

Correction Procedures and Prompting

by
Tracy Vail, MS, CCC/SLP

Introducing new targets

Whenever introducing a new target or if you think it is likely the child will miss a target, an instructor has a choice to either

1. Transfer from a previously mastered response

Instructor: "Swim little _____"

STUDENT: "fish"

Instructor: "What's this?"

STUDENT: "fish"

2. Give the correct answer right after you say the question (prompt with a 0 second delay)

Instructor: "What's this? Fish"

STUDENT: "fish"

In either case, you are providing prompts that will allow the child to respond correctly.

3. For some children, with a history of responding to "pre-trial" prompts, a third option is possible with the prompt provided before the SD.

Instructor: "This is a fish? What is it?"

STUDENT: "Fish"

Non-Responding or Incorrect Responding

If the child does not respond within 2 – 3 seconds, or gives an incorrect answer, repeat the question and say the answer right afterwards (prompt with a 0 second delay) wait for the child to imitate you, then ask the question again to get an unprompted response.

Instructor: "What's this?"

STUDENT: "moo"

Instructor: "What's this? Cow."

STUDENT: "Cow."

Instructor: "What's this?"

STUDENT: "Cow."

Fading Prompts

The next important step is to fade these prompts so that the child does not become dependent on prompting and so the response comes under control of the stimulus and the target verbal SD. This is accomplished by asking the question again in attempts to get an unprompted response.

Instructor: "What's this? Fish."

STUDENT: "Fish."

Instructor: "What's this?"

STUDENT: "Fish."



It is not always possible to get an unprompted response right away and it is important to avoid frustrating the child if this is the case. Children vary in their ability to tolerate multiple trials but as a general rule, if you are still unable to get an unprompted response after the third attempt, accept the prompted response and move on. Children vary in their responsiveness to different types of prompting and use of transfer procedures so it is important to determine what works best for each individual child.

Gradually separate the prompted from unprompted responses with “easy” tasks to which you know the child will respond correctly, then go back to the missed item. Increase the number of “easy tasks” gradually while still going back for an unprompted response.

Instructor: “Swim little _____”
 STUDENT: “fish”
 Instructor: “What’s this?”
 STUDENT: “fish”
 Instructor: “Look at that boat in the water!”
 STUDENT: <looks>
 Instructor: “What’s this?” (*holding up fish*)
 STUDENT: “fish”
 Instructor: “Great job, Smartie!”

These types of procedures are included in what is often referred to as **errorless learning**. The idea is that we don’t want to wait for an incorrect response before we prompt if at all possible because in essence, the child is “practicing” the wrong response. The reason for repeating the question when the child responds incorrectly is to keep the child from inadvertently learning to chain incorrect and correct responses. In addition, it keeps the question and response close together in time. Consider the alternative.

Instructor: “What’s this?”
 STUDENT: “moo”
 Instructor: “No, that’s a cow.”
 STUDENT: “Cow.”
 Instructor: “Good job.”

In this scenario, the child has “practiced” the incorrect response just as frequently as the correct response. In addition, there is a great deal of time and lots of language separating the question, “What’s this?” from the response, “cow”. It is likely that the child will still not learn to respond “cow” in the presence of the cow and when hearing “What’s this?” unless all of the appropriate stimuli are presented close together in time and the correct response is reinforced immediately.

We want to have the “difficult” target presented much more frequently but mixed in with multiple “easy” responses to increase the amount of contact with reinforcement. Using “errorless teaching” procedures will allow the child to practice the correct response mixed in with easy responses. When he does respond correctly to an item he previously missed or a new target without prompting, use a stronger reinforcer than you’ve used for mastered items or “easy” responses (differential reinforcement.)

