

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

What is PECS?

PECS is a communication system that encourages a child to request items by exchanging a picture for a desired item. To choose the pictures, parents compile a list of their child's favorite activities and/or food. The highly motivating nature of these items is used to introduce the concept of requesting.

PECS is a very systematic communication system that is taught in a precise way to the child. The child is taught the power of communicating when he gives something in order to get something. The child learns to gain the attention of the communication partner in order to make a request.

Please Note:

- PECS stands for Picture Exchange Communication System and refers to a specific system of communication by Lori Frost and Andrew Bondy.
- PCS stands for Picture Communication Symbols and refers to the picture used within the system (i.e. Boardmaker, Picture This, photographs, etc.)
- It is important to know that a child may be using PCS and not be doing the PECS system. For example, the child may be using PCS for visual schedules, reinforcement systems, pointing systems, etc.

1. Why is this system suited for my child?

Children need to learn to ask you for things they want (i.e. food/toy). PECS is designed to teach this skill. PECS users tend to demonstrate relief and decreased frustration as they learn how to communicate.

2. I want my child to speak

PECS is not designed to teach children to speak. However, research has shown this visual and systematic approach may actually encourage speech for some children.

3. How is PECS used?

The child is taught to get and then give a picture to a communicative partner. This action is the request for a desired item. The communicative partner then exchanges the picture for the child's desired item.

4. Where is PECS used?

PECS can be used everywhere. Once a child knows how to use the system, it takes minimal training for others to understand and interact with the child.

5. What should the parent/caregiver do?

Your child needs to learn that this is an effective communication system with others. It is important to use PECS with your child every day. Also, encourage other family members and caregivers to use the system with your child.

6. How do I begin PECS?

Your Speech Language Pathologist will give you information about the necessary binder and pictures to begin PECS training. S/he will require a list of your child's favourite food and activities. It may be helpful to look at the list of common motivators below when you prepare your list.

- Food: chips, M&Ms, cookies, cereal, chocolate bars, cheesies, pudding, goldfish crackers
- Drinks: juice, milk
- Videos: (use their current favorite programs)
- Activities: bubbles, slide, swing

*Not all children will be motivated by these items. If it is difficult to determine appropriate motivators for your child, speak to your Speech-Language Pathologist.