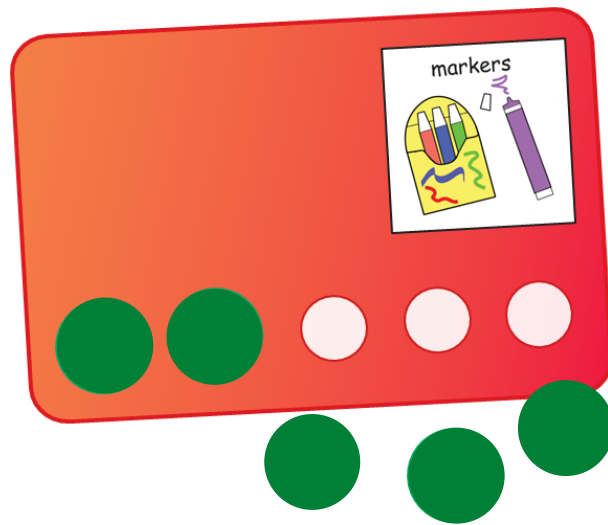


Visual Reinforcement Cards

Visual Reinforcement Cards provide individuals with a visual reminder of potential rewards for staying on task and focusing on the lesson.



Why Use Visual Reinforcement?

When we work for an employer, there are several things we want to ensure are part of our contract (e.g., what our job involves, how much we will be paid, when we will be paid, how much time we can have off). We also want to be certain that each element of the contract is described in a written contract. Another way to think about this written contract is to see it as a visual representation of the deal between the employer and the employee.

Teaching a student a skill involves helping the child to do something different. If the teacher does not observe some new act - tying shoes, saying a word, etc. - then the lesson is not complete. Similarly, an employer wants the employee to accomplish something - complete the job - build the car, paint the house, etc. When we work for someone, we expect to have a clear contract describing our work conditions.

Usage Guide

One of our guiding principles at Pyramid Educational Consultants is that if something is important to us (as adults), it is important to set it up for students. Therefore, if we have a visual contract with our employer, then we should ensure that students have a visual contract with us detailing our “deal.”

As noted in *The Pyramid Approach to Education*, 2nd Edition (Bondy, 2011), teachers should always arrange for “Let’s make a deal” with a student prior to lessons or other demands. A visual representation of this deal will ensure consistently strong performances.

How else can a visual reinforcement system help?

Within the Pyramid Approach we advocate a ‘reinforcer-first’ strategy - we would never take a new job without first knowing what the salary would be! By using this visual reinforcement system you can assure your students by using the same approach. For example, a student, at one point or another, will lose his focus on the lesson. He may appear to be distracted by something in the environment or he may engage in a form of self-stimulation. Typically, when these behaviours occur, the teacher will remind the student about the work that needs to be done (e.g., “You need to do your work!” or “Hey! Pay attention!”).

Rather than a sophisticated teaching strategy, these prompts simply rely upon ‘nagging.’ However, with a visual reinforcement system depicting what the student may earn, when the student’s attention waivers, the teacher can simply point or gesture to the icon representing the next reward or even ask, “Do you want your cookie?” Such prompts should help the student focus on the potential reward. Most often, he will get back to work to earn the reward. Occasionally, the student will continue to look out the window. This means that there is no current reinforcer for the lesson and, thus, there is no lesson! The teacher would need to renegotiate the deal.

As students get older and/or more skilled, the deals should be stretched in time and quantity. Therefore, a student would gradually begin to work for 5, ten, fifteen, twenty minutes before cashing in his tokens. In addition, as a student becomes acquainted with the process, he will be able to earn opportunities to gain access to the reinforcer menu at the end of the deal, rather than having to select the exact reward prior to each deal. This approach is similar to when we earn a paycheck and determine how we will spend it after we get our money!

Usage Guide

How do we teach a student who uses PECS about a “deal?”

