

PECS

(THE PICTURE EXCHANGE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM)



What is PECS?

The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) is an approach that develops early expressive communication skills using pictures. More than using pictures for visual support, PECS is a functional communication system that develops important communication and social skills. It is well-known because it is an evidence-based practice and when implemented correctly, it works! PECS provides an immediately useful method for requesting things, actions and people, in a way that requires and promotes social interaction.

PECS was developed in 1985 as a unique augmentative/alternative communication intervention package for individuals with speech, language, and communication needs. First used at the Delaware Autistic Program, PECS has received worldwide recognition for focusing on the initiation component of communication. PECS does not require complex or expensive materials. It was created with families, educators, and resident care providers in mind, so is readily used in a range of settings.

PECS begins by teaching an individual to give a picture of a desired item to a "communicative partner", who immediately honours the exchange as a request. The system goes on to teach discrimination of pictures and how to put them together in sentences. In the more advanced phases, individuals are taught to answer questions and to comment on the world around them.

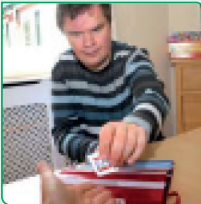

PECS has been successful with individuals of all ages demonstrating a variety of communicative, cognitive and physical difficulties. Some learners using PECS also develop speech. Others may transition to a voice output system. The body of research supporting the effectiveness of PECS continues to expand, with research from countries around the world.

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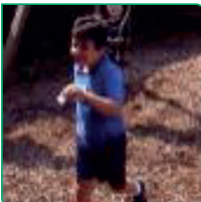
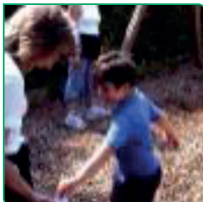


The six phases of PECS

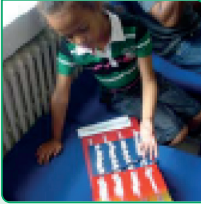

PHASE I
How to Communicate
 Students learn to exchange single pictures for items or activities they really want.

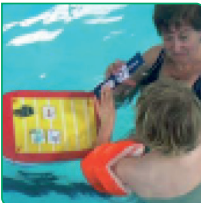

PHASE II
Distance and Persistence
 Still using single pictures, students learn to generalise this new skill by using it in different places, with different people and across distances. They are also taught to be more persistent communicators.

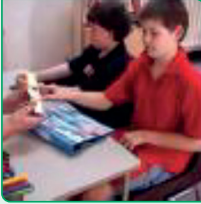

PHASE III
Picture Discrimination
 Students learn to select from two or more pictures to ask for their favourite things. These are placed in a communication book – a ring binder with Velcro® strips allowing pictures to be stored and easily removed for communication.


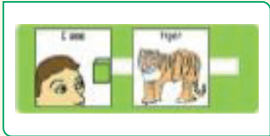
PHASE IV
Sentence Structure
 Students learn to construct simple sentences on a detachable sentence strip using an 'I want' picture followed by a picture of the item being requested.


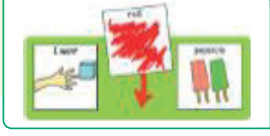
PHASE V
Answering Questions
 Students learn to use PECS to answer the question, "What do you want?"

PHASE VI
Commenting
 Now students are taught to comment in response to questions like 'What do you see?', 'What do you hear?', 'What is it?', etc. They learn to make up sentences starting with 'I see', 'I hear', 'I feel', 'It is a', etc.

Attributes and Language Expansion
 Students learn to expand their sentences by adding adjectives, verbs, prepositions, etc.

How to get started!

There is no hard and fast rule when deciding if PECS would be suitable for the students you have in mind. Remember though: **There is no age limit and no cognitive lower limit to starting PECS.** There is no need to say “My child is too young to start” or “my student is not ready to discriminate pictures”. There is no better time than the present.

PECS is likely to be suitable for those who have difficulty using speech, unintelligible or unclear speech, poor initiation skills, or who are not able to use speech communicatively or get beyond the ‘one-word’ level.

STEPS:

- 1 Finding appropriate reinforcers (R+):** These are the items that your student really loves. It is important to first determine the R+ because this is the only prerequisite for starting PECS. Spend time observing your student, introducing them to new activities, toys, food, other items. Order this list into a reinforcer hierarchy: from most preferred to neutral to non-preferred items. This is an ongoing process as your students’ likes and dislikes will constantly change.
- 2 Preparing symbols:** The next step is to make symbols / pictures that go with all the items you have found that your student likes (R+). Make sure these are a combination of toys, food, activities. The symbol system used is entirely up to you (Pics for PECS, Widgeit, Boardmaker, digital photos, etc.), but it is crucial that all the symbols are the same size and in the same style (2 inch is good starting size). It is best to laminate all the symbols and make duplicates in case they get lost or damaged. Place a small piece of fastener (Velcro) on the back of all the symbols.
- 3 Organising a communication book:** All students will eventually require a communication book for storing their symbols. These can be made using a ring binder or purchased on-line at www.pecs.com. Fastener strips (Velcro) should be placed vertically down each page. The book should also have a removable sentence strip.

