

Experimental Education Unit
Staff Orientation Handout:
PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)

What is PECS?

PECS is a systematic approach to communication that includes a specific hierarchy of steps/phases. As students master these phases, they acquire the skills to exchange a picture-symbol in order to communicate.

The *Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)* was developed by Andrew Bondy and Lori Frost at the Delaware Autistic Program for individuals with severe social communication delays; primarily those with autism or Pervasive Developmental Disability (PDD).

PECS users are taught to INDEPENDENTLY initiate and respond to others. They:

- Scan and select specific picture-symbols that represent objects/actions/ideas from an array several other picture-symbols
- Find and appropriately engage a communicative partner
- Give the picture-symbol(s) to that partner
- Persist until their message until successfully communicated

THE END GOAL OF PECS IS SUCCESSFUL, INDEPENDENT, VERBAL COMMUNICATION.

When to consider teaching PECS

- When a child needs a functional communication system. This includes children who
 - are non-verbal
 - who have some language but their language is not functional.
 - Language that is not directed to a communicative partner
 - Language that consists of “scripts”
 - Their attempts to communicate are inappropriate, ineffective or maladaptive

Choosing PECS as a child’s communication system is a **team decision** (including the child’s family). The team must take into consideration:

- The skills of the child
- The needs/desires of the family

Communication and Behavior

Why kids communicate:

- To get things they want from other people (objects, actions, information, ideas)
- To share information with others (what you see, hear, think, feel, answer questions)
- To interact with others (controlling others’ behavior (stop it, come here), just hanging out)

Some kids’ reasons for communicating are EXTREMELY limited

- Some kids communicate only when they want something (food, toys, help)
- Or when the DON’T want something (“stop”, “I don’t want that”, “move- you’re too close”)

MOTIVATION is key to eliciting communication.

- Motivators change and you must stay on top of what is motivating to each and every child, each and every day.
- Find things that are motivating to each child and USE THEM!
- If the child does not want what you have, then you do not have a teaching opportunity.

How kids communicate:

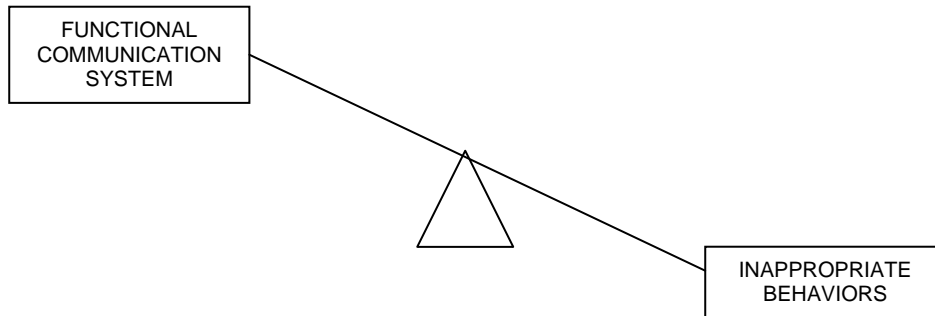
- Appropriately
 - Words (including voice out-put devices)
 - Symbols (printed word, icons, pictures)
 - Gestures
 - Vocalizations

HONOR ALL FORMS OF APPROPRIATE COMMUNICATION!!

- Inappropriately
 - Screaming/tantrums (that can mean: "I want that", "I don't want that", "I'm angry", "You don't understand")
 - Biting, kicking, hitting, scratching (that can mean: "stop it", "I don't like that", "you're too close", "that bothers me")
 - Running away (that can mean: "I'm bored", "I don't know what I'm supposed to do", "I'm scared")

IF KIDS CAN'T COMMUNICATE IN APPROPRIATE WAYS, THEY COMMUNICATE IN OTHER WAYS

REMEMBER:



IF AN INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR PERSISTS, IT'S WORKING FOR THE CHILD AT LEAST ON SOME LEVEL!

