



Teaching New Skills

COVID-19 pandemic has changed many parts of our daily lives. While most of us have been able to adapt to these changes, individuals with intellectual disabilities and/or autism may struggle to make these changes or learn new skills needed to make changes. This resource will provide basic information on how to teach new skills.

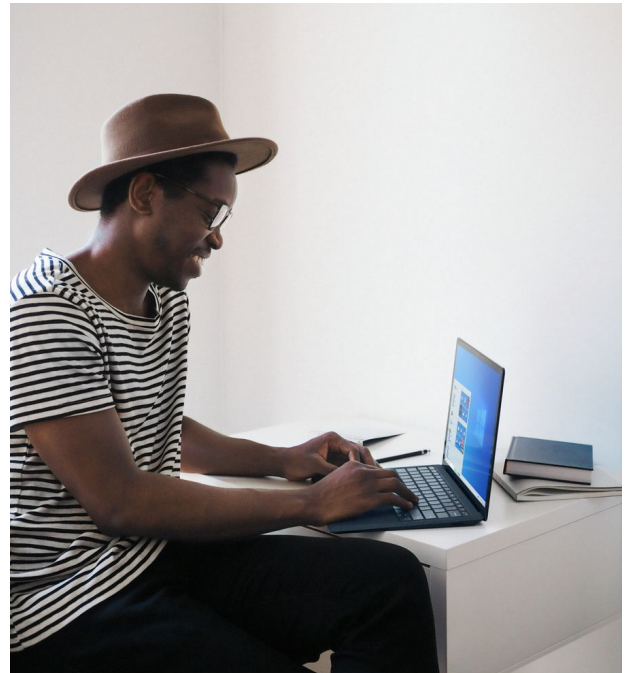
OVERVIEW

Everyone learns in different ways. Some people need to see the information, while other people may do better hearing the information. Still other people may need to be hands on and be actively engaged in the learning process. Or, some people may need to both hear and see the information to learn. The important thing to understand is that each person has different learning preferences and may respond better to certain teaching methods. You know your family member best, so choose the information and teaching methods presented that best suits their needs!

BREAKING DOWN THE SKILL

One of the first steps to teaching any skill is breaking it down into smaller parts. This can make it easier to teach bigger, complex skills. There are a few ways that you can figure out how to break down a skill.

- **Look online:** Some skills, like washing hands, are pretty common and someone may have already outlined steps for the skill. You may need to modify it to fit your needs or the individual, but it may be a good starting point.
- **Do it yourself:** You can go through the skill from start to finish yourself and write down the different steps that you do along the way.
- **Watch someone else:** Have someone who is already good at the skill do it, and write down the different steps.
- **Ask an expert:** Depending on the skill the person needs/wants to learn, you could also ask someone who is an expert in the field. For example, if you want to learn how to play golf it's best to ask someone who already plays the game!





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TEACHING THE SKILL

Once all of the steps of a skill are outlined, you should have the person try each step to see what they are able to do. If they already know how to do some of the steps, you won't need to teach those. You can also find out what type of help they may need for each step. For each step, let the person try to complete it themselves. If they aren't able to do it on their own, you can provide a prompt to see how much help they need to complete the step. These are the different types of prompts, from least helpful to most helpful:

- Verbal
- Gestural
- Modeling
- Physical

When providing prompts follow these guidelines:

- Only provide one prompt at a time. Give the person a chance to respond, and if they don't after a few seconds provide the next level of prompt.
- Do not repeat prompts. If the person doesn't respond to a verbal prompt, don't repeat it again. Move to the next level of prompt, a gesture or model. If you repeat prompts the person may learn that they don't need to pay attention the first time a prompt is provided. They may begin to ignore the prompts.
- Don't provide more help than the person needs. If the person can complete the skill with only a verbal prompt, don't provide a physical prompt. This might make the learning experience unpleasant or frustrate the person. It could also lead to the person becoming dependent on prompts to complete the skill.
- Reduce prompts as they learn steps. If the person initially needed a gesture to complete a step, but is now doing it consistently at that level, try giving them a verbal prompt the next time they practice the skill. As they continue to practice and get better, you can keep reducing the level of prompt they need until they're able to complete the skill independently.

REINFORCING THE SKILL

Another important part of teaching someone a new skill is reinforcing the person. As they are trying the different steps, provide them praise and encouragement. Simple things like saying "great job!" can go a long way.

Even if the person may be struggling to learn a certain step, or they're not quite successful in completing the skill, it can be helpful to praise them for trying and encourage them to try again.

Everyone likes hearing praise, and making the experience positive for the individual will go a long way in helping them learn the skill.