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# TuDOrs Training Course “Teaching Foreign Languages to Students with Learning Difficulties”



**Module 2**

**Annex 2**

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## Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) – Steps for implementation

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These are the steps to follow for the implementation of the PECS. However, before these steps, the sample of reinforcers has to be selected. This is an inventory of elements and activities that will be used during the training to increase learner motivation as well as to promote the acquisition of effective communication skills.

The PECS comprises the following steps and phases.

### Phase 1: Teaching of Assisted Physical Exchange

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The aim of this phase is for the learner to look at, reach for, pick up and hand over the picture/symbol to his/her communication partner.

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| <b>Step 1</b> | The teacher first organises the environment. Once the environment is ready, the task can begin. The student with ADS is positioned seated or standing in front of the communication partner. The student with ADS has a helper who sits behind or next to him/her to help him/her reach the symbols. At the beginning of the session a desired reinforcer is on the table, but out of reach. What is close to him/her is the image or symbol of that object. |
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| <b>Step 2</b> | The teacher engages the learner by interacting with the reinforcement element in front of him/her. |
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| <b>Step 3</b> | The communication partner opens his/her hand after the student initiates the request. |
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| <b>Step 4</b> | Before the learner picks up the desired object, the assistant will indicate to the learner to pick up the picture or symbol by a physical cue. It is important not to use any verbal prompting, as this helps the pupil to become more independent and less dependent on others. |
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| <b>Step 5</b> | The learner should pick up the symbol or image. The assistant helps him/her to place the symbol in the open hand of the communication partner. |
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| <b>Step 6</b> | The communication partner hands the object to the learner and names the object while making the exchange. At this point, sentence structure will be avoided. |
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| <b>Step 7</b> | The assistant and the communication partner shall not give any verbal indication during step 1 |
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| <b>Step 8</b> | The learner is rewarded for the exchange. |
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| <b>Step 9</b> | One teaching strategy in this phase 1 is the fading out of physical assistance. At first, full physical assistance is used. This should be gradually reduced so that the child can initiate and complete an exchange with little or no prompting. Sometimes it is helpful to switch |
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from full physical assistance to tactile or gestural prompting when the fading begins. However, it is important that the communication partner remains with an open hand whenever the child reaches for the picture. This fading may vary according to the needs and abilities of the learner.

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**Step 10** Once the fade-out is achieved, the communication partner fades out the use of the open hand prompt. The object is for the learner to initiate the delivery of the symbol before the communication partner opens his/her hand to receive the object.

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## Phase 2: Expanding spontaneity

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This phase will start when learners have acquired the skills described in phase 1. The aim of this phase is to increase students' spontaneity and the generalisation of image sharing.

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**Step 1** As in step 1, the environment is set up, positioning the communication partner appropriately and displaying the reinforcer.

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**Step 2** The communication partner draws the learner's attention by interacting with the reinforcer.

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**Step 3** As the activity progresses, the teacher moves away from the learner so that there is a shift to access the image or symbol.

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**Step 4** The learner picks up the picture or symbol without being told to do so.

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**Step 5** The teacher places the communication book at a distance so that the learner has to move to access the picture or symbol.

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**Step 6** The communication partner immediately hands the object to the learner and names it while making the exchange.

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**Step 7** No verbal indicators are provided throughout this phase 2.

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**Step 8** The teacher rewards the learner with the requested object after the exchange.

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In this phase, the aim is to encourage communicative exchange by having prompts take place in a variety of natural settings during the course of a typical day. The learner should also have many opportunities to exchange images with a variety of communication partners. Verbal prompts should be avoided, however. Sometimes it is helpful if the interlocutor interacts with the preferred object in front of the learner.

### Phase 3: Simultaneous image discrimination

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Once learners move independently to and from the book to a communication partner to initiate an exchange, phase 3 begins.

Phase 3A. Discrimination between a highly preferred icon and a distracting icon.

