

Unconventional Communication “Echolalia”

By Susan Stokes & Barry Prizant

I. Definition:

Echolalia can be described as an unconventional form of verbal behaviors. Echolalia is when a student repeats verbal information stated by others (e.g., people’s conversational exchanges, videos, books read aloud, songs, etc.). According to Prizant(1983), up to 75% of verbal students with autism exhibit echolalia in some form. Echolalia can include repetition of part of utterances as well as an identical repetition of the entire spoken utterance, sometimes including an exact replication of the inflectional pattern used by the speaker. Utterances can be either immediate or delayed – minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years! Echolalia occurs in normal language development, however, decreases as more spontaneous generative language is developed.

II. Use of Echolalia for Non-Communicative and Communicative Purposes:

Non-communicative Purposes:

Echolalia used without communicative intent occurs when the student does not anticipate a response to his/her verbalization.

Examples –

- ❑ Nonfocused - Echolalic utterances which do not appear relevant to the situation or context
- ❑ Situation association - Utterances that may be triggered by something in the situation or context.
- ❑ Rehearsal - Utterances used as a processing aid, followed by utterance or action indicating comprehension of echoed utterance.
- ❑ Self-Regulatory - Utterances that may be used as self-direction for his own actions (initiation of a task)
- ❑ Label – Utterance labeling objects or actions in the environment with no apparent communicative intent.

Sometimes students with autism engage in echolalia when they are feeling stressed or anxious. It is important to determine whether the student’s arousal level could be precipitating factor for the presence of his echolalia.

Communicative Purposes:

As a student's cognitive and language skills develop, his/her use of echolalia may become more functional and communicative. When echolalia is used more communicatively, the student will generally exhibit an increase in spontaneous, appropriate eye gaze and/or body orientation. Echolalia can be used communicatively for the following functions:

- ❑ *Conversational turn taking*: the student recognizes when he/she is to take a turn and that some sort of response is required. However, the student lacks the spontaneous generative languages to engage in the conversation, so he/she relies upon an echolalic utterance to take his turn in the conversation.
- ❑ *Initiation of communicative interactions*: The student is beginning to recognize and notice others. Because he/she lacks the spontaneous generative language skills to initiate a communicative interaction with someone, he/she uses an echolalic utterance.
- ❑ *Requesting*: The student uses echolalia to request a desired object, action or event.
- ❑ *Protesting*: The student uses echolalia to protest the actions of others.
- ❑ *Indicating affirmation in response to a previous utterance*: The student uses echolalia to respond affirmatively to the previous utterance.

III. Intervention:

Unconventional Verbal Behaviors (UVB)-

- ❑ Modify situations that might be stressful or anxiety producing for the student, thus resulting in the occurrence of UVBs.
- ❑ Simplify verbal messages given to the student.

Communicative Purposes-

- ❑ ***Break down echoed utterances and pair with simple word structures and gestures to build understanding.***
- ❑ Replace the UVB with a more appropriate form to express the same language function (verbal model, visual support strategies)
- ❑ Always respond to UVB's which are produced with communicative intent
- ❑ Use alternative communication strategies to facilitate expressive communication
- ❑ Develop nonverbal social communication skills (Vary vocal volumes, facial expressions, and body language) by video taping.

- ❑ Use strategies such as modeling, role-playing, audio taping, video taping social stories, and comic strip conversations to teach the use of nonverbal social communication behaviors.
- ❑ Develop/increase verbal social communication skills such as dialogue scripts, joint activity routines, visual support strategies [turn taking cards, topic ring]
- ❑ Act out children's stories
- ❑ Encourage replica play and use miniature toys to act out social scenes.
- ❑ Develop communication about past/future events

When one looks at the communicative function of echolalia, typical children copy sounds, words, and eventually phrases and sentences that they hear adults use in specific, repetitive contexts. This is known as the “gestalt” style of language acquisition. Gestalt means whole, therefore, learning language in gestalt form would be learning it in chunks rather than the tiny components of sounds. Most children learn language by using this “gestalt” form but quickly change over to an analytic form. Children begin to analyze the way language is used in other contexts and come to understand that “Mommy” is a word that can represent other things besides the whole of their experience with their specific “Mommy.” This transformation from gestalt to analytical language development is often demonstrated by the reduction in echolalia to spontaneous communication.

