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Autism Agenda



Linn Benton Lincoln ESD-Cascade Regional Autism Program

5 Ways Individuals with Autism Communicate

Even verbally fluent individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have unique methods of communication; below, we've compiled five of the most common ways individuals with autism communicate. We tend to think of communication as a language-based tool, however, a large portion of communication is non-linguistic, relying on body-language, gestures, and tone of voice. Let's take a look at these communication methods—bearing in mind that we'll primarily be discussing the social communication skills present in high-functioning individuals with ASD.

I. Non-Verbal Communication

Many people affected by ASD develop little in the way of language skills, relying instead on non-verbal communication techniques. These include a wide range of behaviors, such as using:

- Gestures
- Pictures or drawings
- Crying and other emotive sounds
- Physically directing someone's hand to an object they want

While this can cause communication difficulties, parents and caregivers often become quite adept at reading these non-linguistic communications through context clues and repetition. For more information on non-verbal communication, the U.K.-based [National Autistic Society](#) has a wealth of information.

2. Echolalia

Echolalia refers to the repetition of phrases that people have heard, perhaps in a favorite movie or television program. These phrases may or may not "fit" the context in which they are spoken, however, they typically do point to something concrete. Parents of autistic children are encouraged to watch the programs in which these phrases are spoken to attempt to figure out what their child might be trying to communicate when they use particular phrases.

Continued on page 2.

5 WAYS INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM COMMUNICATE CONTINUED....

3. Focusing on the Literal Meanings of Words

Individuals with some form of ASD typically have trouble understanding idiomatic language and metaphors. Another implication of this trait is a difficulty understanding jokes and humor, which often rely on a sarcastic tone to convey the speaker's true meaning. A hallmark of the ways individuals with autism communicate is focusing on the "key words" of a sentence. One of the best ways to accommodate this communication style is to speak in simple, plain sentences without idioms or figures of speech that hide the "true message" you're trying to convey.

4. Moving from Topic to Topic

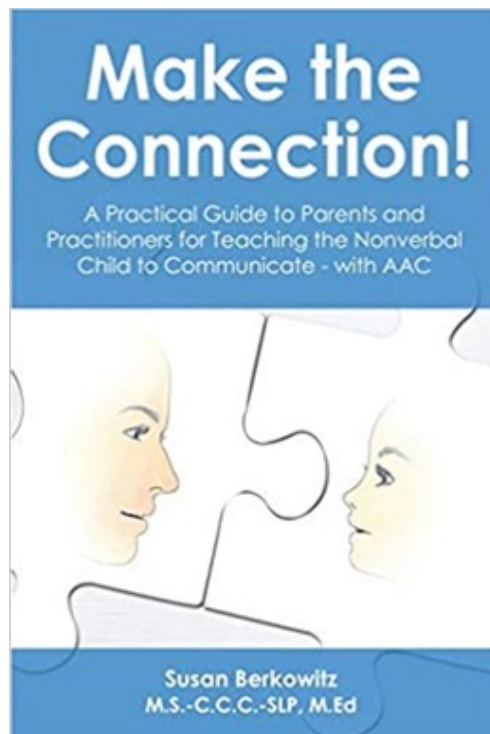
One difficulty individuals with autism find with communication is the ability to "stay on topic." Because their minds are moving very quickly and processing many stimuli, their thoughts may seem disorganized or unfocused. However, this usually isn't the case—unless an ASD individual has expressed the desire to stop talking about a given topic (in which case, you should definitely move on), they're usually open to revisiting previous conversation topics.

5. Speaking with no Eye Contact

The last tool we'll look at in the 5 ways individuals with autism communicate is the fact that often they will speak with you, but will not make eye contact. People affected by this condition are highly attuned to sensory details, and looking into someone's eyes can cause an overload of information. Some may prefer to speak with their eyes shut entirely, so as to focus only on the stimuli provided by the conversation. Understanding and accommodating this variety of communication is key to building better communication with ASD individuals.