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| <b>Step 1</b> | The teacher will give two images of two elements (one preferred and one not) at a certain distance. The student chooses the preferred one, which is the correct one. |
| <b>Step 2</b> | The communication partner attracts the learner with both elements by interacting with them.  |
| <b>Step 3</b> | The learner holds the picture or symbol in his/her hand and moves some distance away to hand it to the communication partner.  |
| <b>Step 4</b> | The communication partner provides reinforcement as soon as the learner touches the correct picture.   |

When the learner picks up the correct picture. Verbal reinforcement can be given with "yes", "that's it" or "good choice".

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| <b>Step 5</b> | The communication partner immediately hands the object to the learner and names it while the exchange takes place.   |
| <b>Step 6</b> | Various distractors and pictures are offered in the communication booklet as the learner is able to discriminate between two or more pictures to increase the number of discriminations. |
| <b>Step 7</b> | The teacher does not give verbal cues during the exchange.   |
| <b>Step 8</b> | The teacher moves the pictures in the book.  |

Phase 3B. Teaching simultaneous picture discrimination.

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| <b>Step 1</b> | Images will be added to increase the number of discriminations to be made by the student as he/she is able to discriminate between two or more images. As many desired and undesired elements will be added. If the learner is confused, the number of images will be decreased until the last known point of success. |
| <b>Step 2</b> | The teacher will provide ample opportunity for the learner to make the request.  |
| <b>Step 3</b> | The communication partner presents the learner with two preferred items with two pictures.   |

The correspondence check is to make sure that the learner asks for and takes the object he/she asks for. A simple way to do this is to present two preferred items and have pictures of both in the communication book. When the student presents the communication partner with a picture, do not give the student the item or name it. If the pupil takes the object that matches the picture presented, you should allow access, reward him/her and name the object.

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| <b>Step 4</b> | When the learner makes the exchanges, the communication partner responds: "OK, take it". If the learner takes the other object, the communication partner blocks access and applies a correction procedure so that the learner has to take the correct image. |
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Error correction procedure.

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| <b>Step 1</b> | When the learner gives the wrong picture, the communication partner picks up the correct picture, shows it to the learner and verbally labels it. |
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| <b>Step 2</b> | When the learner looks at the picture, the communication partner prompts the learner to give the correct picture by holding out their hand close to the picture and giving physical cues if necessary. |
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| <b>Step 3</b> | When the learner gives the correct picture, the communication partner verbally acknowledges the correct answer, but does not give the object to the learner. The communication partner follows with an unrelated directive. |
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| <b>Step 4</b> | When the learner follows the directive, the communication partner engages the learner by interacting with the desired object. |
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| <b>Step 5</b> | When the learner touches the correct picture, the communication partner praises the learner verbally. |
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| <b>Step 6</b> | When the learner gives the correct picture, the communication partner hands the desired object to the learner. |
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#### Phase 4: Building the sentence structure

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When the learner uses and knows how to discriminate between 12 and 20 pictures to select the desired item, the learner moves on to phase 4. In this phase the learner is instructed to implement the word "I want" with one of the pictures already used in a sentence strip and to use it during the communicative exchange. The aim of this phase is for the learner to ask spontaneously using a simple sentence structure.

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| <b>Step 1</b> | The teacher or communication partner places the "I want" symbol on the left side of the sentence strip and waits for the learner to initiate the communicative exchange. |
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| <b>Step 2</b> | When the learner takes the picture from the board, the teacher guides the learner to place the picture to the "I want" symbol on the sentence strip. |
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| <b>Step 3</b> | The teacher guides the learner to take the sentence strip and give it to the communication partner. |
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| <b>Step 4</b> | The communication partner reads the sentence strip, points to the symbols on the strip and hands the requested item to the learner. |
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**Step 5** The teacher or communication partner replaces the sentence strip in the communication book.

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**Step 6** On repeated trials, the teacher gradually fades the guide until the learner is able to place the symbol next to the "I want" symbol.

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**Step 7** Once the exchange is established, the teacher guides the learner to place the "I want" symbol on the sentence strip before placing the image of the requested object.