PECS Training Protocol

PHASE	FINAL OBJECTIVE	METHOD	CRITERIA
I. Getting Ready	Find motivating objects/actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Present several cool items → Allow the child to select what s/he prefers → Determine 3-5 “most preferred” to be used as motivators 	
II. Training to Exchange	Child independently places and picture-symbol into a communicative partner’s hand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Communicative partner is seated across from child with a highly preferred item between them and a picture-symbol placed between the child and the object *only one symbol presented → Communicative partner presents “open-hand” cue → Child’s reach for the object is interrupted and child is given full physical support to pick up the picture-symbol, extend her/his hand, and release it into the partner’s open hand. → Fade physical assistance → Fade open hand cue 	80%
III. Distance and Persistence	Child finds and persists in engaging a communicative partner regardless of the distance between the child and the partner and the distance between the child and the location of his/her picture-symbols and successfully completes the exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Begin with close proximity to communicative partner and communication book *only one symbol presented → Gradually increase availability of partner’s hand so the child must work harder to complete the exchange → Gradually increase distance between partner and child, and distance between child and symbols 	<p style="text-align: center;">80%</p> <p>3 parts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.persistence 2.distance from child to partner 3.distance from child to picture-symbols
IV. Discrimination	The child scans and selects a specific picture-symbol for a desired object/action from an array of picture-symbols and successfully completes the exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Present a highly preferred and a non-preferred item with corresponding picture-symbols *begin with only 2 symbols → Always honor the child’s request (even if you know s/he is requesting something s/he doesn’t want) → Change placement of symbols on the book → Correspondence checks (taking the requested item when presented with 2 highly preferred items) indicate mastery → Gradually increase the number of symbols available to the child 	<p style="text-align: center;">80%</p> <p>See manual for more information</p>
V. Sentence Building	The child combines picture-symbols to create the carrier phrase “I want” + object/action and successfully completes the exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Begin with “I want” on sentence strip and prompt the child to place picture-symbol on the sentence strip before the exchange → Place “I want” symbol in upper left hand corner of the communication book → Random placement of “I want” symbol 	80%
VI. PECS with Peers	The child successfully exchanges picture-symbols with peers to request objects/actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Child will try to exchange with an adult. Respond by holding empty hands up by face and say, “I don’t have X, Sam has X.” → Prompt child to identify target peer and complete exchange by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gaining peer’s attention ○ Persisting until request is acknowledged → Train peers incidentally to respond appropriately (“Hey, Sam, Bob is talking to you. Check it out- what is he asking you for? You can take the picture- that way he knows that you’ve heard him. Super! Look at you guys sharing! Bob and Sam are really good friends!”) 	80%

Roles for Communicative Partner and Back-up Trainer

Communicative Partner	Back-up Trainer
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make the item as appealing as possible- really “sell it”.• Do NOT give any verbal prompts regarding the exchange (e.g., “Give me the picture.”) Instead, say things like, “I have FISH CRACKERS”, “Boy these look tasty”, “ I love FISH CRACKERS” and you can even eat one or two just to tempt the child).• Do NOT take the symbol from the child. S/he must place it in your hand.• Deliver the item IMMEDIATELY after receiving the picture-symbol.• Do NOT give any verbal praise regarding the exchange (e.g., “You gave me the picture!”). Instead, say, things like “You told me that you want the FISH CRACKERS”, “You really like FISH CRACKERS”).• Fade the open-hand cue as soon as possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Think of yourself as an extension of the child.• Provide physical prompts to help the child pick up, reach and release the symbol into the communicative partner’s hand.• Do NOT give verbal prompts.• Systematically fade physical prompts.• Record child’s progress on each trial.• Do NOT give any verbal praise regarding the exchange (e.g., “You gave me the picture!”). Instead, say, things like “You told me that you want the FISH CRACKERS”, “You really like FISH CRACKERS”).

PECS is NOT just for snack and small group! PECS should be taught using multiple communicative partners with multiple materials in multiple settings to insure generalization and maintenance of new skills. “Salt” the environment with highly preferred materials (in sight but out of reach) with corresponding symbols within the target child’s reach. Recognize where the child is in her/his mastery of the PECS phases and provide appropriate levels of support to facilitate successful interactions.