

FACT SHEET

PICTURE EXCHANGE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM (PECS)



The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) is a type of augmentative alternative communication (AAC) originally developed for children with autism in 1984 by Lori Frost, MS, CCC/SLP and Dr. Andrew Bondy. The primary purpose of PECS is to teach individuals with autism to initiate communication. Individuals are taught to initiate by handing a picture to a communication partner in exchange for a desired item.

1 Why use PECS?



PECS allows individuals with autism to communicate by using pictures instead of, or in conjunction with, speech. PECS provides a functional outlet of expression for individuals who otherwise have difficulty communicating with others. It can be used, beginning as early as age two, to initiate conversation and to communicate wants or needs to another person and has successfully been taught to adults with similar communication needs. Oftentimes, maladaptive behavior is used to gain access to the learners' needs and wants. Once functional communication is implemented, those maladaptive behaviors decrease.

- **Will PECS work with my specific learner?**

Answer these questions. Is the learner using functional communication? Is the communication modality understood by unfamiliar listeners? Is the learner initiating communication? Does the learner use multiple-word utterances? Does the learner have an appropriate vocabulary size? Or check out the flow chart at: <https://www.pecsusa.com/download/FlowChart-IsthispersonacandidateforPECS-Letter.pdf>

- **How does PECS Work?**

After being taught the phase six system, an individual using PECS chooses a picture from a variety of pictures available and then gives the picture to a communication partner. Knowing the individual's request, the partner can then provide the desired item or fulfill the desired need.

2 The Six Phases of PECS:



Phase I. Purpose: How to communicate

The individual with autism will learn how to exchange a single picture for items or activities they want. The individual sees the desired item. They are physically guided by a prompter to pick up a picture of that item from the table and place it into the communication partner's hand in exchange for the desired item. Physical guidance by the prompter is faded as soon as possible.



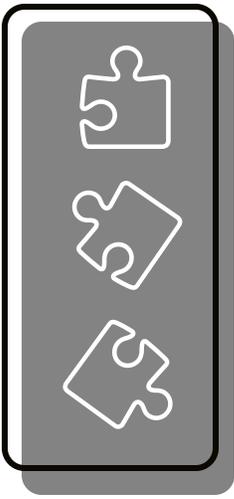
=



The individual hands the cookie icon to the listener and the listener gives the learner the actual cookie

Phase II. Purpose: To teach distance and persistence

A communication book is provided with one picture on the front of the book at a time. The learner is taught to locate their communication book and travel to the communication partner to exchange a picture for the desired object. The focus of this phase is to encourage ownership and teach generalization, by using the communication book in different settings, with different people, and across distances.



Phase III. Purpose: To discriminate between pictures or symbols

The individual with autism is presented with a picture of a highly preferred item and a picture of a non-preferred item on their communication book. The individual exchanges a picture and they are given the item with animated social reinforcement. If they exchange the undesirable or non-preferred item icon, an error correction sequence is introduced. Once the individual begins to discriminate between the items, correspondence checks are completed to ensure that the individual's actions correspond to their requests. Discrimination training continues by adding multiple desired items and increasing the number of pictures on the front of the book.



Preferred Item



Non-preferred Item.



Helpful Hints:

- Make sure they are portable, durable, and easily accessible
- Make sure the learner is **motivated!**
- They do not need to be fancy!

Phase IV. Purpose: To begin using sentence structure

The individual is introduced to a new icon "I want" to begin teaching the individual to use a sentence starter. A sentence strip is added to the front of the communication book and the individual learns to build and exchange the phrase by attaching the "I want" picture to the strip along with the preferred item icon. The communication partner then turns the strip toward the individual with autism and reads the phrase and provides the individual with the desired item.



Phase V. Purpose: To answer a direct question

The individual is taught to answer the question "What do you want?" When the question is presented, the individual will use the "I want strip along

Phase VI. Purpose: To begin to develop commenting

The individual learns to communicate more than just their wants and needs. They learn to comment about the environment. Icons, such as, "I see" and "I hear" are introduced one at a time on the communication board in a systematic fashion.



Additional Resources

Book:

Frost, L., & Bondy, A. (2002). The Picture Exchange Communication System Training Manual. Newark, DE: Pyramid Educational Products, Inc.

Website:

Pyramid Educational Consultants: www.pecs.com