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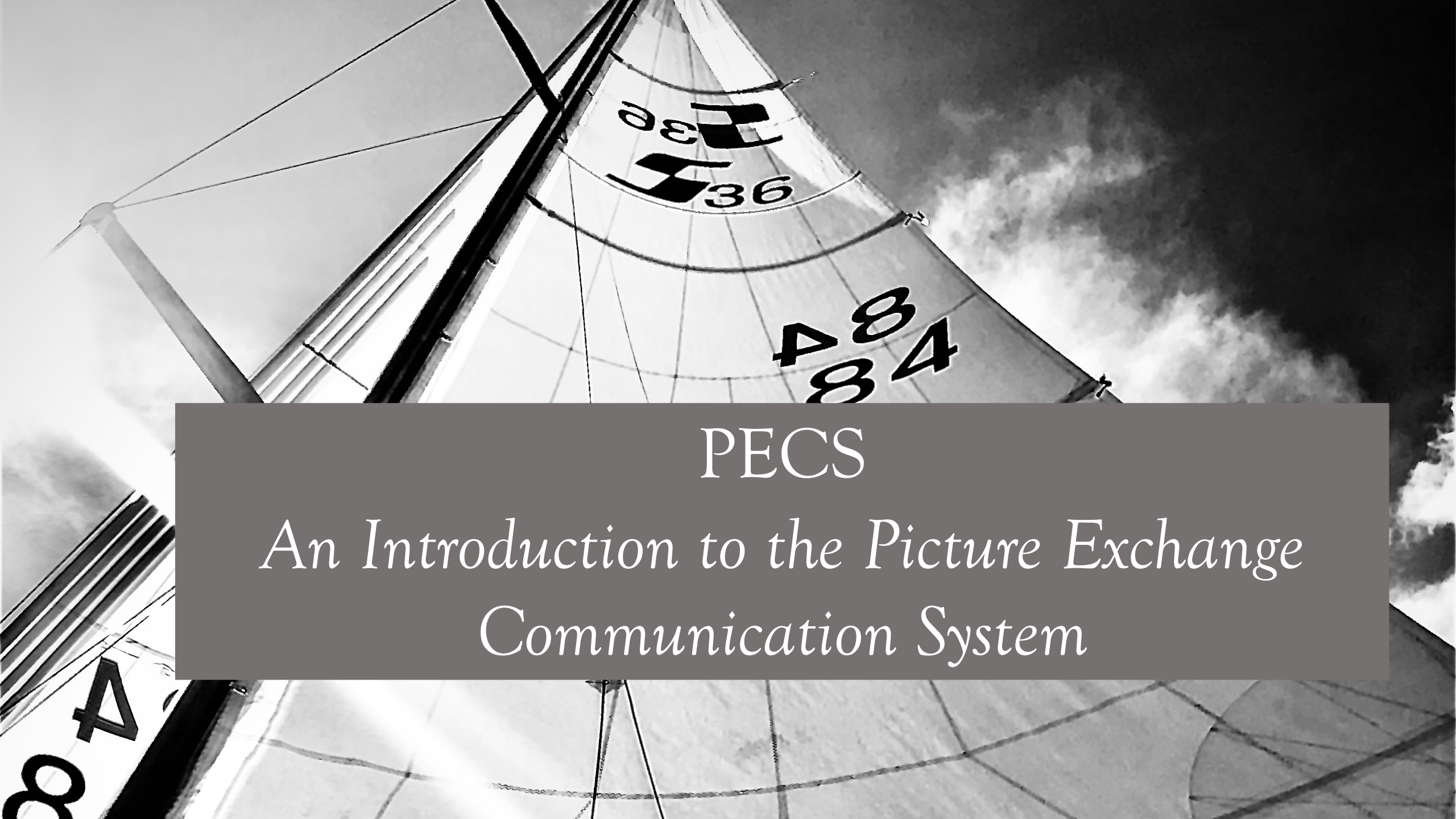


PECS

An Introduction to the Picture Exchange Communication System

What are PECS?

Picture Exchange Communication System

Low tech augmented alternative communication device (AAC).

Uses pictures and symbols to represent items/activities the learner may request

Uses a physical exchange of the card for the item (speaker and audience)

Why use PECS?

The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) is recognized as an evidence-based procedure for individuals with autism ages 2- 12.

