

The picture exchange communication system (PECS)



PECS is a unique alternative augmentative communication system. It allows individuals with little or no communication abilities to communicate using pictures. It teaches the child 'how' to communicate and then how to communicate specific messages. Children learn first with single pictures and later combine pictures to learn a variety of grammatical structures. The PECS training method closely parallels typical language development. PECS can be tailored to the Individual's needs, by using either photos or symbols, but never mixed together.

In addition, despite common misconceptions, PECS is a specific augmentative alternative method of communication that can support the development of speech. It is used with children with a wide range of diagnoses or difficulties. It has been taught around the world in family and educational settings. PECS can be used with children who use no speech at all, who speak only when prompted, struggle to be understood using other forms of communication or use echolalia. Some of these communication difficulties can be socially related in that children do not routinely approach others to communicate, avoid interactions with others or only communicate after a direct request to do so.

(adapted from The Picture Exchange Communication System Training Manual, 2002, Frost L and Bondy A,) www.pecs-unitedkingdom.com

Method:

Individuals using PECS are taught to approach and give a picture of a desired item to a communication partner in exchange for that item. By doing this, the child initiates communication for a concrete outcome within a social context. It is best to always start with high motivating objects of interest, with the individual to encourage the exchange process in order for the child to become familiar with how to make requests.

The six phases of picture exchange communication system are:**Phase 1:** How to Communicate

The individual is taught the purpose of communication, learning to approach another person (reach) direct and action (give a picture) and receive a desired outcome (the item requested). This process is by the physical prompter supporting the individual to make an exchange to the communication partner by having the correct symbol available to them for the motivation object.

Target sequence: Pick up  Reach  Release

***Each of these processes below need the individual to have access to their communication book. This enables them to make a choice and then exchange this with the communication partner to receive what they have requested or respond to questions. The pictures are placed in a communication book, a ring binder with Velcro strips, where pictures are stored and easily removed for communication.**

Phase 2: Distance and Persistence

Still using single pictures, the individual needs to learn how to generalise this new skill by using the process in different places, with different people and across distances. They are also taught to be more persistent communicators.

Phase 3: Picture Discrimination

This is where the individual chooses between two or more pictures to make a request, this is by having pictures for a motivating object against a distractor (something the child does not like) in order to differentiate between pictures. They will learn that exchanging a specific picture will result in a preferred item, whilst the other picture will result in receiving something they do not want.

Phase 4: Sentence Structure

The individual learns to construct simple sentences on a detachable sentence strip using the "I want" picture, followed by a picture of the item being requested.

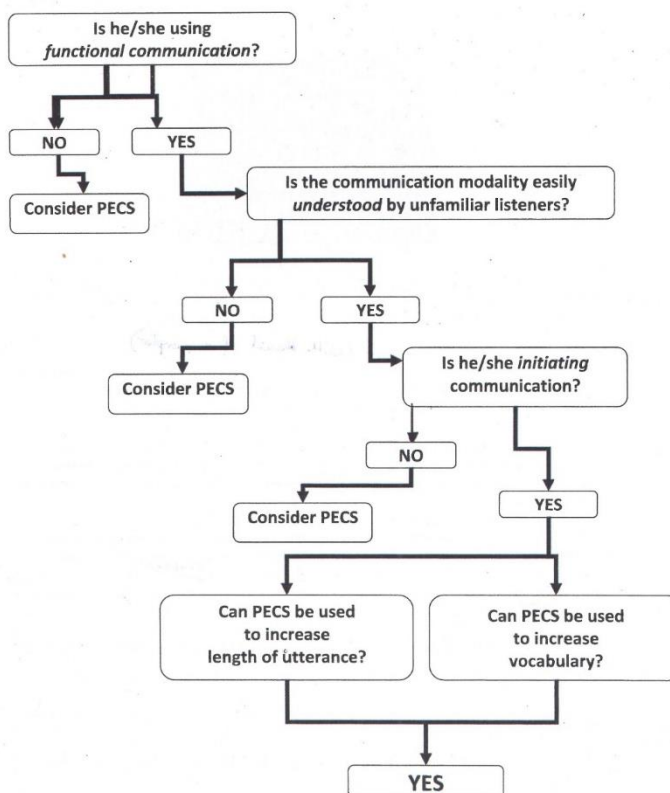
Phase 5: Answering Questions

The individual learns to use PECS to answer the question, "What do you want?"

Phase 6: Commenting

Now the individual 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" and "It is a..."

Is this person a candidate for PECS?



Notes:

