Introduction

- PECS is an alternative communication method in which a speaker gives a picture icon to a listener (i.e., a communicative partner [CP]) in exchange for a desired item or activity (Frost & Bondy, 1994).
- The PECS manual prescribes the use of a second instructor to deliver physical prompts to teach the communication response during Phases 1 and 2.
- In response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, practitioners must consider how to adapt instructional techniques that reduce virus transmission (e.g., limiting number of individuals in room).
- The purpose was to develop and evaluate modifications to the PECS manual that do not include a second instructor.

Method

**Participant and Setting:** Bella is a 5-year-old female diagnosed with ASD. She did not have an echoic repertoire nor an established communication system. Sessions were conducted throughout her clinical appointments at a university-based autism center.

**Dependent Variable:** Icon exchanges defined as picking up icon, reaching to CP, and releasing icon into CP’s open hand (see phase-specific additional criteria).

**Procedures:**
- **Baseline:** No consequences delivered for icon exchanges. Assessed responding across the six PECS phases across consecutive 2-minute sessions. (Cummings et al., 2012).
- **Phase 1:** 3s prompt delay to physical prompts delivered by CP.
- **Phase 2A:** Progressively increased the distance to exchange icon with CP using a changing criterion design (CCD).
- **Phase 2B:** Progressively increased the distance to the PECS book using a CCD. Added interspersed probes of traveling to the CP at 2, 4, 6, and 9 steps.

Results

- During baseline conditions (data not depicted), Bella engaged in an average of fewer than one correct response across Phases 1 and 2.
- During Phase 1, Bella’s performance met the mastery criterion. She engaged in 100% correct icon exchanges across three CPs, eight items, and three social activities. There were 28 errors.
- During Phase 2A, Bella’s performance met the mastery criterion. She engaged in 90% correct icon exchanges when the CP was across the room, across three CPs and with eight items. There were eight errors.
- During Phase 2B, Bella’s performance met the mastery criterion. She engaged in 90% correct icon exchanges when the PECS book and the CP were across the room, across three CPs and eight items. There were three errors.
- Bella acquired the communication responses in Phases 1 and 2 of PECS without a second instructor. This demonstrates the efficacy of the modified instructional procedures.
- Due to restrictions in response to COVID-19, limitations include:
  - We evaluated outcomes in only one environment (the child’s classroom).
  - We assessed communication responses across three CPs, rather than five, as recommended in the PECS manual.
- This clinical evaluation is ongoing, and Bella is receiving Phase 3 instruction.

References