

PECS



What is it and why would you use it?

PECS is a unique alternative / augmentative communication system developed in the USA in 1985. PECS was first implemented with pre-school students diagnosed with autism at the Delaware Autism program. Since then, PECS has successfully been implemented worldwide with thousands of learners of all ages who have various cognitive, physical and communication challenges.

PECS consists of six phases and begins by teaching an individual to give a single picture of a desired item or action 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 use modifiers, answer questions and comment. Initially PECS aims to teach these individuals to give a photograph in exchange for an item. As individuals make progress across the phases they begin to discriminate between photographs and learn how to make sentences. Depending on the level of understanding of the pupil, photographs or symbols can be used to support the child’s learning.

Who is it for?

PECS is an approach for teaching communication skills to children and adults. It is used to further support individuals who struggle to communicate.

The primary goal of PECS is to teach functional communication. Research has shown that some learners using PECS also develop speech. Others may transition to a speech generating device such as Swiftkey.

What does it look like?

PHASE I – How to Communicate - Individuals learn to exchange single pictures for items or activities they really want. This stage involves 2 adults working with the child. 1 as the communicative partner and 1 as the physical prompt. The physical prompt helps the child to learn to pick up the picture and hand it to the communicative partner. The physical prompt does not speak to the child or interact with them.

PHASE II – Distance and persistence - Still using single pictures, the child learns to generalise this skill by using it in different places with different people across distances. They are also taught to be more persistent communicators, attempting to gain the attention of the adult.

PHASE III – Picture Discrimination - The child learns to select from two or more pictures to ask for their favourite thing. Once the child is able to discriminate between pictures you can begin to make a collection of pictures of their favourite things and begin to set them up with a PECS folder.

PHASE IV – Sentence Structure - Children learn to construct simple sentences on a detachable sentence strip using an “I want” picture followed by the item being requested. Speech sounds are encouraged when the child hands over the strip to begin to speak.

Attribute & Learning Expansion - Individuals learn to expand their sentences by adding adjectives, verbs and prepositions.

PHASE V – Responsive Requesting - Individuals learn to use PECS to answer questions such as “What do you want?”

PHASE VI – Commenting - Individuals are taught to comment in response to questions such as “What can 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.