<https://www.appliedbehavioranalysisprograms.com/lists/5-ways-individuals-with-autism-communicate/>

BOOK REVIEWS



Make the Connection: A Practical Guide to Parents and Practitioners for Teaching the Nonverbal Child to Communicate - with AAC by Susan Berkowitz

This book is for all of those parents of nonverbal children (with autism and other severe language disorders) and professionals who want to "get it right," but need the guidance to get there. We know that collaboration between school and home is a significant component in the lives of students who use picture-based communication. The information and ideas in this book are not unique; they are things the author has learned over the past 40 years from articles, books, seminars and most importantly, from her students. Much of this information is available elsewhere, but not in this unique format. This book has curated the ideas in a way that cuts away the jargon and discussion of research protocols, leaving all but the basic information and strategies to help parents and educators.

The LBL ESD Autism Agenda Newsletter is a compilation of national and regional resources designed to support families and school teams. Every effort is made to provide accurate and complete information in the LBL ESD Autism Agenda Newsletter; however, LBL ESD cannot guarantee that there will be no errors. For example, some of the content within curated resources from across the nation may not apply to Oregon. LBL ESD does not assume any legal liability for any direct, indirect or any other loss or damage of any kind for the accuracy, completeness, or usefulness of any information, product, or process disclosed herein, and do not represent that use of such information, product, or process would not infringe on privately owned rights.

WHAT ARE AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION?

What are Augmentative and Alternative Communication?

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) is a form of communication used instead of or along with talking.

AAC helps children who have difficulties hearing and/or speaking. These alternative forms of communication can help children take in and understand messages, as well as express their thoughts and ideas with others.

What are the different types of AAC?

There are unaided and aided forms of AAC.

Unaided Forms of AAC – require children to use their bodies to communicate. They can use sign language, gestures, and facial expressions. An example of this is a hand gesture like the ‘thumbs up’ sign.

Aided Forms of AAC – require a child to use equipment and devices to communicate. This could include a pen and paper, pictures, or a device that requires batteries or electricity.

What do AAC devices offer to a child?

AAC devices help bring together many parts of communication to include a child in more activities. The features on AAC device can include:

- Screens showing text for two people to share information
- Picture board touch screens with images and symbols
- Spelling and word recognition
- Internet to access information
- Multimedia, e.g. videos and photos
- Texting and cell phone apps
- Social media to connect with others



Can I purchase my own AAC mobile apps and devices for my child?

Mobile technology has made AAC software easier to access for families, however, children should always receive a formal evaluation for AAC by a speech and language pathologist who can choose a program that best suits the needs of the child.

Your healthcare provider can offer you a referral for a speech-language pathologist. Many pediatric therapy clinics also give free screenings to children.

<https://pathways.org/augmentative-and-alternative-forms-of-communication/>

LBL ESD CASCADE REGIONAL WEBSITE SUPPORTS

Autism website: <https://www.lblesd.k12.or.us/cascade-regional-program/autism/>

Augmentative Communication website: <https://www.lblesd.k12.or.us/cascade-regional-program/alternative-augmentative-communication-services/>

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PICTURE EXCHANGE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

What is the Picture Exchange Communication System or PECS?

By: Beverly Vicker, M.S., CCC-SLP

Description of the PECS program as defined by Lori Frost and Andrew Bondy

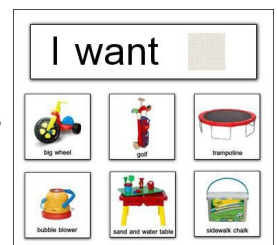
The Picture Exchange Communication System or PECS approach is a modified applied behavior analysis program designed for early nonverbal symbolic communication training. It is not a program designed to teach speech, although the latter is encouraged indirectly and some children begin to spontaneously use speech while enrolled in the PECS program. The PECS training program was developed at the Delaware Autistic Program. PECS training occurs during typical activities within the natural settings of the classroom and the home. The communication training occurs within a broader positive behavioral support context entitled the Pyramid Approach. Training techniques include strategies such as chaining, prompting/cuing, modeling, and environmental engineering. (See the training manual, video, and other print material published by Lori Frost and Andrew Bondy for details about the program.)

