Many kids with autism or signs of autism are prompt dependent, but it's not the child's fault as prompt dependency is caused by adults who don't know how to fade prompts. This can be really detrimental to a child's independence so today I am going to talk about prompt fading. Hi, I'm Dr. Mary Barbera, autism mom, Board Certified Behavior Analyst, and bestselling author of The Verbal Behavior Approach.

Each week I provide you with some of my ideas about turning autism or signs of autism around so if you haven't subscribed to my YouTube channel, you can do that now. When Lucas was three, he was in a typical toddler preschool classroom, two mornings a week to supplement his 40 hour a week home ABA program.

Um, when he was in this classroom, he was evaluated by a psychologist and a big thing stood out in the report that the psychologist did. And it was this, she said, Lucas was prompt dependent. When a direction was given such as to put a smock on for painting or to clean up his toys Lucas's one-to-one ABA therapist or one of the teachers would help or prompt him.

Lucas, um, couldn't complete this task of putting on the smock independently and they would physically have to help Lucas, but he wasn't also able to dress himself yet. And for toys, they might point to the pile of toys to clean up or sing a cleanup song to get him to participate, to participate after the direction was given to clean up the toys.

Now, back then when Lucas was three, I wasn't a behavior analyst and I didn't know much about prompts or prompt fading, but that report by the psychologist made me angry. Even back then, I knew that prompt dependency was not a child problem. It was and is caused by teachers and well-meaning parents like me, who did not know how to fade prompts.

I've spent the last two decades developing procedures to teach kids skills and to teach adults how to effectively fade prompts. Helping kids learn new skills can be hard. And as parents and professionals, we want to help our kids succeed. So we frequently offer prompts or help when we think they may need them.

We need to know how to use prompt fading to make sure kids don't become prompt dependent, and I'll show you how right now. The first step is assessment of your child or client skills. What skills are truly independent and what skills are not solid and require prompting? My one page, Turn Autism Around Assessment Form, which I recently revised is a great start.

It will take you less than 10 minutes to complete as a parent or professional. Um, and we'll help you learn whether your child can truly touch his body parts independently. If you say touch head, does he touch his head or you have to, like, I had to, give them a prompt and touch your own head. Do you have to sing the Barney song so that he touches his head, um, in the sing-song manner? These are all prompts that need to be detected so that you know what prompts have to be faded. We also have to think about our child's age or our client's age, because a three-year-old needing some help getting a painting smock on like Lucas did is not that unusual. But a three-year-old that needs prompting to speak or to follow one-step directions is much more of a concern.

So we don't want to just look at our prompts. We want to look at the whole picture. And I think that one-page assessment form is a great start to look at the whole picture. I did a video blog called “What is Prompt Dependency in Children with Autism?” And that is a good one as well to look at. So what is a prompt? It's when a child needs help to complete a task. That can, it can be a physical prompt to put, help them put their socks on, or it can be an echoic prompt, like cookie for cookie or say cuh, and that would be a partial echoic prompt. Prompts can be physical, they can be vocal, verbal. They can be gestural by like, um, Lucas's therapist used to point to the toys, that’s a gestural prompt. We, but we can't consider a skill truly mastered until the prompts are faded.

So in addition to assessing the child's skills and needs also important for you to assess your prompts and see which ones can be faded now, and which ones you'll plan to fade in the future. One of the big ways to work on prompt fading is to learn about transfer trials. Back in 2005, I published a study n this important procedure that I learned about when Lucas was six years old, right before I became a behavior analyst. So, way after Lucas was three, way after this psychologist report, I learned about transfer procedures and I published a study on it. I also did a video blog on transfer procedures that you can check out, but I'm going to briefly explain it here because transfer procedures, I believe, are the key to fading out prompts. Briefly, to use a transfer procedure, you want to use them when you, when you put a prompt in to get a response, more independent. So if you hold up a pretzel and the child wants to eat it and you give a full echoic prompt by saying pretzel or say pretzel, and the child says pretzel, then the, way back, I was just giving Lucas the pretzel.

I was giving it to him right after the full prompt. And he accepted the prompt and he got the pretzel , but the transfer trial is critical. So right after he says pretzel. When I say, say pretzel, I am going to do a transfer trial and try to get that response more independent by using another prompt. What do you want? Or tell me again, or just holding up the pretzel, like, oh, you want a pretzel and then hold it back and see if the child says pretzel again. If that doesn't happen, you could also use a partial echoic prompt as a transfer. So say pretzel pretzel. Good. Tell me again, pre. And then he says pretzel, he gets it on that partial echoic prompt, which is more spontaneous with less prompting. And that is a transfer trial. You can also use transfer procedures across every operant and skill. So if you're not using transfer procedures, I urge you to learn more, since I do believe that's the number one secret to fading prompts.

Make sure any prompt you use is gentle and child-friendly. I did a video blog on why it's important to avoid unnecessary physical prompts for children with autism. As with any behavior change procedure, collecting baseline data and data after intervening will ensure you're going in the right direction.

 If you want to learn more about my child friendly Turn Autism Around approach, including how to effectively fade prompts, I would encourage you to take my two minute autism quiz at marybarbera.com/quiz. Watch the free workshop after the quiz too, to start learning how to assess your child or client and ensure you’re effectively fading prompts. At the end of the day, we all want our children and clients to be as independent as possible. We need to prompt them to help them learn, but we also need to be mindful about how we are fading our prompts. Making sure that a child has an appropriate assessment, is working on appropriate goals, and using transfer procedures in teaching will help reduce the likelihood that your child or client will become prompt dependent.

Ultimately, we need to take some data to make sure our prompts are effective and are being faded. Don't forget to take the two minute autism quiz at marybarbera.com/quiz. It’s for both parents and professionals, toddlers through teens, even if, if your child is just showing signs of autism. If you liked this video blog, I would love it, if you would leave me a comment, give me a thumbs up or share this video with others who might benefit and subscribe to the channel for more autism videos that come out every week. I'll see you right here next time.