At the start of PECS®, it is important to reinforce a student's requests as frequently as possible. However, over time this strategy becomes impractical. We all want the student to become increasingly independent, which means we want him to work longer and longer before he accesses his reinforcers. We suggest starting to teach deals within a few days of a student showing progress on Phases I and II of PECS.

The lesson about deals starts with a student approaching an adult to make a request. Rather than immediately rewarding the student, the teacher would ask the student to complete a simple task (e.g., “Pick that up”). The teacher would then say, “Nice work!” and give the student the originally requested item. Notice that the student does not need to go through another PECS exchange because he already has made a request. The “work” in this situation is something we know the student can do and is very quickly completed. Over time, the teacher can gradually increase what is expected of the student - by adding items for the student to pick up, or by requiring simple actions with the item or placement of the item in particular locations.

The key to using this strategy is understanding that the interaction - the deal - starts with the student indicating what is wanted before the teacher gives an instruction. Remember that we, as employees, would not take a job if the boss said, “Hey, I want you to do this job for me and in a year or so, I'll tell you what you've earned.” We would only accept the job if we knew our salary before doing the work. The same should be true for a student - he needs to know what he can earn before he learns about the job.

Note that at the beginning of teaching deals, we don't use a visual representation. This is introduced once the student understands that he will be rewarded for doing a job!

Any Modality Will Work

Note that this is important for all of our students, not just those using PECS. The strategy described above can be used following requests in any modality.

Usage Guide

Introducing the Visual Contract

Once the student reliably completes short deals, introduce the visual reinforcement system.

Rather than immediately issuing an instruction (as noted above), the teacher places the icon on the one-circle card. She then gives a simple instruction. As soon as the student completes the task, the teacher gives the student a token (e.g., a penny, a sticker, a trinket that is age-appropriate) and guides the student to place it on the circle.

This action is equivalent to “paying” the student. Then teach the student to take the token and give it to you. Immediately give the student the item corresponding to the icon on the card. In this manner, the student is taught to “buy” the item by cashing in the token. We would suggest keeping this strategy in place throughout the day and for several days (or until it is clear that the student quickly cashes in a token upon receiving one).



How Do We Increase the Size of the Deal?

Once the student has mastered receiving and cashing in a single token, the teacher would move to the two-circle card. Again, the sequence begins with a request by the student. When the student completes a portion of the task, the teacher would provide one token.

Usage Guide

At this point, the student will probably try to cash in the token. In that case, the teacher would calmly point to the remaining open circle and indicate that the student should continue to work. The remaining task should be short and simple at this point in the teaching sequence. The student is then given the second token to put on the reinforcer card. Having filled in all the circles, the student can now cash in for the selected reward.

Over time, the amount of work for each token can be gradually increased. Furthermore, the number of circles on a card also is gradually increased to 3, then 4, and then 5.



Large Visual Reinforcement System

This set of five cards, progressing from one token to five tokens, is designed for a student beginning to learn about visual reinforcement systems. The cards, made of durable polyvinyl, measure 15.2cm x 12.1cm and include a place for the icon representing the student's chosen reinforcer. Hook and loop coin fasteners and tokens are included.

Small Visual Reinforcement System

This set of three (3) cards, progressing from three (3) tokens to five (5) tokens, is designed for a student who has mastered visual reinforcement systems. The cards, made of durable polyvinyl, measure 12.1cm x 5.9cm and include a place for the icon representing the student's chosen reinforcer. Hook and loop coin fasteners and tokens are included.

Usage Guide

For more detailed information on teaching the use of visual reinforcement systems, refer to pages 291 to 298 of The PECS Training Manual, 2nd Edition (Frost & Bondy, 2002).

Our visual reinforcement system is also available as an app for iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch, and Android. Go to iTunes or Play Store and search for “Working4”

For information on implementing the Pyramid Approach to Education or the Picture Exchange Communication System, contact Pyramid Educational Consultants.