

# The 10 Commandments of Teaching Access Skills

- 1. Make it motivating! Learning new access skills can be effortful.** We need to make the reward worth the student's effort. What is motivating will be different for each student.
- 2. Teach in a natural context.** Teach access skills during the student's regular routines and activities. This helps the student relate what they are learning to what they already know. This increases retention of new learning. We learn through experiences not drills. (Burkhart, 2016)
- 3. Model.** When introducing an activity, model the activity and access method prior to expecting the student to participate. Take a turn as a participant rather than an instructor to show them what they need to do and what the reward is. (Burkhart, 2016)
- 4. Secure the equipment.** Mount or secure the equipment and accessories being used, so that it is in a consistent position each time the student tries to access it.
- 5. Wait, Wait, Wait.** Give the student plenty of time to process what they want to do and initiate their reaction. Prompts can interrupt a student's intent. Imagine everything the student needs to do to engage with the activity;
  - Process instructions
  - Understand what is required of them
  - Figure out how to respond
  - Engage muscles
  - Focus on and perform the action(Talksense Switching to Success, n.d)

There should always be a plan to phase out prompts after a period of time to prevent the student becoming dependent on prompts.
- 6. Use a Prompt Hierarchy.** When there is a need to prompt the student, use a hierarchy to provide the least intrusive prompt appropriate. This gives the student the opportunity to be as independent as possible. Physical prompts can make the student focus on the touch sensation rather than the activity.



## 6. Use a Prompt Hierarchy. (continued)

Least to most prompt hierarchy;

- **Wait** – Give the student an opportunity to complete the activity independently.
- **Environmental cue** – Look at or draw attention to the activity.
- **Gesture** – Indicate with a motion what you want the student to do.
- **Model** – Take a turn of the activity as a participant to show the student what you want them to do.
- **Verbal prompt** – Prompt directed at the activity rather than the access method; e.g. “I want to see the Elmo dance” rather than “Hit the switch”.
- **Partial physical prompt** – Allow child to finish the movement; e.g. initiate movement at the elbow and then allow student to complete movement
- **Full physical assistance** – Hands on assistance to complete the activity (Burkhart, 2016)

**7. Provide activity focused feedback.** Provide feedback on the activity rather than giving instructions; e.g. – “I liked that song, what’s next?” rather than “Hit it again”.

**8. Repetition with moderate differences.** Provide lots of repetition with moderate difference to keep the child engaged. This doesn’t have to be a whole new activity but a variation in the activity to keep it interesting; e.g. – Instead of using voice output switch to say ‘good morning’ in morning circle every day, the student could get to choose to say ‘good morning’ with the switch to a different staff member or student each day. Moderate differences in the activity are needed to keep the student engaged to learn. 1000’s of repetitions will be needed for the movements required for access to become automatic (Burkhart, 2016).

**9. Balance the motor and cognitive demands.** Learning new access skills may be very effortful, both physically and cognitively. When teaching a new motor skill, initially keep the cognitive demands of the activity low. Once the motor plan becomes automatic you can then increase the cognitive demands of the activity. Short frequent opportunities throughout the day to learn these skills may be more beneficial than long sessions.

**10. Remove the equipment when not in use.** The student should never attempt to access the activity and have nothing happen; e.g. Students should not be sat in front of an eye gaze computer without eye gaze functioning or a switch and mount should not be left in place when not connected to an activity. Leaving the equipment in place would work against our goal of teaching the student that their access method gives them choice and control.

## References

Burkhart, L. (2016) Multi-Modal Communication and Learning Strategies for Children who Face Significant Challenges. Retrieved from <http://lindaburkhart.com>

TalkSense Switching to Success. Retrieved October 7 2016 from <http://talksense.weebly.com>



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**Phone: 08 9381 0600 | Web: [www.ilc.com.au](http://www.ilc.com.au) | Email: [help@ilc.com.au](mailto:help@ilc.com.au)**