Setting the stage for communication:

Communication should happen all day and every day. Pictures need to be readily available right across the day, not just at snack times or during a structured lesson.

Provide as many opportunities as possible in all situations across the day.

Aim for 40 exchanges a day. Think about different times or lessons during the day and create opportunities for your student to hand over symbols to request items. Keep ongoing reinforcer assessments so that your student is always motivated to request new things.






Make your own PECS book!

You can purchase official PECS resources from Pyramid:

[Click here to view them](#)






Alternatively, you can find similar products online and in everyday shops.
(Please note that the links below contain examples of the products that could be purchased and are correct at the time of publication)

You will need:

-  **A4 ring binder:** Many stores such as Tesco, Amazon and WHSmith have them available. [Click here for an example](#)
-  **Laminating sheets:** (Ideally with matte finish to reduce reflection).
[Click here for an example](#)
-  **Carry strap:** A piece of string, ribbon or cord would be just as effective tied to the folder.
-  **Sticky backed Velcro:** You can buy this as either dots or strips which can be cut up. [Click here for an example](#)
-  **Coloured card:** This will be used to create the insert pages. It is best to laminate them for durability. They can be colour-coded if you wish to represent different types of words eg yellow for actions.
[Click here for an example](#)

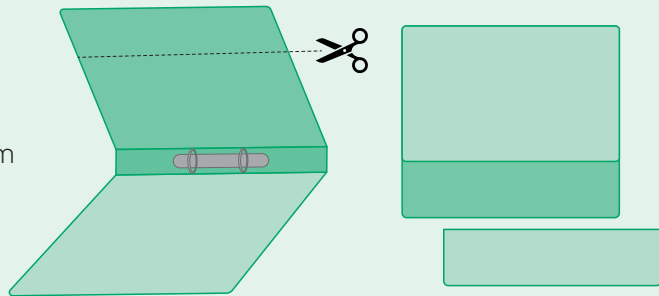
How to make your PECS Book:

You will need:

-  A standard A4 ring binder folder
-  Velcro strips
-  Pencil and ruler
-  Heavy duty scissors
-  Electric tape (optional)

Step 1

Rotate the folder so that it is horizontal. On the top cover, measure 2.5 inches from the bottom and draw a line across. Cut across the line using heavy duty scissors.



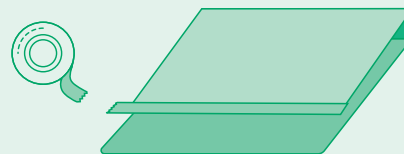
Step 2

Finish the cut edges with electrical tape (same colour as the folder).



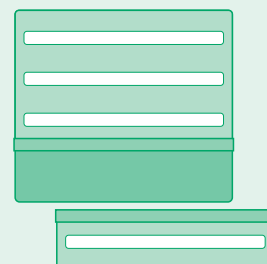
Step 3

Repeat step 2 with the other unfinished edge of the binder.



Step 4

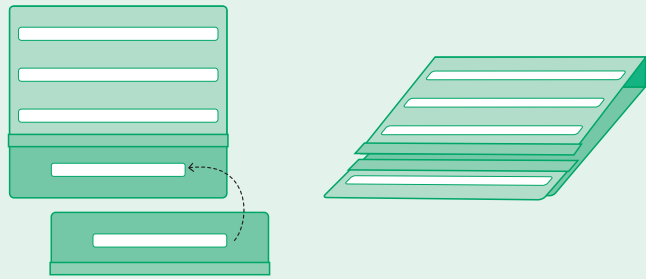
Add strips of Velcro horizontally on the folder, the bottom section and onto the cut off strip. Use the 'fluffy' side of the Velcro.



CONTINUED OVERLEAF >>>

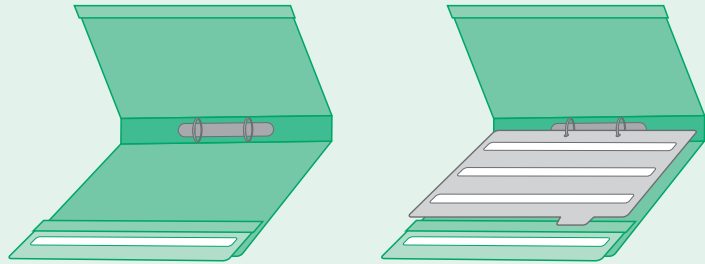
Step 5

Attach the cut off strip to the folder with Velcro, this will act as a 'sentence strip'.



Step 6

Pages for the book can be made using thin cardboard (you could also laminate it for durability). Just cut them to size and hole punch the pages. Then add strips of Velcro, similar to the front of the binder, to secure and store the communication pictures.



Step 7

Add pictures to your PECS book.