Professional training regarding PECS is required in order to implement the program as designed. Generally the training is provided at a two-day workshop. While speech pathologists might be the primary PECS program coordinator for a specific child, it is helpful to have others also attend the two-day trainings since they too will play an important role. These others could include parents, the classroom teacher, and classroom assistants. They will be important in identifying new vocabulary and may help construct some of the picture display symbols as well as provide the nonverbal individual with opportunities to use/learn the new vocabulary. Although many people receive their initial training from a Pyramid Educational Consultant, others may receive their training through a train-the-trainer model from a local individual who has had training beyond the two-day orientation and is certified to train others.

Who is a candidate for PECS training?

PECS training is not limited by age but rather by a small set of criteria. Thus, PECS training could be offered to a fifty year old adult with a cognitive impairment as well as to a two year old with no cognitive impairment.

First of all, the candidate for PECS training should be an intentional communicator. This means that the child (or adult) is aware of the need to communicate his/her message to someone, even if it is in a limited fashion. The child (or adult) who drags someone across the room to the location of an object that he or she wishes to have, has at least a beginning notion of intentionality. The child (or adult) who attempts to obtain things without visually checking for an adult or involving him or her in some fashion in the quest to fulfill a desire or need, may not be intentional and may need a different approach before PECS training. (See McLean, McLean, Brady, and Etter, 1991 for information about contact and distal gestures.)



Second, the individual should have some personal preferences, in addition to having intentionality. PECS helps to teach the concept of the power of alternative communication. If one has no or weak preferences, then it may be more difficult to understand and learn the POWER of effective alternative communication via the PECS approach. Sampling for preferences is a first step before beginning PECS training. It may be necessary to develop a repertoire of preferences and dislikes through trial and error or through a history of exposure to various types of food, objects, or activities when there are few strong preferences. (See Reichle, York, and Eynon, 1989 for additional information on identifying preferences.)

Picture discrimination ability is not a pre-requisite criterion for candidacy. Those individuals who do have discrimination skills, may make faster progress in the initial stages of the program. Some individuals, however, may spontaneously demonstrate that they not only have the ability to discriminate pictured material but that they also already know how to use pictures to communicate. These individuals might be locating and bringing pictures or catalogues on their own initiative to parents or teachers to indicate their desires, for example. These children (or adults) may be ready to begin more traditional augmentative programming; the latter would allow a greater variety of message generation during the initial stages. (See Beukelman and Miranda, 1998 for more specific guidance regarding augmentative communication.) Continued on page 5.

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PICTURE EXCHANGE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM CONTINUED...

Although the PECS strategy is primarily used with individuals who are nonverbal, it could be used with individuals who are primarily echolalic, those who have unintelligible speech, and those who have only a small set of meaningful words or signs in their repertoire. Careful consideration of the program and its strengths and weaknesses should play an important role in program selection for each prospective communication learner.

WHAT IS THE PECS TRAINING FORMAT?

Phase I

Programming for PECS begins with three people in the training situation, the child (or adult) who will be transmitting a message, the person who receives the message (e.g., Mom or the teacher), and the facilitative adult who deliberately assists the message sender to make the targeted response.



In Phase I, the program begins with enticement whereby the adult displays or shows a preferred object or food item to the child (or adult learner). As he or she reaches for the desired object, the facilitator assists the child to pick up a picture for the desired object or food item. He or she is physically assisted to give the picture to the message receiver who must be physically near the child (or adult) communicator. The physical closeness allows the exchange to easily take place. The adult who receives the message (picture) does not say anything until the picture is offered. At that juncture, the message receiver says something such as "Oh, you want a pretzel (or whatever the picture represents) and gives the item to the person making the request. In Phase I, there is variation of the items requested, the person who receives the message, the facilitator, and the environment in which the exchange takes place. The objective is to have approximately 80 exchanges during the course of the day.

Phase II

In Phase II, the exchange continues with attempts to increase the independence of the student. The facilitator is still available for as-needed assistance. The student learns to remove the picture from a display board for the exchange. He or she must engage in more physical movement than in Phase I in order to accomplish the exchange. It is preferable to have the child or adult who is the PECS user be responsible for carrying his or her own communication book.

