

## Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

PECS is an invaluable resource, which can be used with children and young people with Autism Spectrum Conditions and other communication difficulties. PECS does not require complex or expensive materials and can easily be used in school, home or community environments.

### What is PECS?

PECS is a type of Augmentative and Alternative Communication that uses visual symbols to teach the learner to communicate with parents, carers, teachers and peers. The aim is to teach intentional, functional communication and to allow users to communicate their wants and needs.



The PECS approach occurs in 6 phases:

- Phase 1 – Teaches the user '*How to communicate*', where the user learns to exchange a picture of a preferred activity/item in return for the actual activity/item;
- Phase 2 – Teaches '*Distance and persistence*', where the user carries out the same task as above but the distance between the user and the communication partner is increased;
- Phase 3 – Teaches '*Picture Discrimination*' (although some users develop this in Phases 1 & 2), where the user learns to be able to tell apart the pictures they want from the pictures they do not want;
- Phase 4 – Teaches the user to build a '*Sentence structure*', where the user learns to formulate a sentence strip (including an 'I want' card and a picture) before the exchange;
- Phase 5 teaches '*Responding*' and Phase 6 teaches '*Responsive and Spontaneous Commenting*', where the user is required to use the PECS materials to answer questions such as "what do you want?".

The exchange initially involves the user, a communication partner and a physical prompter. The physical prompter is required in the early stages, when teaching the exchange. However, as the user becomes more skilled there only needs to be a communication partner.

### Why use PECS?

There are a range of benefits to using this approach, including (but not limited to):

- developing intentional communication;
- reducing negative or challenging behaviours caused by frustration;
- increasing opportunities for learning;
- developing social skills;

- building meaningful relationships;
- increasing opportunities for interaction;
- improving language skills.

## Who can benefit from PECS?

The approach can be used for one to one therapy with children and adults with a range of Speech, Language and Communication Needs. More frequently, the approach is used with children and adults with Autism Spectrum Conditions, as well as those who have little or no verbal communication.

## Who can deliver PECS?

PECS can be delivered by everyone in contact with the user, as long as they have received training and advice from a Speech and Language Therapist to support their use of the approach.

## Evidence for PECS

Studies have demonstrated positive outcomes in the use of PECS to support functional communication in children with complex needs (Hart & Banda, 2010; Preston and Carter, 2009; Sulzer-Azaroff, Hoffman, Horton, Bondy & Frost, 2009).

## References

Hart, S. L., & Banda, D. R. (2010). Picture Exchange Communication System with individuals with developmental disabilities: A meta-analysis of single subject studies. *Remedial and Special Education, 31*, pp.476–488.

Preston, D., & Carter, M. (2009). A review of the efficacy of the Picture Exchange Communication System intervention. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 39*, pp.1471–1486.

Sulzer-Azaroff, B., Hoffman, A. O., Horton, C. B., Bondy, A., & Frost, L. (2009). The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS): What do the data say? *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 24*, pp.89–103.