



Welcome to the *Pyramid Picture!* In this newsletter, you will find articles on the following topics:

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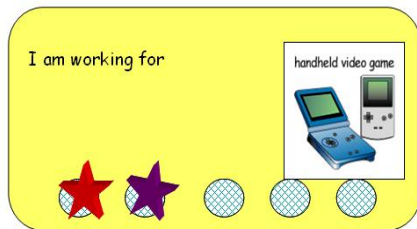
Welcome Back to School

Many educators across the United States have already started the new school year. Others will begin shortly. The start of another school year is always exciting, with new students and the corresponding successes and challenges. Remember to start the year on a positive note. Conducting individualized reinforcement assessments should be a top priority. Each student will have unique preferences ranging from carpet lint, to light-up toys to books and computers.

To begin this assessment process, there are wonderful reproducible forms on pages 347 and 351 in the PECS Second Edition Manual. These preference assessment forms should be distributed to caregivers, siblings, previous teachers, OTs, PTs, SLPs and others familiar with the target student. From there, the student should be observed interacting with the specified reinforcers. More systematic assessments will also likely reveal important information regarding student preferences. This may be done in a variety of ways, including systematic pairings of various items. Remember preferences change frequently! Sometimes the items that worked yesterday may not work on the following day.

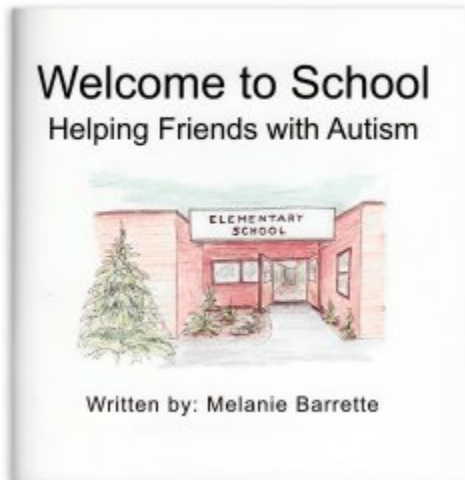
Prior to each lesson, the student should be offered a choice of 2-3

avored items, so that the reinforcer remains enticing from the student's perspective. The key to any good lesson is identification of a powerful reinforcer. This is the case for the first five phases of the PECS protocol, as the student is taught to request powerful reinforcers with increasing language complexity. However, identification of powerful reinforcers is also imperative for the majority of vocational/academic lessons. Students are encouraged to choose a reinforcer, prior to the beginning of the lesson. Token boards/"Let's make a deal" are then utilized as a visual representation of the progress towards earning the chosen reinforcer.



Finally, remember if there is no reinforcer, there is no lesson! If the student isn't currently interested in any of the items/activities offered, the student should not be expected to participate in a lesson. Compare this happening with arriving to work without the reinforcing paycheck/benefit package/etc. Typical adults would not voluntarily work without pay, so our students shouldn't be expected to participate in lessons without an identified reinforcer! Instead, spend time exploring other alternatives that may be motivating from the student's perspective.

For those educators working in inclusionary settings, it will be important to explain the students' use of PECS, and other strategies, to the typically developing peers in the classroom. A perfect resource to begin this dialog is our featured product, *Welcome to School – Helping Friends with Autism*.



[Click here for more information and/or to order this book.](#)

Teaching Waiting Skills

Many students with developmental disabilities have difficulty waiting. In fact, many typical adults have difficulty with delay to the access of a reinforcer. Waiting can be tough for everyone, yet this is a critical skill that we'll need to teach our students as early as possible.

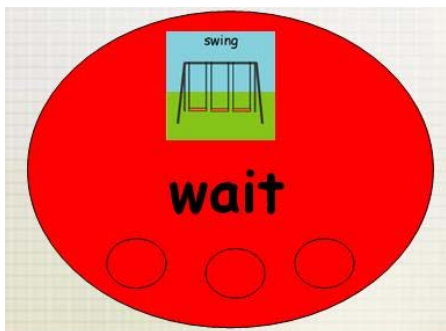
Begin by introducing waiting skills only when the teacher/trainer has control over the wait interval. For instance, I would never introduce wait at a long line at a restaurant. Rather, consider introducing waiting in a more structured setting. Prepare a visual to accompany this lesson. At Pyramid, we use a large orange oval with the word "wait" written in the middle.



For the initial teaching session, begin by having the student identify a reinforcer. Once the student has requested the item, quickly hand over the wait card while saying, "wait". Then instantaneously

remove the card and deliver the reinforcer. During the first wait interval, the student should only wait for $\frac{1}{2}$ second, as the goal is for the student to be successful. Gradually over time, begin to increase the amount of wait time. The student should move from waiting for $\frac{1}{2}$ second to one second, then two seconds, four seconds, eight seconds, doubling the wait increment upon success at each time interval. As a long-term goal, the student should be able to wait the number of minutes that is equivalent to the student's age. A four year old student should work towards waiting for four minutes. A sixteen year old learner should be able to wait for at least sixteen minutes.

For longer wait intervals, consider creating a wait bin/container. The bin should be filled with items that are somewhat interesting, but not highly reinforcing from the student's perspective. The teacher/trainer may also wish to consider adding visual elements to the wait card. For instance, a small patch of Velcro can be placed at the top of the wait card. The picture of the requested item can be placed at the top as a visual reminder. Velcro dots can be added to the bottom of the wait card to signify the passage of time. For instance for a student working on wait times of three minutes, each of the three Velcro dots would indicate one minute of wait time.



Though a structured learning environment is generally advisable for the initial training sessions, practical application of waiting skills should be targeted as quickly as possible. There are many naturally occurring waiting opportunities during the day including food preparation, waiting for staff members/family member to transition to another environment and waiting for a turn at a game. Remember that the student should only be expected to wait for the interval that he/she has currently mastered. For practicality, consider storing the wait cards and/or bins in locations where waiting is common (i.e. kitchen, classroom exit, etc.).

For information regarding purchase of the wait cards, please visit our website at www.pecs-usa.com. Is your student having difficulty with waiting skills? Pyramid can help! Contact Catherine Horton via phone (302-355-5979) or email (chorton@pecs.com) to discuss training and/or consultation services for your setting.

Happy Birthday to the Pyramid Autism Center!

The Pyramid Autism Center (PAC) celebrated its 10th Anniversary on August 1, 2009. PAC is a non-profit organization dedicated to serving the children and families of the Orange County, California autism community. The PAC school utilizes the Pyramid Approach to Education developed by Dr. Andrew Bondy and Dr. Beth Sulzer-Azaroff. PAC's emphasis is upon creating functional activities that stress the use of powerful and on-going reinforcement systems, while assuring children can effectively communicate and understand expectations. When such systems are in place, many challenging behaviors are significantly reduced. Congratulations to PAC on 10 years of wonderful work!

PECS Basic Training with Andy Bondy and Lori Frost!

Don't miss this opportunity to attend the PECS Basic Training presented by the creators of PECS! Andy Bondy, PhD and Lori Frost, MS/CCC-SLP will be presenting this world-renowned workshop in Philadelphia, PA on October 26 & 27, 2009. This training offers 1.3 ASHA CEUs or 7.0 BACB CEUs.



Registration is available online at www.pecs-usa.com or via phone at 888-732-7462. Act now, as seats for this training will fill up rapidly!

Pyramid Trainings and Consultation

Did you know that Pyramid Educational Consultants, Inc. is available for scheduling workshops and consultation within your

setting? Many school districts, organizations and families across the United States have significantly benefited from the guidance of our expert consultants. For more information regarding price and availability of our services, please contact Catherine Horton via email (chorton@pecs.com) or phone (302-355-5979).

Product Spotlight – Photo Surprise Activity Kit

The Photo Surprise Activity Kit is a favorite among professionals and parents! This kit contains everything you'll need for a fun, changeable PECS Phase VI commenting activity. Stack up to 40 pictures in the frame and pull the handle to switch from picture to picture. Change the pictures or switch their order so that the next picture is always a surprise. The kit comes with the Magic picture frame, two different pictures of 29 common objects, an Activity Board with hook Velcro®, a large Sentence Strip™, and all the Sentence Starter icons you'll need. A CD of the 58 pictures is also included.



[Click here to order this fantastic product for the low price of \\$49!](#)

Communication Book Donations

Do you have communication books that are no longer used by your learners? Pyramid Educational Consultants, Inc. is now accepting donations of used communication books to distribute to persons in need. Please send the communication books to:

Pyramid Educational Consultants, Inc.
13 Garfield Way
Newark, DE 19713

Thank you for your consideration!

Welcome Marsha Miller, BCBA

On July 1, 2009 Pyramid Educational Consultants, Inc. added a new member to our exceptional team of staff members. Marsha Miller is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst, currently residing in Harrisburg,

PA. Marsha earned her Master's Degree in Applied Behavior Analysis from Penn State University. Working for the state behavioral health system, being employed by both private and public schools, and having a family member diagnosed with autism has given Marsha a wide perspective on meeting the needs of children. Marsha has extensive experience implementing PECS and the Pyramid Approach to Education. Marsha recounted her initial exposure to PECS by indicating, "I was amazed to hear that PECS could help our students to initiate communication and even more amazed when I saw it succeed!" Pyramid is honored to have Marsha join our team!



Newsletter content written by Catherine Horton, MS, CCC-SLP.
Please direct any inquiries to chorton@pecs.com or 302-355-5979.

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