Phase III

In Phase III, the student learns to select the target picture from a choice of multiple pictures that differ in various dimensions. Error correction strategies are used when the response is incorrect.

Phase IV

In Phase IV, the student combines the object picture with the carrier phrase "I want" on a sentence strip and gives the strip to the adult or communication partner.

Phase V

In Phase V, the student learns to respond to the question "What do you want?" by exchanging the sentence strip. Use of the questioning phrase is delayed until Phase V, because the exchange behavior should be automatic by that point in the programming sequence. Earlier use of the carrier phrase or an extended hand gesture is believed to provide undesirable cues relative to the desired behavior.

Phase VI

In Phase VI, the student learns to respond to the questions "What do you want?" vs. "What do you see?" vs. "What do you have?" This last phase is designed to introduce the young communicator to commenting behavior; the previous stages focused on requesting behavior.

Continued on page 6.

PICTURE EXCHANGE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM CONTINUED...

WHAT TYPES OF SYMBOLS SHOULD BE USED FOR PECS TRAINING?

The pictures used with the program may be photographs, colored or black and white line drawings, or even tangible symbols. Mayer-Johnson pictures symbols, often called PCS, although often used as stimulus material, are not a mandatory picture resource for the program. Selection of picture representation type and size is dependent on individual needs. (See the IRCA article entitled Visual Resources for Enhancing Communication for Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Other Disabilities which is located on the IRCA website for a listing of options.)

IS IT NECESSARY TO FOLLOW THE TOTAL PECS PROTOCOL?

Published reports regarding PECS are based on implementation of the program as defined above. The program may take several months or several years to complete.

Not everyone who says that he or she is using PECS is running the program as designed, however. Some may use the strategy of a picture exchange but do not adopt the PECS procedures and phases. Many people try to run the program without using a facilitator in the early stages. The latter would not be considered as representing PECS programming, although it might be very successful with selective individuals. Following the protocol for the first three stages and then shifting to a more traditional AAC intervention program, however, is recognized by Frost and Bondy as a legitimate adaptation of the PECS program.



Summary

PECS can be an effective program to assist specific individuals with autism spectrum disorders to become more effective communicators. Decisions about the use of the PECS program, any modifications of it, co-programming, or preliminary programming must complement and reflect the needs of the individual emergent communicator and should be made by the entire treatment/instructional team.

<https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/articles/what-is-the-picture-exchange-communication-system-or-pecs.html>

HALLOWEEN COVID SOCIAL STORIES

1. Halloween During COVID-19 Story

Halloween is definitely going to be different in 2020, due to COVID-19. This story is meant to help work through those differences with little learners. There is also a page where children can draw what they are going to do this year.

This free story is helpful for special education teachers, preschool teachers, speech therapists and parents: (suggestion: use Google Chrome Browser to open the social story)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jIn1VyuLtOwvAGZ7ZYJ40mdXEVXf6Moc/view>

<https://www.autismlittlelearners.com/2020/10/halloween-during-covid-19-story.html>



2. CORONAVIRUS AND HALLOWEEN BY LITTLE PUDDINS

In this blog post I share a Coronavirus inspired FREE Social Story I have created to help children with additional needs understand Halloween this year and why they cannot Trick or Treat. I also give you some Halloween activities you can do within the four walls of your home.

Please go to the following website address to read the rest of the article and download the free social story:

<https://littlepuddins.ie/coronavirus-halloween-autism/>

3. Teachers Pay Teachers and Simply Special Ed have more amazing Social Stories and supports at:

<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Browse/Search:free%20halloween%20social%20stories>

<https://www.simplyspecialed.com/>

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TIPS FOR USING ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY DEVICES

Tips for Using Assistive Technology Devices

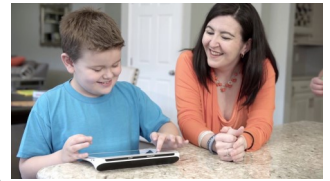
Tablets and other devices can be great tools for autistic people of all ages. Autism Speaks has compiled the following tips to help individuals with autism benefit from using assistive technology devices in all areas of life. Read our tips below to learn more and get started.