Perseverative speech/incessant question taking – Definition:

Perseverative speech and incessant question asking are persistent repetitions of speech or questions which can be used both communicatively or non-communicatively.

Purpose:

This occurs when a student is trying to initiate or maintain a communicative interaction, and the student anticipates a response. However, it is perseverative, because the student repeats the speech act either immediately or shortly thereafter, even after receiving a response.

Perseverative speech/incessant question asking may be related to the student's processing difficulties and / or his emotional state. These utterances may be non-communicative in that the student repeats the utterances /questions without anticipating a response from someone. In this case the verbal repetition may be calming or pleasurable to the student.

Student Communication

In order to be an effective communicator, a person needs to demonstrate four major components: 1) an understanding of information “a code” and the world around him/her, 2) how to communicate “a code,” 3) a reason to communicate, 4) and a communication partner. Without all four components, communication is often limited to a one sided message that may or may not be received.

1) Receptive Communication

Receptive communication refers to the way we understand information and the world around us. Some students understand spoken or signed language or symbols systems. Others gather information about the world from visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, vestibular (related to balance), proprioceptive (related to motion), and kinesthetic (related to balance) stimuli. It is important to determine what / how the student understands and to consistently pair additional preferred cues with speech as we interact with the student throughout the day to help the student build associations between the cues and events in the environment. Developing routines which have a predictable series of steps, objects or actions and that are of interest to the student increase understanding strengthen the association between cues and events and allow the student to begin to anticipate or predict what will happen.

2) Expressive Communication

Expressive communication refers to the ways we share information with others. Students learn to express pleasure and displeasure, to get attention, to signal continuation and termination of an interaction or activity, and to make choices. They may do this by fussing, crying, smiling, moving, reaching, touching, pointing, looking, signing and talking. Initially communication is used to indicate wants and needs. Providing information or commenting, greeting and other communication functions are learned later. Students with limited means of communication may develop their own unique systems of communication. For example, a student may touch his/her shoe to indicate s/he wants to go. For these students, it is important to document what their behavior means since the purpose of their behavior may be readily apparent to others.

3) Communicative Intent (Reason to communicate)

As we develop communication skills there are many reasons to communicate. Initially, a student communicates to satisfy his/her own needs. S/he may request an object, action or activity that is pleasurable. For example, a student’s stomach may growl and s/he may reach for a box of cereal because s/he is hungry. The student is not communicating to interact with another person because s/he wants to be social but only to get her/his needs met.

As a student develops, s/he recognizes that there are distinct differences in the objects in his/her environment and people. For example, when a student makes a certain noise, his/her teacher smiles in response. Eye contact, imitation, cause and effect, and basic turn-taking begin. At this stage, a student is communicating for basic social interaction.

Finally, as a student becomes more sophisticated at recognizing if s/he gains the attention of another person by pointing at an object and then looking at the person, s/he develops

joint attention. At this stage, a student recognizes that an object is fun and wants another person to communicate about the same object. The student may want to comment, signal a turn, ask a question or request something that is related to that object. S/he is interested in the opinion of the person during the interaction. These interactions may occur verbally or non-verbally, based on the student's expressive communication skills.

4) Communication Partner

Some students with limited communication skills begin to communicate without signaling a partner that s/he needs to communicate something. S/he assumes that the person knows that s/he is communicating and can become quite frustrated when the message is not received or a response does not occur.

Building Effective Communication Partners

In order to provide opportunities for effective communication when instructing students with disabilities, six environmental strategies have been shown to increase the likelihood of students initiating communication and interactions: 1) develop a positive relationship with the student, 2) give maximum control over daily life, 3) reinforce socially acceptable behavior to gain attention, 4) be responsive to communication attempts, 5) teach skills and functional behaviors that are preferred, 6) interpret refusals, "bad choices", and off-

task behavior as communication, 7) and provide visual communication support to increase communication.

