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PICTURE EXCHANGE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

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Summary written by Laura Deer M.S. CCC/SLP, CAS

TARGET POPULATION

- Originally developed for children with autism, PDD and other socio-communicative disorders, but it can be modified to use with people of all ages and various communication problems
- People who do not display functional or socially acceptable speech (e.g. people who are echolalic or mute).
- People who rarely initiate communication, avoid interactions, or are dependent upon prompts

PURPOSE

- To teach students to initiate requests without a cue or verbal prompts
- To teach spontaneous commenting and other language concepts are taught during late stages.

PHASE I: THE PHYSICAL EXCHANGE

- Assess for reinforcing objects or edibles
- Two trainers: one communication partner, one physical prompter
- When a student reaches for an item the physical prompter assists the student to pick up a single picture and hand it to the communication partner.
- Student is socially reinforced and the object is given to the student
- The physical assistance is faded out.

PHASE II: EXPANDING SPONTANEITY

- Student learns to take a picture from a communication board/book.
- Distance is gradually increased between student, communication partner, and pictures.

PHASE III: PICTURE DISCRIMINATION

- Student learns to discriminate between multiple pictures
- Initially, preferred and non-preferred/irrelevant item pictures are presented. Then, two non-preferred item pictures are presented. Can use a blank distracter card if non-preferred does not work.
- Prompt incorrect by saying, "You asked for _____. And point to item. Then gestured to preferred item and say, "If you want _____ this then tell me _____ (gesture to appropriate picture)."
- Picture size is reduced from 2-inches to 1-inch when the student can discriminate between 8 and 10 pictures.

PHASE IV: SENTENCE STRUCTURE

- Student is physically guided to put "I want" picture on a sentence strip with desired picture and give to communication partner. (physical assistance is faded)
- Partner reads sentence to student and encourages student to point to pictures or to say what they want.

PHASE V: RESPONDING TO "WHAT DO YOU WANT"

- With the desired object present, the trainer points to the "I want" picture and asks the student, "What do you want?"
- The point prompt is faded.
- Opportunities for spontaneous communication still present.

PHASE VI: RESPONDING AND SPONTANEOUS COMMENTING

- "I see" and "I have" pictures are introduced to the student.
- Trainer presents a non-preferred item and asks the student, "What do you see?"
- When the student responds correctly an unrelated reinforcement is provided.
- Walks around the home or school provide spontaneous commenting opportunities. The trainer encourages these responses by pointing and saying general comments like, "Wow."

Introducing Additional Language Concepts

- Color size and location concepts can be taught for describing and differentiating between items.
- Eye contact can be taught by guiding the student's hand to gently touch the communication partner on the arm or shoulder.

CORRESPONDENCE CHECKS

- Ensures that the student associates the correct picture with the item.
- After presenting the picture, the student is encouraged to take the item they asked for.
- If student takes incorrect item, and error correction plan is implemented
- Begin during phase III / Picture Discrimination.

GOOD TO KNOW

- Use different communication partners, environments, and items to promote generalization
- Don't use verbal prompts unless otherwise specified.
- Provide many opportunities throughout the day.
- The student should be treated as though he/she were really talking. Pictures should always be available as a part of natural communication.
- Especially during early stages, items should always be available if the pictures are available.

ADVANTAGES

- Requires minimal knowledge and activity on the part of the speaker
- Relatively low cost and portable to many settings
- Easy and fast for the trainers and students to learn
- Provides functional meaningful interactions
- Large number of children develop spoken language
- Associated with a decrease in problem behaviors
- Capitalizes on naturally occurring reinforcement

DISADVANTAGES

- Most studies into efficacy rely on case studies and informational reports.
- The creators have written much of the published information.
- Empirical studies that have been published include a small number of subjects.

For More Information

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