

Picture Communication Symbols (PCS): Quick Guide for Teachers & ES Staff

What is PCS?

Picture Communication Symbols (PCS) are simple, consistent images used to support students with communication challenges. They help students express themselves, understand others, and navigate daily routines.

Commonly used in:

- Visual schedules/ First and Then/ Social Stories
- Communication boards
- AAC devices (speech-generating)
- Classroom instructions and routines

Who Benefits from PCS?

Student Profile

Autism

Intellectual disability

Speech/language delay

Non-verbal students

Down syndrome

Developmental/global delays

Students recovering from injury

PCS Support

Reduces anxiety, supports expression

Aids understanding and learning

Bridges gaps in communication

Provides a way to express needs

Enhances verbal and visual expression

Supports structure and participation

Supports re-learning communication

Why Use PCS?

- Promotes inclusive communication
- Reduces frustration and behaviour issues
- Encourages independence and engagement
- Supports emotional regulation
- Helps students access learning and routines

How to Use PCS at School

In the Classroom

- Visual timetables (e.g., reading 📖, lunch 🍎, play 🎪)
- Step-by-step task cards (e.g., Cut ✂️ → Paste 🪑 → Colour 🎨)
- Feelings boards (e.g., happy 😊, sad 😢, need break 🕒)
- Choice boards (e.g., which book, toy, or activity?)
- Social Stories

In the Playground (with musical instruments)

Examples of using visual cues with Wellbeing Instruments products:

“Go”



go

“Stop”



stop

“Fast”



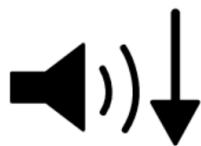
fast

“Slow”



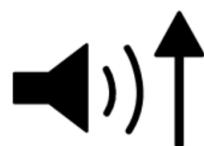
slow

“Softer”



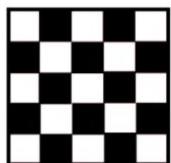
softer

“Louder”



louder

“Finish”



finish

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Tips for Staff

- Be consistent – Use the same symbols regularly
- Model usage – Show how to point or refer to symbols
- Pair with speech – Say the word as you show the symbol
- Keep symbols accessible – Display at eye level or attach to lanyards

Where to Find PCS

- Boardmaker (PCS library, used in most schools)
- Speech pathologist or inclusion staff
- AAC devices/software
- Free templates or make-your-own (e.g., Canva, LessonPix)

Inclusivity starts with communication. Even one or two symbols can make a big difference.