Using Your Assistive Technology Device for Communication

There are many wonderful apps which focus on developing language. Many families and teachers are particularly interested in helping their children and students learn to talk using a device. This can be very helpful for individuals who are having difficulty learning language. I recommend you work closely with your speech and language therapist on how to incorporate assistive technology into the treatment plan. In the meantime here are some tips to get you started:

What to look for in an app:

For beginning language learners you want to have an app that has lots of pictures. Some apps come with plenty of pictures; others let you upload your own photographs. The app should also speak the word when the picture is touched. It's also nice if you can control how many pictures are displayed at a time, and make your own categorization system to keep track of all the different pictures.



Using Your Device to make a Request

Step 1: Start by modeling how it's done! When the individual wants something, have the device out and touch the picture so the device says the word. Repeat the word yourself, then hand over what he or she is asking for. For example, if he or she wants another slice of pizza, press the device picture of a piece of pizza. The device says "pizza", you repeat "pizza", and you hand over the pizza.

Step 2: Any time the device user tries to repeat the word, or say the word, make sure to reward him! After doing the above example many times, he or she may make a "p" sound when they want pizza, or repeat the word after the device. If the device user makes any attempt to communicate in this way, make sure to hand over the pizza (or whatever he wants) right away.

Step 3: Any time you're the individual tries to communicate using the device, make sure to reward him or her! If he or she presses a picture, make sure to give the requested item, even if you're not sure that's really what he/she wants. That will help them learn to associate the pictures with objects. At first you may want to have only one or two pictures up at a time on the device, until the individual learns how to use it. In most apps, you can increase and decrease the number of pictures on the screen at one time.

Keep in mind:

If you are using the device primarily to teach language, you might want to avoid putting games on it at first, at least until you're the user is consistently communicating. Otherwise he may open games when you want him to be talking to you!

If you're using the device for communication, make sure it's available all the time, you don't want to take away his or her voice.

This is just the beginning! Teachers or speech and language pathologist can help you start to use the device in conversations once your child has the basics. Continued on page 8.

TIPS FOR USING ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY DEVICES CONTINUED...

Using Your Device for Daily Activities

Your device can help individuals with daily activities and routines. They can help with staying on a schedule, and laying out the steps in completing activities.

What to look for in an app:

There are many different scheduling apps, as well as ones with visual supports. Which one is best will depend on your needs and types of activities.

Ways to use your device for daily activities:

Step 1: Keep a schedule on the device, with reminders that pop up when it's time for the next activity.

Step 2: Have steps for activities that are difficult for the individual with autism, such as teeth brushing, getting dressed, etc. You can have pictures with each step in putting on pajamas that the device user can follow along to help increase his/her independence.

Step 3: Use a visual schedule to help with evening routines. For example, after school you may have a snack, then do homework, then be allowed to play outside. Having a picture of what he or she is supposed to be doing first and what's coming next may help keep them focused.

Keep in mind:

Ask treatment providers to help you set up a routine and set up the apps!

Using Your Device as a Reward

Many individuals with autism find the device very motivating, and this is a good opportunity to use it to encourage new skills.

What to look for in an app:

Give special attention to games that are engaging for the user!

Ways to use as a reward:

Step 1: Choose a behavior you want to increase that is appropriate for the device user's skill level. This may be something simple like playing nicely with a sibling, or something more complicated like getting ready for school independently.

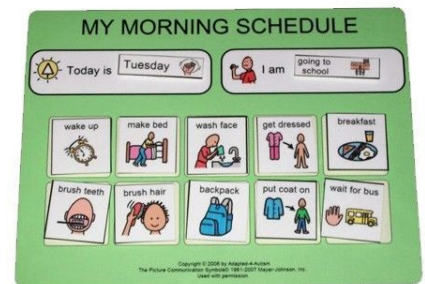
Step 2: Break down the behavior into small steps that you can reward. For example, if you want them to play nicely with a sibling, you may break down the behavior by rewarding for every minute he or she plays without hitting. Over time you can increase the demands, to two minutes without hitting, then five minutes without hitting before he gets the device. If you choose something like getting ready for school independently, first you would help him /her through most steps, and have him brush his teeth independently before getting the device. Once this is consistent you'd have him/her eat breakfast and brush their teeth before playing on the device. You can add in getting dressed, packing a back-pack, and other tasks over time.

