**Errorless Teaching, Prompting, and Fading**

Errorless teaching is an instructional strategy that ensures children always respond correctly. As each skill is taught, children are provided with a prompt or cue immediately following an instruction. The immediate prompt prevents any chance for incorrect responses. Unlike other teaching procedures where opportunities for mistakes are allowed and then corrected through prompting, errorless teaching’s immediate prompting ensures that a child can only respond correctly. Prompts are systematically removed until children are able to respond correctly on their own. The theory behind errorless teaching is that children with autism do not learn as successfully from their mistakes as typically developing children, but instead continue to repeat them. Frustration following incorrect responses associated with trial and error teaching can lead to problem behavior such as tantrums, aggression, and self-injury. Using an initial prompt, before the child has an opportunity to respond incorrectly, avoids discouragement and builds success and self-confidence in a new skill.

***Steps***

1. Identify and teach the child the desired behavior.

2. Identify prompts that will ensure success.

3. Introduce a task instruction to the child and provide a prompt before an error can be made. This could be before, during or right after the instruction.

4. Provide the right level of prompt to make sure the child performs the target behavior correctly.

5. If behavior/response is incorrect, increase prompts to make the child successful.

6. Repeat the trial several times until the child appears to be able to demonstrate the desired behavior correctly and independently.

7. Following a specified number of non-prompted behavior, conduct an independent trial to assess the child’s correct or incorrect learned behavior.

8. Fade or decrease prompting as soon as indicated by data collection.

**Positive Reinforcement**

Errorless teaching uses positive reinforcement combined with prompting strategies to teach new skills. Instructions are immediately followed by a prompted correct response, which is then followed positive reinforcement.

**Example:**

* Teacher gives instruction, “*clap hands.*”
* Teacher immediately prompts child by manipulating the child’s hands to
* make a clapping motion.
* Teacher praises the child, “*nice job clapping your hands*!” and gives the child a reinforcer.

To promote independence the immediate prompts, or amount of help provided, are systematically decreased, or faded, to allow children the opportunity to provide correct responses on their own. Errorless teaching strategies used to decrease prompting and encourage independence may include time delay prompting and most-to-least prompting.

**Time Delay Prompting**

Time delay is a prompt fading strategy that systematically increases the amount of time between the instruction and the prompt. This delaying of prompts gives children a brief window of opportunity to give a correct response independently. As the child begins to respond independently before a prompt is given, the delay is continuously increased until it is faded out completely. Responses provided independently, before any assistance is given, are immediately followed by positive reinforcement.

**Example:**

* (2 second delay)
  + Teacher gives instruction, “clap hands.”
  + Teacher waits 2 seconds and then manipulates the child’s hands to make a clapping motion.
  + Teacher praises the child, “nice job clapping your hands!” and gives a reinforcer.
* (3 second delay)
  + Teacher gives instruction, “clap hands.”
  + Teacher waits 3 seconds for the child to respond independently.
  + If the child does not respond independently, the teacher manipulates the child’s hands to make a clapping motion.
  + Teacher praises the child, “nice job clapping your hands!” and gives a reinforcer.

**Most-to-Least Prompting**

In most to least prompting, prompts are systematically faded by decreasing the intrusiveness of assistance provided to promote independence in responding.

**Example:**

* (light physical prompt)
  + Teacher gives instruction, “clap hands”
  + Teacher immediately prompts child by providing a light physical prompt at the child’s elbows to make a clapping motion.
  + Teacher praises the child, “nice job clapping your hands!” and gives a reinforcer.
* (Gesture)
  + Teacher gives instruction, “clap hands”
  + Teacher immediately prompts child by raising hands slightly to gesture clapping without touching the child.
  + Child begins clapping hands.
  + Teacher praises the child, “nice job clapping your hands!” and gives a reinforcer.

**Promoting Independence**

It is important to collect data on how often children require prompts as well as how often they give independent responses. This information is used to determine when to decrease prompt levels. An example of decreasing prompt levels using *time delay* may be delaying prompts 2 seconds, then 3 seconds, and then 5 seconds. An example of decreasing prompts in *most-to-least prompting* may be lessening the intrusiveness from hand over hand, to a light physical touch, to shadowing the response.

**Errors**

Even with errorless teaching, errors may still occur. If a child makes an error, the instructor may withhold reinforcement and present a new instruction or withhold reinforcement and present the same instruction again providing an immediate full prompt of the correct answer. Errors should not be followed by negative comments, reinforcement, or presentation of a reward.

***Brief Example***

Ms. Williams utilized errorless teaching techniques in teaching John, a 3-year-old boy with autism spectrum disorder, to recognize his body parts. She asked John to touch the body part that she named. At first, Ms. Williams provided a full prompt by taking John’s hand and touching the correct body part. After several trials, Ms. Williams faded the prompt by lifting John’s elbow toward the correct body part. When John successfully performed the task. Gradually, Ms. Williams faded prompts to a model then a visual. After several trials, John could successfully perform the task with no prompts.

Fading Errorless Teaching

Examples

**Labeling** (verbal, student labels animal)

Step 1:

Teacher says: It’s a pig

Teacher says: Say pig

Student response: Pig

Step 2:

Teacher says: It’s a pig

Teachers asks: What is this? Immediately give the /p/ sound for a verbal prompt

Student response: “Pig” or “It’s a pig”

Step 3:

Teacher asks: What is this?

Student response: It’s a pig

Generalization:

During a play situation

Teacher asks: What are you playing with?

Student response: A pig

**Identifying Receptively** (non-verbal student identifying farm animals)

Step 1:

Teacher: Have three items out and label all three items (e.g. dog, pig, cow), such as “This is a dog, this is a pig, this is a cow.” You may have to guide student’s hand and show him how to point while saying “This is pointing to the pig”

Student response: points to the pig

Step 2:

Teacher: Have three items out and label all three items (e.g. dog, pig, cow).

Teacher says: Find the pig while barely pointing to the item

Student response: Points to the pig

Step 3:

Teacher says: Find the pig

Student response: Points to the pig

Generalization:

During a class game with farm animals hidden around the room

Teacher says: Go find the pig

Student response: Student finds the pig and brings it back to the teacher