1) Relationships

Having a social context provides each of us with a sense of belonging and is a basic need that is essential for each of us in the human community. This sense of belonging is important in developing self-esteem and confidence in students and, ultimately, it is necessary for student achievement to occur.

2) Empower a student

To facilitate the development of communication in our students, we can employ four strategies which give them control over their daily life:

- a. Allow students to impact and control at least some people and events by teaching them how to obtain the attention of another, make a choice of what will happen next, or to push a switch to make something happen.
- b. Allow students to anticipate events by keeping routines.
- c. Give students more of what they like and less of what they don't
- d. Prompt the development of relationships through social interactions

3) Reinforce socially acceptable behavior to gain attention

The more others pay attention to the student when s/he asks for attention or social interaction appropriately, the less s/he will need to engage in inappropriate behavior for attention. Socially acceptable ways to get attention include standing next to someone; touching someone on the arm or shoulder; giving someone a handshake or hug; vocalizing or talking; making eye contact; smiling or laughing; and engaging in appropriate activities. Initially, it is important to reinforce socially acceptable attention getting behavior each time it occurs even if the timing is inconvenient. In addition to acknowledging appropriate behavior, ignore inappropriate attention getting behavior if possible.

4) Be responsive

Assume communication intent, i.e., assume the person is communicating with you. Monitor the student for signals of acceptance or rejection of objects, activities, or interactions. Acknowledge the communication when it occurs, and respond accordingly. A student's failure to respond or to change affect can be interpreted as rejection of an object or activity. Responding consistently to the student's signals regardless of whether or not they are intentional, will increase the use of these signals to express preference and provide the student with increased control over daily life.

5) Teach skills and functional behaviors that are preferred

Provide opportunities for students to participate in activities that are interesting and motivating. Activities of high interest, activities that comfort, and activities that meet a basic need increase attention and reward the student's participation. Since communicative behaviors will be most readily learned if they enable the person to obtain something they want from the environment, it is important to determine a student's likes and dislikes.

We create internal memories (event schemas) of routines that we experience and communicate about over and over again. New vocabulary terms are stored as well as experiences that relate to the words. Provide opportunities to create and link experiences together through functional routines. For example, making a shopping list, going to the grocery store, asking for items to buy, greeting grocery clerks are all forms of communication built within a natural experience.

6). Interpret refusals, “bad choices,” and off-task behavior as communication

What student’s understand and how they attempt to communicate to others may not be what is typical for their peers. Behavior situations may occur because:

- a. Student’s don’t understand
 - Students have difficulty understanding the social cues and clues in their environment.
 - They inaccurately interpret what they see or hear.
 - They misunderstand or misinterpret social information and social attempts of others.
 - Student difficulty in establishing attention results in missing information or not being able to follow ongoing conversation.
 - Delay in processing information may reduce their ability to participate effectively.
 - They don’t participate effectively because they don’t understand what they need to learn.
 - Behavior problems occur because other people don’t recognize that the students don’t understand.
- b. The student’s have difficulty expressing themselves
 - Lack of effective gestures, facial expressions, body language or communication supports hinder ability to communicate information.
 - Ability to produce intelligible speech with appropriate, effective use of vocabulary affects ability to express clear ideas.
 - People don’t realize that the student’s are attempting to communicate.
 - In some circumstances, the listener expects a different **form** of communication and does not respond to what the student is attempting to communicate.
 - People don’t interpret the communication attempt (i.e., speech, gesture, body postures, aggression, etc.) accurately.
 - The student’s communication attempts do not adequately communicate his/her wants and needs.
 - The student uses behavior to try to accomplish his goals because that works better or more efficiently than the other forms of communication he knows how to use.
- c. The student’s have difficulty with social/pragmatic skills

- Impairment in establishing, maintaining and shifting attention reduces effective communication.
 - Difficulty staying involved in a social interaction reduces appropriate social connections.
 - Not taking turns appropriately in social exchanges results in inappropriate social interactions.
 - Difficulty recognizing communication breakdowns makes communication ineffective.
 - Lack of skills for repairing communication breakdowns causes frustration when they don't get their wants and needs met.
- d. Students don't know what else to do
- Students do what they know how to do.
 - They need to learn new or different skills to help them participate in their life routines more effectively.
 - Communicative partners need to acknowledge more appropriate communication attempts and teach students how to use new skills more efficiently.