Step 3: Make sure you're consistent. Whatever step they are working on should result in the reward each time a task is completed. Remember not to give the reward at other times. This sends mixed messages. Over time you can add in more behaviors that can earn time on the device.

Keep in mind:

- A behavioral therapist or teacher can help you pick an appropriate behavior and reward system.
- You may need to set a timer to indicate when it's time to stop playing on the device.

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/tips-using-assistive-technology-devices>

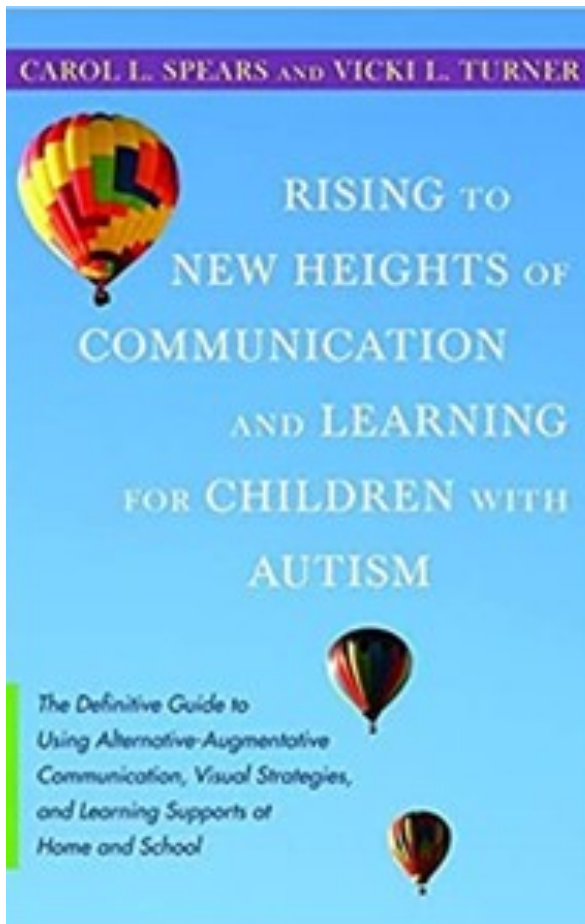
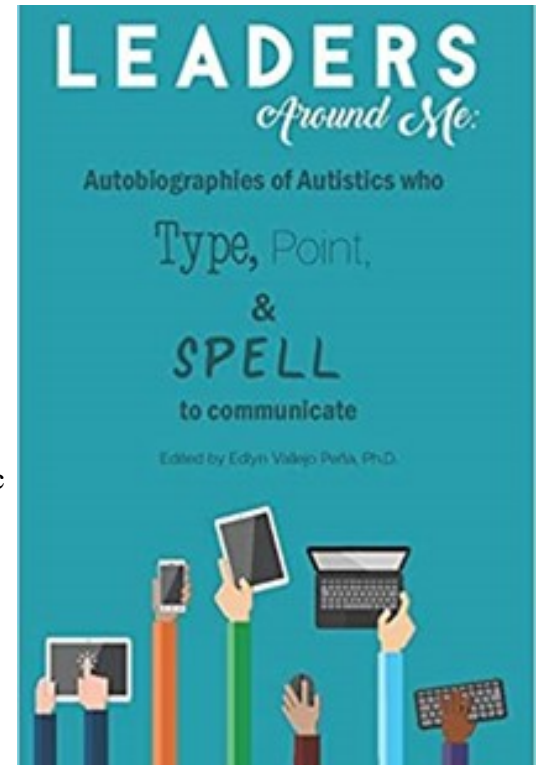


BOOK REVIEWS

Leaders Around Me: Autobiographies of Autistics who Type, Point, and Spell to Communicate

by Edlyn Vallejo Pena

This book is a compilation of 45 autobiographies of extraordinary individuals who use keyboards, letter boards, and communication devices. The authors demonstrate that people who experience communication differences have the potential to achieve major accomplishments under accessible, inclusive, and supportive circumstances. Each autobiographical narrative ends with reflection questions to encourage reader engagement and reflection. All autistic individuals deserve autistic leaders around them for support and mentoring.



