I-Independent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STAFF INITIAL</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROMPT</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
References