SOME SOLUTIONS:

- Evaluate the communicative intent of the behavior.
- Provide an acceptable substitution for communication attempts (i.e., picture symbols, objects, and calendar).
- Provide a predictable routine using a visual schedule.
- Acknowledge all acceptable communication attempts.
- Increase the students understanding by providing visual support, simplifying the linguistic message or pairing the two components together.
- Use gestures and body language meaningful.
- Include "wait time" in order for a student to process the incoming message.
- Provide prompts to support the student's communication attempts (if needed).
- Stay with the interaction until you both reach a desired response.

* Excerpts from Solving Behavior Problems in Autism, Linda A. Hodgdon, M.ED., CCC-SLP, 1999.

7) Provide visual communication support to increase communication

Communication is a complex task that requires the interconnection of many different skills. Understanding the communication of others, trying to figure out what is happening or not happening, handling changes and transitions, and interpreting cues and signals in the environment can all be areas of difficulty. Whether students are verbal or nonverbal, the strategies they use to get their needs met and to interact socially with others may not work efficiently. Inappropriate behaviors may actually work more

effectively for students than other forms of communication. Communication breakdowns occur when:

- They have acquired a limited number of communication skills.
- The skills that they have do not work very well to help them understand their environment or get their wants and needs met.
- Communication partners do not recognize the message.

Therefore, students with communication disorders will use what works best. If they don't understand what to do, they will do what they think they are supposed to do. In addition, if they attempt to communicate their wants and needs and people don't respond to them, they may try another way.....perhaps using a behavior that is less desirable (from our point of view) but works better (from their point of view).

Therefore, as educators we are assigned the task of identifying an alternative communication method to facilitate communication attempts. Some alternative communication methods include: 1) use of visual communication boards, 2) access to switches, augmentative communication devices with voice output, 3) sign language, 4) gestures, 5) and/or object cues. We learn to accept a reach, point or body proximity as communication as well as verbally labeling the action. Based on a student's level of cognitive representation (objects, photographs, colored symbols, words), communication tools can be created to extend and expand communication attempts.

Communication boards support student's expressive communication to others by:

- improving comprehension of communication
- improving understanding of the environment
- increasing attending and auditory comprehension skills
- supporting organization and processing of communication and information
- used as a student's expressive form of communication such as requesting, protesting, and informing
- enhancing communicative intent and interaction skills
- teaching skills
- teaching self-regulation
- developing more effective expressive communication
- increasing independent performance

Physical Appearance of communication boards:

- frequently low tech, using picture communication symbols
- electronic devices (high tech) with voice output
- frequently work best when there are obvious categorical separations of symbols/photos to help students associate with specific activities or locations
- portability for mobile students require that a student's communication book is easy to access and can be carried by the student at all times

- communication books may be assembled in a variety of individual signs, charts, books, and holder to promote convenient use
- size is determined by need...can range from small piece of paper to a large poster or bulletin board
- recommend concrete, universally understood symbols for student understanding and universal comprehension by the wide variety of people who will access it
- most effective aids use a combination of picture and written words to describe or label the action or object represented
- goals frequently include development of language structure (i.e., nouns, verbs, noun phrases, etc, to generate sentences)
- symbols are frequently organized in a linguistic manner so students can select nouns, verbs, and other word categories to generate unique sentence construction

The emphasis should always be on communicating concepts and ideas rather than developing specific language structures. At first, limit the number and type of symbols used on one board to ensure comprehension.

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

Objective: Using the PECS, the student learns to **spontaneously initiate communicative exchanges**. PECS can be used with children or adults who are not yet initiating requests, comments, etc. People using PECS are taught to approach and give a picture of a desired item to a communicative partner in exchange for that item. While advancing through the phases of PECS, the student learns to sequence words to create sentences. Pointing to pictures is discouraged as pointing does not require interaction with a person. Using PECS, students learn to gain the attention of the communication partner in order to make a request.