Rising to New Heights of Communication and Learning for Children with Autism

by Carol L. Spears

Greater integration into home and school activities, along with improved behavior and academic success can be achieved using alternative-augmentative communication (AAC). Exploring the various communication and intervention options available and offering straightforward techniques and strategies for using them effectively, this book clearly explains everything families, teachers, therapists and other professionals need to know in order to improve a child's communication, behavior, social and academic skills. Chapters follow a consistent, user-friendly format, answering the questions Who, What, Why, How, Where and When about every technique. This book will be essential reading for anyone looking to improve social interaction between children with pervasive developmental disorders and those around them.

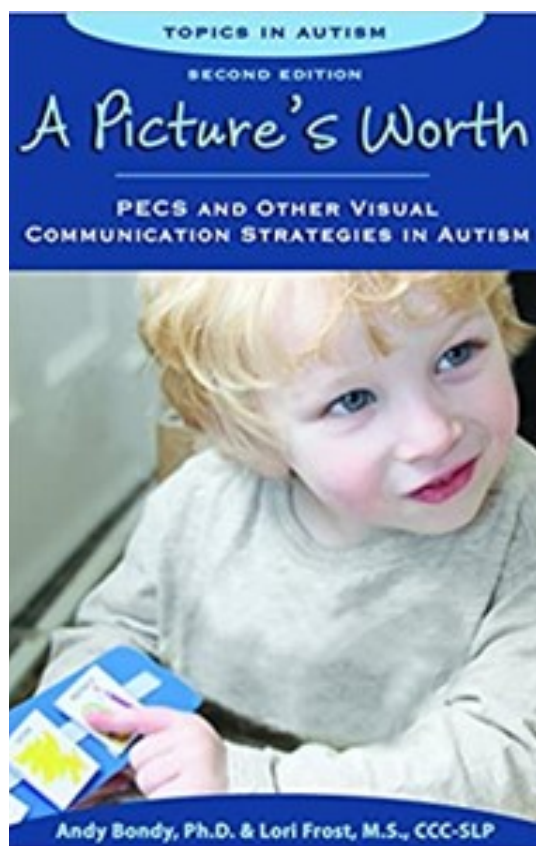
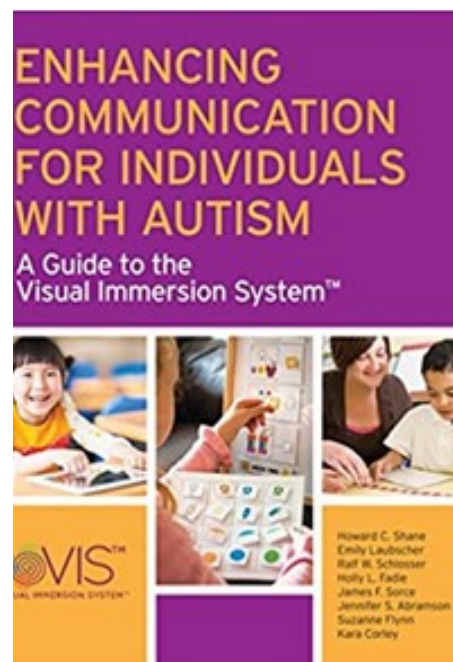
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BOOK REVIEWS

Enhancing Communication for Individuals with Autism: A Guide to the Visual Immersion System

by Howard Shane & others

Discover the Visual Immersion System (VIS), a practical, research-based intervention framework that taps into the strong visual processing skills many children on the spectrum have. You'll learn how to use readily available resources—from photos and symbols to apps and software—to create a customized system of visual supports that boost seven key communicative functions: protest and refusal, organization & transitions, requesting, directives, commenting, questions, and social pragmatics. For each of the functions, you'll get comprehensive how-to guidance on choosing tools and materials, conducting systematic instruction, collecting data, and assessing how well interventions are working. A must for SLPs, interventionists, and educators, the innovative VIS approach will ensure better communication and higher quality of life for children with autism.