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**Step 8** On repeated trials, the teacher gradually fades the guidance until the learner is able to place the symbol next to the "I want" symbol.

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At this point, the assistant starts asking the pupil to point to the symbols on the strip while the communication partner reads it.

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**Step 9** When the learner is able to point to the symbols while the communication partner reads the words, the communication partner pauses after saying "I want" and before identifying the item depicted, thus allowing time for the learner to verbalise the item himself/herself.

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**Step 10** If the learner verbalises something during the pause after the communication partner says "I want", the communication partner provides the requested item immediately. During the vocalisation he/she gives praise.

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### Phase 5: Responding to "What do you want"?

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In this phase, pupils will verbally and spontaneously request a number of objects or activities.

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**Step 1** The interlocutor points to the "I want" card and asks, "What do you want?"

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**Step 2** Once the learner is able to complete the phrase "I want" with a picture, the communication partner adds an increasing delay between the dot and the verbal prompt "What do you want?"

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**Step 3** When the pupil demonstrates that he/she is able to overcome the point indication by responding to the verbal signal with the symbol "I want" and the desired picture, the communication partner praises him/her.

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**Step 4** The communication partner provides ample opportunities for the learner to respond to the question "What do you want?" as well as opportunities for the learner to initiate requests without prompting.

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## Phase 6: Comments in response to a question

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The aim of this phase is to teach a new communicative function: labelling or naming things. The last part aims to eliminate the question so that the learner can start using spontaneous comments.

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| <b>Step 1</b>  | The communication partner gathers materials that include the items already in the vocabulary requested by the learner, along with pictures of the items, and a new picture or symbol or a new sentence prompt such as "I see".  |
| <b>Step 2</b>  | The communication partner holds up an object, then places the symbol "I see" and the image of the object near the sentence strip.   |
| <b>Step 3</b>  | The communication partner holds up the object and asks; "What do you see?", and then points to the "I see" symbol.  |
| <b>Step 4</b>  | If the student does not pick up the "I see" symbol after three to five seconds, the communication partner guides the student to pick it up and place it on the sentence strip.  |
| <b>Step 5</b>  | The communication partner waits five seconds to see if the student picks up and places the picture of the object on the sentence strip.   |
| <b>Step 6</b>  | If the student completes step 5, the communication partner says: "Yes, I see a _____".  |
| <b>Step 7</b>  | If the student does not complete step 5, the communication partner guides the student to do so and then says: "You see a _____".  |
| <b>Step 8</b>  | The communication partner reinforces the learner in steps 5 or 7 with verbal praise or other reinforcement.   |
| <b>Step 9</b>  | As the student is able to assemble and use the symbol "I see" to answer the question "What do you see?", the communication partner fades out the signs.   |
| <b>Step 10</b> | As the learner is able to assemble and use the exchange to answer "What do you see?", the communication partner increases the number of images and elements for the learner to discriminate the images in the assembly process. |

## Phase 6: Commenting in response to a question - Differentiate answers to questions

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| <b>Step 1</b> | As the learner is able to reliably answer "What do you see?", the communication partner places the symbol "I see" under the symbol "I want" in the upper left corner of the communication book. |
| <b>Step 2</b> | Once the learner is able to reliably answer "What do you see?", the interlocutor interjects the questions "What do you see?" with "What do you want?"   |
| <b>Step 3</b> | When appropriately requested by the learner, the communicative interlocutor gives the requested item.   |



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**Step 4** When the comment is correct, the communication partner responds with verbal confirmation and reinforcement.

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### **Phase 6: Comment in response to a question - Encourage spontaneous comments and incorporate attributes and modifications.**

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**Step 1** As the learner demonstrates his or her ability to make requests and respond to questions, the interlocutor removes the questions to encourage spontaneous comments.

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**Step 2** As the learner demonstrates competencies in phase 6, the communication partner provides opportunities for individualisation of requests by making images available for attributions or modifications. Attributes or modifiers can be added at any time after phase 4.

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