

# PECS and the Pyramid Approach



general information



## About Pyramid

**Pyramid Educational Consultants** was first established in the US in 1992 by Andy Bondy, Ph.D., and Lori Frost, MS, CCC/SLP. The UK base opened in Brighton in 1998 to support developments in the UK, Ireland and beyond. We provide high quality training, consultation and support to families and professionals, to improve the skills and lives of people with communication difficulties. As the only official training provider of PECS and the Pyramid Approach, we train and help thousands of people every year. More information on us and our services is available on our website: [www.pecs.org.uk](http://www.pecs.org.uk).

**The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)** is a tried-and-tested approach that uses pictures to develop communication skills. It's appropriate for children and adults with a wide range of learning, speech and communication difficulties, including autism. Easy to access, affordable to implement and scientifically supported as one of the most effective communication interventions, PECS is an opportunity to open the door to spontaneous communication.

**The Pyramid Approach to Education** is a step-by-step approach to developing effective educational environments for people of all ages with communication and learning difficulties. Based on a behavioural perspective, it provides an invaluable foundation for professionals and family members who want to provide the best possible environment for successful learning in the home, school or community.



*"PECS has given the students a way of being more involved in everyday activities and making choices for themselves. They seem so much happier too!"* (Teacher)

*"PECS has given us back our boy...simple as that"* (Parent)

## What is PECS?

### **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.

### **PECS is appropriate for people of all ages with a wide range of learning difficulties**

Originally developed for pre-school children with autism, PECS is now being successfully used with adults and children with a range of communication difficulties. It's never too late to start PECS, which can be used in conjunction with other approaches such as TEACCH, Portage, ABA.

### **PECS can be used anywhere that someone communicates**

Often, it's initially introduced at home or in special schools, residential settings, outreach programmes and/or care homes. PECS can be successfully implemented by family members or professionals. It does not require expensive or complex equipment and overcomes disadvantages found with signing and other picture-based augmentative communication systems.

### **PECS is based on a tried and tested model**

One reason for the success of PECS is the integration of theoretical and practical perspectives from the fields of applied behaviour analysis (ABA) and speech and language therapy. With a functional perspective, PECS focuses on important and meaningful communication that is initiated by the student rather than being dependent on prompts from another person.

### **PECS focuses on communication that is relevant and motivating to each student**

Students are taught to exchange pictures for things they want in their environment. For example, if they want a drink they will give a picture of a drink to an adult who will then give them a drink.

### **PECS teaches students to initiate, as spontaneous communication is the goal**

Using this 'exchange' format, skills that are critical to communication, such as approaching another person, interacting with that person, and doing this spontaneously, are incorporated from the start.

### **PECS has a clear programme to follow, divided into six phases**

Beginning with using single pictures to communicate their needs, students are then taught to discriminate, or choose, between a variety of pictures and then to construct increasingly complex sentences. The pictures and sentence strip are all stored in a portable communication book, attached with Velcro®, so they can be easily removed when the student wants to communicate.

### **PECS and speech development**

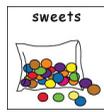
The aim of PECS is to give the student a functional communication system. However, an exciting finding has been the number of children who develop speech after more than one year on the programme. The findings from the Delaware Autistic Program provide grounds for optimism, with 76% of all children placed on PECS acquiring speech as either their sole communication system or augmented by a picture-based system. PECS has also been successfully used for students who have developed speech, but may not be using it communicatively. Reassuringly, research also confirms that PECS does not delay or hinder speech.

# 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

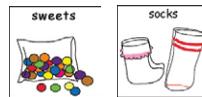
Still using single pictures, students learn to generalise this new skill by using it in different places, with different people and across distances. They are also taught to be more persistent communicators.



## PHASE III

### Picture Discrimination

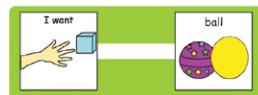
Students learn to select from 2 or more pictures to ask for their favourite things. These are placed in a communication book – a ring binder with Velcro® strips allowing pictures to be stored and easily removed for communication.



## 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

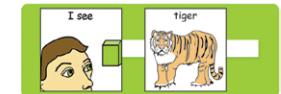
Students learn to use PECS to answer the question, "What do you want?"



## PHASE VI

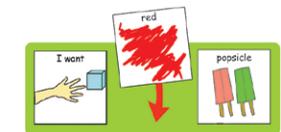
### Commenting

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.



