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| The Picture Exchange Communication Case History Assignment |
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| **SED 6050** |
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**Selection of a Child**

Isaac is an eight-year old child diagnosed with autism. He lives with his mother, younger sister and other family members. He is currently enrolled in second grade and placed in an Autism Spectrum Disorder categorical classroom. He is primarily non-verbal but he does make sounds. Isaac enjoys music and one of his sounds is very much like the chorus of “Old McDonald Had a Farm”. When the song is sung, he will make his sounds in the appropriate place in the song. He also has a sound that sounds a lot like “cookie”. He says “ookie” and will at times lead an adult to the closet door where the snacks are stored.

**Critical Communication Checklist**

Isaac is currently able to communicate appropriately in eight of the twenty seven areas indicated on the Critical Communication Skills Checklist. Isaac appropriately puts his shoes and/or coat on to indicate his desire to leave the room. He will also take an offered item to indicate his acceptance of the item. He will stop and wait when told to “wait”. He will “sit down” appropriately using both visual and oral directions. He will “stop” when shown a PECs card but will not consistently stop when given a verbal direction. Isaac will respond to a “come with me” oral direction but not a visual direction. He will transition appropriately from work to play, but play to work often requires more physical management.

While Isaac is able to communicate many of his needs, he does not always do so in an age appropriate manner. He will often lead adults to the closets where snacks are contained, but there are times that he will climb on a chair to access the closets. He will not request a toy, but will get it on his own. He does not request toys that are out of reach and/or sight. He will lead adults to the door to indicate his desire to leave the room for either a walk or to go home. Generally when Isaac is working at his desk, he is buckled into his chair. When he wants to be finished with a task, he will point to the buckle to have you open it. He can now manipulate the belt on the chair to enlarge it and slip out of the chair when he desires. However, he will also now get the belt out to be voluntarily buckled into the chair. If Isaac does not want an offered object, he will push the object away from himself.

In the area of visual directions, signally Isaac’s name was not attempted. He does not respond visual requests for the following: “come here”, “give it to me”, “go get…”, “put it back/down”, or “Let’s go.” If he sees his jacket or shoes in the classroom, he will occasionally use the items to indicate his desire to leave. Isaac responds slightly better to oral directions. He will occasionally react appropriately to his name being called, “stop”, and “go get…” He will put something down when orally told if the speaker is advancing towards him. He will come if the speaker is holding a desired object but Isaac does not respond to “give it to me”.

Isaac does not follow a visual schedule with any regularity.

**Assessing Reinforcers**

Isaac is highly motivated by food. His favorite motivators are store brand fruit loops. Isaac can taste the difference between the store brand and the national brand and will not eat the national brand. He also loves crunchy peanut butter, fruit snacks, popcorn and Cheez-its. He especially enjoys drinking apple juice and chocolate milk. His other highly preferred items include Duplo’s and puzzles. For all of these items Isaac will reach for them, show pleasure in them and take them again.

 Neutral items for Isaac include: balls, shape sorter pieces and books. Isaac will interact with these items on his own, but they are not an inducement to work at requesting them. Interestingly, Isaac’s three rejected items are food. He does not like Goldfish, rolls or cheese. He pushes them away when they are offered.

**The Phases of PEC’s: How the child communicates.**

I started working with Isaac at the end of February when I was asked to be a long-term substitute teacher in his classroom. Before my arrival, Isaac was either being held and/or rocked to sleep or running wild in the room. He was also allowed to wonder around the room while eating. He was known to climb up on chairs to open cabinets and closets to get food as he desired.

Isaac had been trained in the first three phases of PECs by the school speech therapist prior to my working with him but I had to search the room to find his PECs book because the teacher was not using it on a daily basis with him. I reintroduced Isaac to his PECs book by utilizing food cards. At first he would grab any card and give it his communication partner. All he remembered was that the card meant he was asking for food. Over the next month or so, we worked multiple times a day at discriminating between various cards for peanut butter, fruit loops, chocolate milk and juice. All these items are highly preferred. Currently, Isaac can easily discriminate between all four cards. The rate of discrimination does decrease when he is really hungry or getting tired.

One of the “ah-ha” moments came about three weeks ago. I watched as Isaac climbed on a chair to get into the cabinet with peanut butters. As he stood on the chair, he stopped and thought for a moment. He then climbed down and went to the table. I watched in amazement as he removed the correct card from the top of the PECs book and handed it to me. I am so proud of the progress he is making.

Last week Dori, the speech therapist and I had an opportunity to work on phase IV with Isaac. Initially, Dori was the communication partner, while I was the physical prompter. After about 15 minutes, Dori and I switched places so that I could practice as well. I was surprised that within that half-hour time period, Isaac required less and less prompting to do the entire sequence of requesting food. The “I want” card was placed on the sentence strip and Isaac would discriminate between fruit loops and fruit snacks. He would then put the preferred food card on the strip, remove the strip from the binder and hand it to the communication partner. The partner would then read the sentence strip and give him a few of the requested food items. The hardest part for Isaac was the physical removal of the sentence strip from the binder. It was difficult for his little hands to separate the Velcro. My staff and I have been working with Isaac multiple times each day on phase IV. He is getting more consistent with his use of the sentence strip. He requires less and less prompting to do each step of the phase. Like the discrimination, his rate of accuracy decreases when he is very tired or hungry.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of the PECS model**

By and large I love the PECs model. I have seen huge strides in Isaac since we reintroduced PECs to his school life. Three months ago, Isaac ran around the room while eating, climbed into cupboards and stole food from classmates. Now, he sits while eating, requests food by using the PECs cards and generally leaves his classmates food alone. He has gone from eating alone at lunch to having two other students eat with him on a daily basis. While Isaac still gets up and tries to eat on the run, he does it with a twinkle in his eye. Isaac is content at school because he can more easily communicate his wants and needs. I can foresee a day when Isaac is able to use PECs throughout the day to communicate in a meaningful way to communicate not only his wants and needs but also his ideas and comments.

 One down side to PECs is need for two people for the initial training times. This has been a challenge in a classroom setting when we have to pull a second person from another student. Another negative is that there is a lot of prep work involved. From the binders to the cards, the teacher and/or parent have to be very organized. In Isaac’s case, one negative is that PECs does not appear to be being used at home. Mom does appear to have some issues of her own and PECs may just be one thing to many for her.

 I would love to see an app version of PECs developed that goes through the phases but uses a hand-held device and a swipe motion rather than a notebook and cards. I know that there are apps out there, but I have not seen an PECs based one.