

PECS

Picture Exchange Communication System



What is PECS?

- The Picture Exchange Communication System[®], or PECS[®], allows people with little or no communication abilities to communicate using pictures. People using PECS are taught to approach another person and give them a picture of a desired item in exchange for that item. By doing so, the person is able to initiate communication. A child or adult with autism or social communication difficulties can use PECS to communicate a request, a thought, or anything that can reasonably be displayed or symbolized on a picture card. PECS works well in the home or in the classroom.

Development

PECS was developed over 40 years ago.

The goal of (PECS) is to teach children with autism or social communication difficulties a fast, self-initiating, functional communication system. PECS begins with the exchange of simple icons but rapidly builds "sentence" structure.

- Studies have also shown that PECS can decrease tantrums and odd behaviours. For example, an individual may cry because they are thirsty. However, a parent or teacher may not understand why they are crying and as a result their needs will remain unmet. However, if an individual has access to communication pictures they can quickly communicate their need.

The Six Phases of PECS

- **PECS PHASE I:** How to Communicate
The child with autism or social communication difficulties learns to exchange single pictures for items or activities they really want.

Phase II

- **PECS PHASE II: Distance and Persistence**
Still using single pictures, the child with social communication difficulties learn to generalize this new skill by using it in different places, with different people and across distances. They are also taught to be more persistent communicators

PHASE III

- **PECS PHASE III:** Picture Discrimination
The child with social communication difficulties learns to select from two or more pictures to ask for their favourite things. These are placed in a communication book, a ring binder with Velcro strips where pictures are stored and easily removed for communication.

PHASE IV

- **PECS PHASE IV: Sentence Structure**
The child with social communication difficulties learns to construct simple sentences on a detachable sentence strip using an "I want" picture followed by a picture of the item being requested.

PHASE V

- **PECS PHASE V:** Answering Questions
The child with social communication difficulties learns to use PECS to answer the question, "What do you want?"

PHASE VI

- **PECS PHASE VI: Commenting**
Now the child with social communication difficulties is taught to comment in response to questions such as, What do you see?, What do you hear? and What is it? They learn to make up sentences starting with I see, I hear, I feel, It is a, etc.

Advantages of Picture Communication

- The listener does not need special training because pictures are easy to understand and are often labelled.
- Simple matching makes initial communication easier.
- This is a research based intervention that is based on Skinner's analysis of verbal behaviour.
- Many individuals start with the ability to point to what they want so there is a high possibility for success.
- PECS is a fairly inexpensive, low tech language intervention.