



DCDSB Understanding & Supporting All Learners

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)



What is PECS:

- A unique AAC system that involves exchanging pictures with another person for the purpose of communicating ones wants and needs
- There are six phases of PECS, with the first stage involving an exchange of a single picture symbol to request for a desired item
- Please refer to the following videos for a brief introduction to PECS:
 - **Video:** <https://youtu.be/X-7XK1USpBc>
 - **Video:** <https://youtu.be/WPRrMorSAkQ>

What are the six phases of PECS:

- **Phase I – How to Communicate:** The individual is taught how to initiate an interaction with another person by exchanging a single picture of a desired item. Two prompters are required for this stage.
- **Phase II – Distance and Persistence:** The individual is taught to generalize and expand their ability to use the above skill. The expectation is that the individual will initially travel a short distance (e.g., across a table) to the communication partner to exchange the single picture. Eventually, the individual should be able to travel a longer distance (e.g., across a room) to do so. As well, the individual should be able to complete this exchange in a variety of settings, with a variety of people and a variety of desired items.
- **Phase III – Discrimination Between Symbols:** The individual is taught to choose the picture of their desired item out of several choices. Initially, the individual chooses between a highly-preferred item and non-preferred item. Following success at that level, the individual will then choose between two preferred items, then three items, four items and so on. At this time, picture symbols are usually placed inside of a communication binder for the individual to access.

- **Phase IV – Sentence Structure:** The individual is taught to construct a simple “I want...” phrase on a separate sentence strip. The individual is taught to pair their desired item’s symbol with an “I want” symbol, on the sentence strip, and then taught to exchange the entire sentence to request for their preferred item.
 - **Attributes:** The individual is taught to expand the length of their sentence by adding adjectives or modifiers to their sentence. For example, if requesting for ‘playdough’, the individual may request for a specific colour making a phrase “I want blue playdough”.
- **Phase V – Responding to the Question “What do you want?”:** The individual is taught to respond to the question “What do you want?” using their sentence strip and providing this to the communication partner appropriately.
- **Phase VI – Commenting:** The individual is taught to create new sentences/phrases, using their sentence strip, for the purpose of making comments or responding to social questions, including:
 - “What do you see?”; “What do you hear?”; “What is it?” and “How do you feel?”
The individual is taught to respond using sentence starters including:
 - “I see...”, “I hear...”, “It is a...” and “I feel...”.

Suggestions for Using PECS at Home:

- When choosing preferred items around the home for your child to request, consider:
 - favourite toys/activities
 - favourite TV shows and/or movies and/or apps
 - favourite songs
 - favourite foods
 - favourite places
 - favourite books
- When playing with a certain toy/game/activity, consider the variety of items required to complete that activity. For example:
 - Playing with cars: cars versus trucks, colours of vehicles
 - Playing with trains: trains, tracks, people, colours of trains, number of track pieces
 - Playing a game: game pieces, dice, any additional accessories needed for that specific game
 - Playing with playdough: playdough, rolling pin, playdough colours, any additional accessories you may have (e.g., animal shape cutters)
 - Playing with Mr. Potato Head: Potato Head and all possible body parts
 - Singing nursery rhymes/songs: pictures of different actions/body parts/animals
- For additional information on PECS, and possible training/supports, please refer to the following website:
 - **Website:** <https://pecs-canada.com/pecs/>

This information contained in this resource is not intended for diagnostic purposes. It is to be used a reference for your own understanding and to provide you with some information about the different kinds of difficulties you may encounter with your child, and about different ways you may be able to support your child at home.