*"Although he has no speech, people know what he wants as he can make his needs known with the pictures. It was a lot of hard work but it has paid off so well – the smile on his face says it all!"* (Parent)

*"Before PECS, everything was chosen and arranged for him because the staff didn't think he was able to make choices. The staff now experience him to be less rigid and fixed in his habits at meals and he is able to spontaneously choose new food items. Generally he is calmer and less anxious and for a long time he hasn't displayed challenging or destructive behaviour."* (Professional, working at a home for adults with autism)

## What is the Pyramid Approach to Education?

Created by Dr Andy Bondy, the Pyramid Approach is based on the principles of applied behaviour analysis (ABA). It will help you think about, and develop, all the factors that need to be in place to create effective educational environments.

PECS is one small part of the Pyramid Approach: the critical part that relates to acquiring a successful communication system.

The Pyramid Approach:

- focuses on activities for students that are meaningful and highly motivating
- helps to develop functional communication as the highest priority
- helps to develop effective behaviour intervention plans
- encourages creativity and innovation on the teacher's part
- emphasises how to teach, rather than simply what to teach

### The Pyramid Approach is not just for teachers

It's a practical approach that can be used by parents, psychologists, speech and language therapists, programme managers and any other family members and professionals who are involved in the support and education of people with communication and/or learning difficulties.

All Pyramid Consultants are well versed in the Pyramid Approach and will use this model in their training and consultancy support.

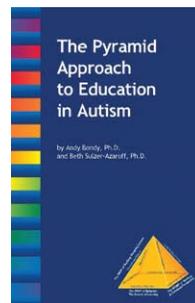
### Further reading:

#### ***The Pyramid Approach to Education in Autism***

by Andy Bondy, Ph.D. and Beth Sulzer-Azaroff, Ph.D.

This manual provides clear and detailed guidelines on implementing the Pyramid Approach, as well as examples, helpful hints and a number of other essential tools for success.

**Order *The Pyramid Approach to Education in Autism* at [www.pecs.com](http://www.pecs.com)**



## How do I get started?

### PECS & the Pyramid Approach – the first step is training

Attend a PECS Basic Training workshop to learn everything you need to know to get started and be successful with PECS. You will receive detailed instruction, with video examples and opportunities to practise.

### Who should attend?

The PECS Basic Training workshop is appropriate for family members as well as professionals.

### How to attend

Book a place on a workshop held regularly around the UK or Ireland, or save money on large-scale training by bringing our specialist consultants to you.

*“One of the most relevant, interesting and useful training courses I have ever been on in my career as a special needs teacher – thank you!”* (Teacher) Attendee of PECS Basic Training



*“A must for anyone wishing to implement PECS effectively. Left me feeling fired up and ready to start with my son!”* (Parent) Attendee of PECS Basic Training

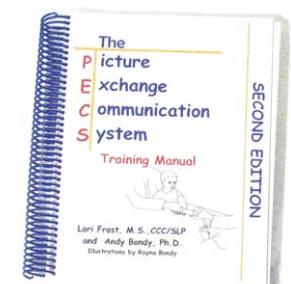
### Further reading:

#### ***The PECS Training Manual, 2nd Edition,***

by Lori Frost, MS, CCC/SLP and Andrew Bondy, Ph.D.

This manual, included in the registration fee for the Basic PECS Workshop, details the 6 phases of PECS: how to implement them and solve common problems.

**Order *The PECS Training Manual, 2nd Edition* at [www.pecs.com](http://www.pecs.com)**



# Sign up for training & get more information...

## Contact Us

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Email: [pyramiduk@pecs.com](mailto:pyramiduk@pecs.com) | Website: [www.pecs.com](http://www.pecs.com)

## Leaflets

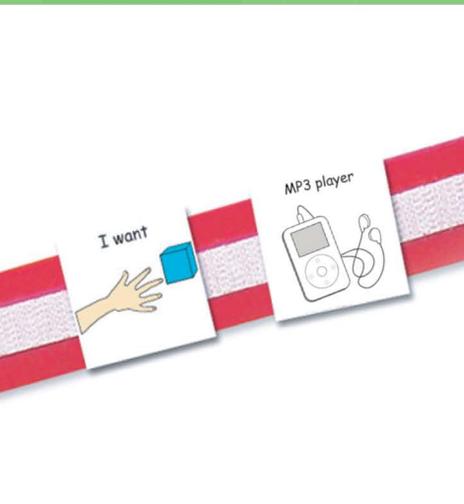
Call or email our office for a copy of our other leaflets:

- *Training Workshops & Consultancy Services*
- *Resources Catalogue*

## Research and References

A list of supporting research is available on our website or by contacting our office.

*"PECS has enabled him to reveal his potential to me. He has shown a level of discrimination, problem solving and awareness that I hadn't known he was capable of."* (Teacher)



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