A Picture's Worth: Pecs and Other Visual Communication Strategies in Autism

by Andy Bondy and Lori Frost

This user-friendly guide introduces PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System), a simple and empowering communication tool in which partners exchange cards with photos or line drawings representing objects, attributes, and actions. A child or adult who has delayed or no speech can easily express his basic desires (e.g., "ice cream") or needs using a PECS card without prompting from another. And as a person's PECS usage progresses, he or she learns to put pictures together in sentences to express desires (e.g., "I want chocolate ice cream."), to comment, and to ask questions. **A Picture's Worth** examines verbal communication development and how autism affects these skills, showing how a child's poor communication skills can lead to problem behaviors. Providing communication options--PECS and the other augmentative and alternative communication strategies (AAC) described in the book--reduces frustration and enhances learning. This new edition cites research that proves PECS and other AAC strategies do not interfere with the development of speaking skills, and actually can provide a boost to the acquisition of these skills.

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VISUALS



Simple Communication Core Board

Linn Benton Lincoln ESD
Cascade Regional Autism
Program

905 4th Ave SE
Albany, Or. 97321

Tel: 541 - 812-2600
Fax: 541 926-6047
E-mail: webmaster@lblead.k12.or.us

Autism Consultants:

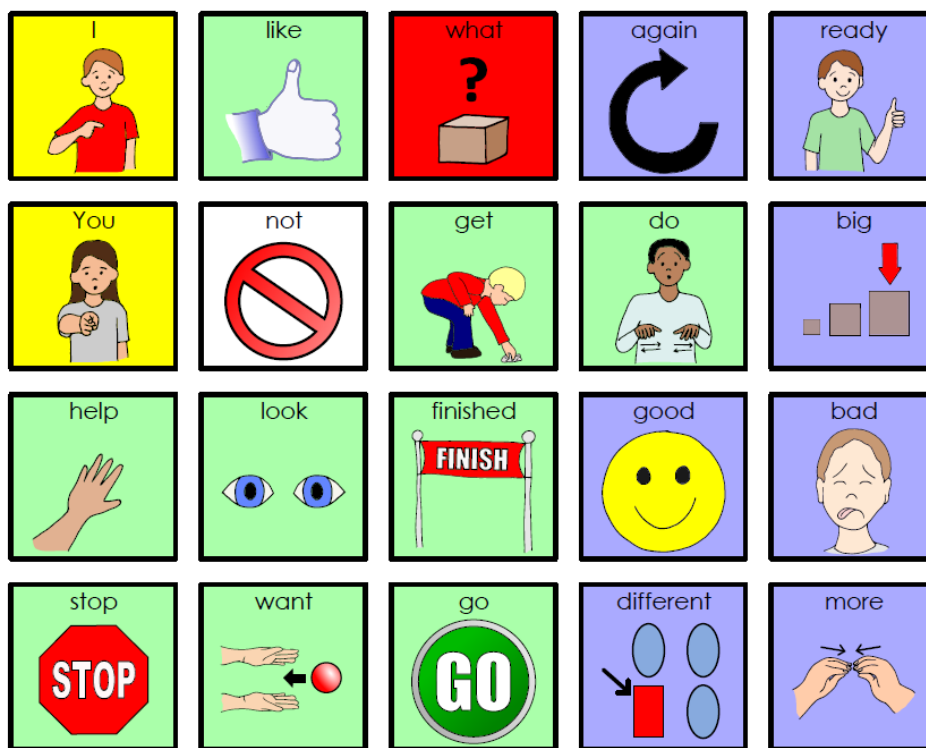
Skye McCloud-
skye.mccloud@lblead.k12.or.us
541-336-2012

Ryan Stanley-
ryan.stanley@lblead.k12.or.us
541-812-2773

Michelle Helton-
michelle.helton@lblead.k12.or.us
541-812-2674

Amanda Stenberg-
amanda.stenberg@lblead.k12.or.us
541-812-2676

Michelle Neilson-
michelle.neilson@lblead.k12.or.us
541-812-2678



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