PHASE I - THE PHYSICAL EXCHANGE

Objective: Upon seeing a highly preferred item, the student will pick up the picture of the item, reach toward the communication partner, and release the picture into the partner's hand.

Note: At this phase, it is not essential for the student to look at or identify the pictures.

Preparing for Phase I:

- ☞ identify all of the objects, foods, activities, etc. that the student is interested in **Note:** avoid focusing only on one activity (such as food); it is important the student learns that communication occurs in all activities
- ☞ develop a representational set for those items (i.e., photographs, Picture Communication Symbols (PCS), etc.)
- ☞ identify for yourself which activities you are going to start training in

Notes:

- ☞ No verbal prompts are used during this phase (such as “What do you want?” or “Give me the picture”).
- ☞ Plan to use a variety of pictures, but only one at a time.
- ☞ Try to “practice” PECS during naturally occurring situations throughout the day.
- ☞ Although two trainers are helpful, it is possible to do this phase with only one.

Training Procedure:

- ☞ when you see the student reaching for a desired item, take that opportunity to work on the physical exchange
- ☞ allow the child to engage in the activity for a short period and then remove the item (or stop the activity)

- ☞ get the picture that represents the identified item
- ☞ sit directly in front of the student
- ☞ place the picture of the item between you and the student
- ☞ hold the desired item in one hand while showing it to the student (the reason for holding it is so that the student cannot take it)
- ☞ hold out your other hand as a cue for the student to give you the picture (“open-hand cue”)
- ☞ initially, the student is going to reach for the desired item
- ☞ without saying anything (i.e., no verbal cuing!) and using hand-over-hand, help the student to pick up the picture and put into your “open hand” (put the object down while doing this)
- ☞ as the student releases the picture into your hand, you label his action by saying something like “oh, you want the play dough!” (this is beneficial for those children who tend to repeat sentences exactly how they are presented as well for those who have difficulty with pronoun reversals)
- ☞ without delay, give the desired item to the student

Helpful Hints:

- ☞ only give parts of the activity at a time, so that you can practice this for several turns/trials during one activity
- ☞ if there is only one item, take away the item after a few seconds (or one turn, etc.) and practice the exchange several times
- ☞ only use items that the student has shown an interest in at that moment – the child must *want* the item or else the exchange will not be reinforcing

Fading Cues:

- ☞ as the student becomes familiar with the expectations of the exchange, start fading the physical assistance (i.e., hand-over-hand)
- ☞ next, start fading your “open-hand” cue
- ☞ move on the Phase II once the student is consistently and independently exchanging a picture in order to retrieve a desired item

Phase II – Expanding Spontaneity

Objective: The student will go to his/her communication board/book, pull the picture off, go to the communication partner, and release the picture into the partner's hand.

Preparing for Phase II:

- ☞ create a communication board (i.e., a piece of laminated cardboard with Velcro on it, the front of a binder with Velcro on it, etc.)
- ☞ store the pictures in a binder using Velcro; arrange the pictures in a meaningful way so that you can easily find them (i.e., sort by themes)

Notes:

- ☞ no verbal prompts are used
- ☞ teach a variety of pictures – using only one at a time (the student is not required to be discriminating between the pictures at this phase)
- ☞ use a variety of trainers/communication partners
- ☞ train in naturally occurring situations

Training Procedure:

- ☞ once the desired activity has been established by the student, place the appropriate picture on the communication board
- ☞ the student must now remove the picture from the board and give it to you
- ☞ once the student learns to do this, increase the distance between you and the student
- ☞ now, the exchange must become more intentional first by reaching for you and then by getting up and moving towards you
- ☞ the next step is to increase the distance between the student and the picture (slowly increase the distance)
- ☞ the trainer is the one expected to return the picture to the board once the student has given the picture – do not tell the student to “Put your picture back” – you would not ask a verbal child to “Put your words back”
- ☞ move on to Phase III once the child consistently and independently goes to get the picture of the desired item and brings it to you

Phase III – Picture Discrimination

Objective: The student will request the desired items by going to a communication board, selecting the appropriate picture from an array, going to a communication partner and giving the picture.

Preparing for Phase III:

- ☞ in addition to having pictures of desired items, you should now identify and get pictures of non-desired items
- ☞ non-desired items could be those that the student dislikes or shows no interest in, or are contextually irrelevant (such as a shoe during snack time)

Notes:

- ☞ no verbal prompts are used during this phase
- ☞ rotate the position of the pictures on the communication board so that the student does not learn to identify them by their location (this will discourage *looking*)

Training Procedures:

- ☞ present the student with one desired item and one strongly disliked, non-preferred item
- ☞ at first, pair the pictures with the real objects (i.e., by placing the picture between the object and the student)
- ☞ almost immediately, try to fade away the real objects and just present the student with the pictures
- ☞ give the student the object that corresponds with the given picture (even if it is the non-preferred or contextually irrelevant item); you can then say “You asked for the shoe” or “You want the shoe” – wait a few seconds and then return the two pictures to the board when the student responds to the non-preferred item, point to the desired item and say “If you want a cookie, you need to ask for a cookie”
- ☞ if this occurs continually, check that the student is, in fact, interested in the “desired item”
- ☞ you can also start reducing the size of the pictures to $\frac{3}{4}$ ” – 1”
- ☞ correspondence checks: every once in a while let the student take the requested item after giving you the picture. This will tell you whether or not the student is making the connection between the picture and its corresponding object
- ☞ once the student has learned to look at the pictures and to discriminate between them, start adding more pictures to the board so that the student learns to request from a variety of pictures
- ☞ continue doing this until the student can discriminate amongst 1 - 20 pictures
- ☞ at this point, you can develop theme boards and place in the environment or in a book (or both)

- ☞ you may also want to start putting desired objects out of reach to increase opportunities for requesting
- ☞ the student is ready to move on to Phase IV once s/he is able to discriminate between a variety of pictures and is able to request a preferred choice from amongst a group of pictures

Phase IV – Sentence Structure

Objective: The student requests present and non-present items using a multi-word phrase by going to the book, picking up a picture/symbol of “I want”, putting it on a sentence strip, picking out the picture of what is wanted, putting it on the sentence strip, removing the strip from the communication book, approaching the communicative partner, and giving the sentence strip to him/her. By the end of this phase, the student typically has 20 – 50 pictures in the communication book (or board) and is communication with a variety of partners.

Preparing for Phase IV:

- ☞ create a sentence strip out of cardboard (laminated and add Velcro) and with Velcro, attach to the communication binder
- ☞ create a picture for “I want”
- ☞ it is helpful for some children to use colour-coding for teaching sentence structure; a widely used colour-coding format is known as “Fitzgerald Key”

Notes:

- ☞ no verbal prompts are used during this phase
- ☞ continue periodic “correspondence checks”
- ☞ continue to use during a variety of activities and with a variety of partners

Training Procedure:

- ☞ attach the “I want” picture to the far left of the sentence strip
- ☞ the student should be guided to place the picture of the desired item next to the “I want” picture
- ☞ the student then gives you the sentence strip
- ☞ as the student is giving you the strip, you should verbalize the request by saying “I want _____” or tell the student “You told me...I want _____” (pause as if expecting the student to repeat or fill in the blank)
- ☞ once the student consistently does this, move the “I want” picture to the top left hand corner of the board/page
- ☞ when the student wants something, guide him/her to the “I want” picture, help him/her to place it on the left side of the sentence strip and then help the student to place the picture of the desired item next to it
- ☞ continue doing this until the student can complete these steps independently
- ☞ start placing desired items out of sight

Phase V – Responding to “What do you want?”

Objective: The student can spontaneously request a variety of items and can answer the question “What do you want?”

Training Procedures:

- ☞ at this phase, the student can initiate requests independently using the starter phrase “I want” followed by a picture of the desired item
- ☞ ideally, the student has not yet been exposed to the prompt “What do you want?”
- ☞ it is inevitable that people will continue to ask the student this; therefore, this phase teaches the student how to respond to this prompt (by this phase, the student may already be doing this)
- ☞ however, it is extremely important that the student still be able to request most things spontaneously, without being prompted
- ☞ you should be able to move through this stage quite quickly

Phase VI – Responsive and Spontaneous Commenting

Objective: The student expands communicative functions to include commenting, expression of feelings, likes and dislikes, etc.

Preparing for Phase VI:

- ☛ create pictures for “I see”, “I like”, “I feel”, etc.

Notes:

- ☛ reinforcers should match the communicative act (i.e., tangibles for requests and social responses for comments)
- ☛ use the pictures when you communicate with the student to model how to use them for these expanded functions (you can either use the sentence strip or point to the pictures)
- ☛ colour coding may be helpful at this stage

Training Procedure:

- ☛ create opportunities for commenting during naturally occurring activities
- ☛ for example, during snack time, you could make a comment “mmmm, I like cookies” (using the child’s pictures), “What do you like?”
- ☛ another example could be “I feel happy”, “How do you feel?”
- ☛ at the end of this phase, the student may be ready to start pointing to the pictures; however, the student needs to bring the communication book/board to his/her communication partner while pointing so the person-to-person interaction is still occurring

Colour/Size/Location Concepts

- ☛ the student should learn to use these concepts in communicative functions within his/her current repertoire (i.e., rather than just saying “I want the ball”, the child can add “I want the *red* ball” or “I want the *big* ball” or “I want the *big red* ball”)
- ☛ this can be taught in a more structured format as well as within natural contexts

Differentiate yes/no request vs. yes/no label

- ☛ the student learns to answer both “Do you want _____?” and “Is this a _____?” questions
- ☛ remember, the reinforcers for the “Do you want” questions should be tangible and the

reinforcers for the “Is this a” questions should be social

References:

Frost, L., and Bondy, A. (1994). The picture exchange communication system: Training manual. Pyramid Educational Consultants, Cherry Hill, N.J.

Fitzgerald Key

Any colour system can be used with the *Picture Communication Symbols (PCS)* as long as it is consistent. The recommended colours are as follows:

People	Yellow
Verbs	Green
Descriptions	Blue
Nouns	Orange
Social	Pink
Miscellaneous	White

It is believed that if this colour system is followed, it will encourage some consistency within the non-verbal population. It will also provide more flexibility in terms of combining different types of symbol programs with one another.

If you do not have a colour printer, you may use colour paper and photocopy your symbols onto the corresponding coloured sheet.

Credits

Prepared by Dana Sahian, Speech-Language Pathologist

Communication and Writing Aids,

Bloorview MacMillan Centre

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References:


Frost, L., and Bondy, A. (1994). The picture exchange communication system: Training manual. Pyramid Educational Consultants, Cherry Hill, N.J.

**THE PICTURE EXCHANGE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM (PECS)
SHORTHAND NOTES**

Shana Ellman, SLP, Bloorview MacMillan

WHO CAN USE PECS?


 Children or adults of any age

 Those not yet initiating communication

PECS has many communicative purposes:

 Teaches *interaction* and communication

 Is not restricted to one setting


 Is not transitory...the PCS is in view for the entire time it takes the child to process (sign is transitory)


PECS stands for Picture Exchange Communication System and refers to the whole system by Lori Frost and Andrew Bondy

PCS stands for Picture Communication Symbols and therefore refers to the picture used within the system (whether it be Boardmaker, Picture This, photographs, etc)

It is important to know that a successful PECS programs may incorporate various types of PCS.


OBJECTIVES:


 Spontaneous communication exchanges initiated by child

 Learning of sequence, words to create sentences

A WORD ABOUT SPEECH

 PECS facilitates, rather than inhibits speech

 2/3 of children introduced to PECS develop speech

 The communication partner is verbalizing in conjunction with showing the PCS

 Attempts at speech are encouraged

A display was provided by Dawn Gutowski of Communication Made Easy - custom PCS binders.