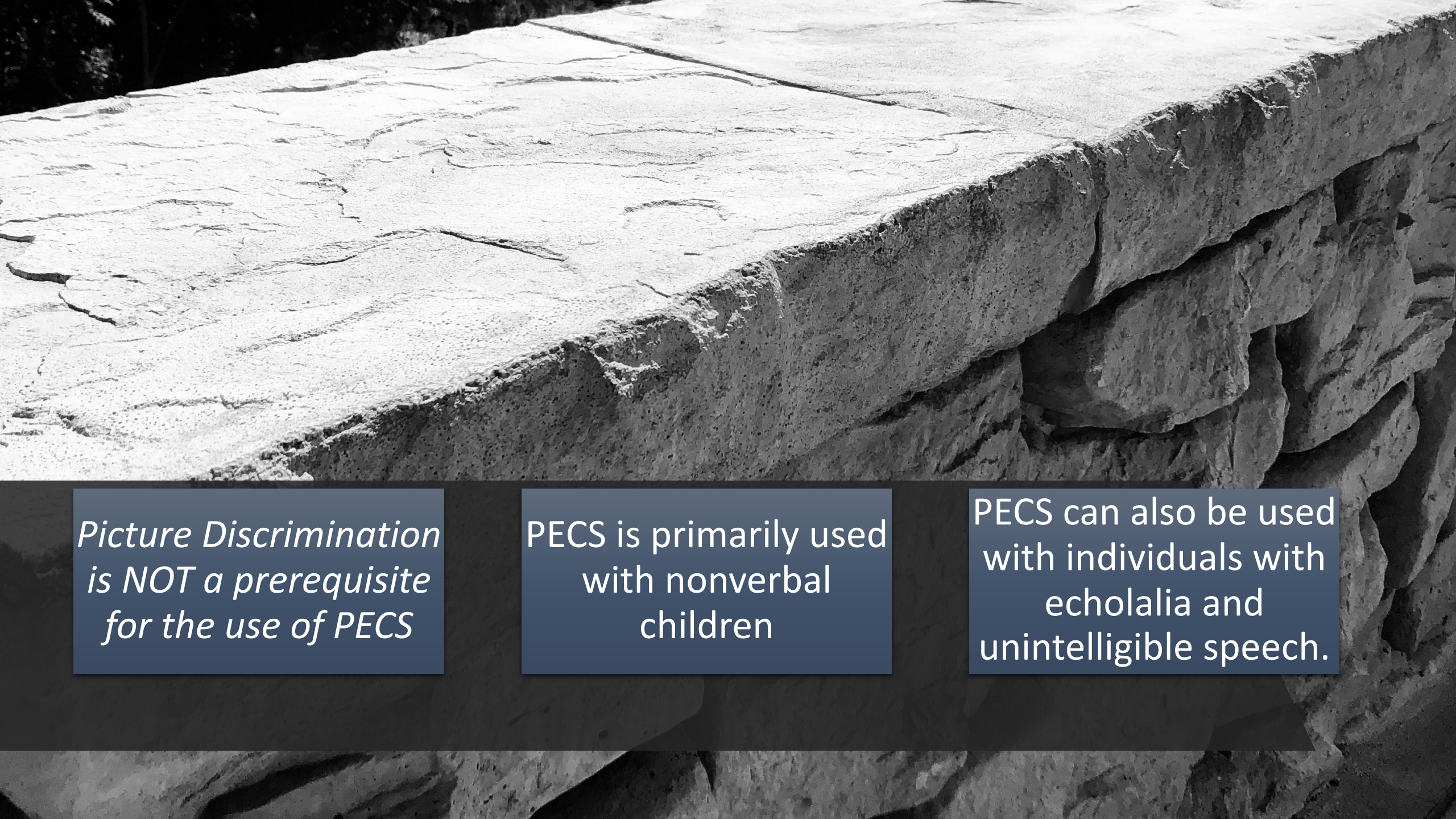
Implementation of PECS has demonstrated:

increased communication and social interaction,	Decreased range of problem behavior	Increased vocal output	Increased variety of mands.

Prerequisites for using PECS

Individual must have preferred items/activities

Intentional Communicator: *learner is aware of the need to communicate in some way to obtain what they want.*



Picture Discrimination is NOT a prerequisite for the use of PECS

PECS is primarily used with nonverbal children

PECS can also be used with individuals with echolalia and unintelligible speech.

Teaching a learner PECS is a methodical practice with six, sequential phases of teaching. If you are not familiar with the learner, it is recommended that you conduct a preference assessment before beginning phase 1.

- *Even with learners you are familiar with, it is best practice to do preference assessments often to the point where you are continually doing an informal preference assessment by offering choices and observing the learner throughout each session.*

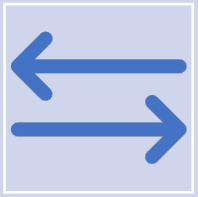
Benefits of PECS

- If vocal speech is not developing,
  - You could use sign language but it “requires the individual to be able to attend to and imitate, as well as discriminate, very fine motor movements”

Teaching PECS

Phase 1

Teaching the exchange



Phase 1 teaches the physical exchange and how to communicate.

It teaches the learner the basic exchange of communication

Involves a speaker and an audience

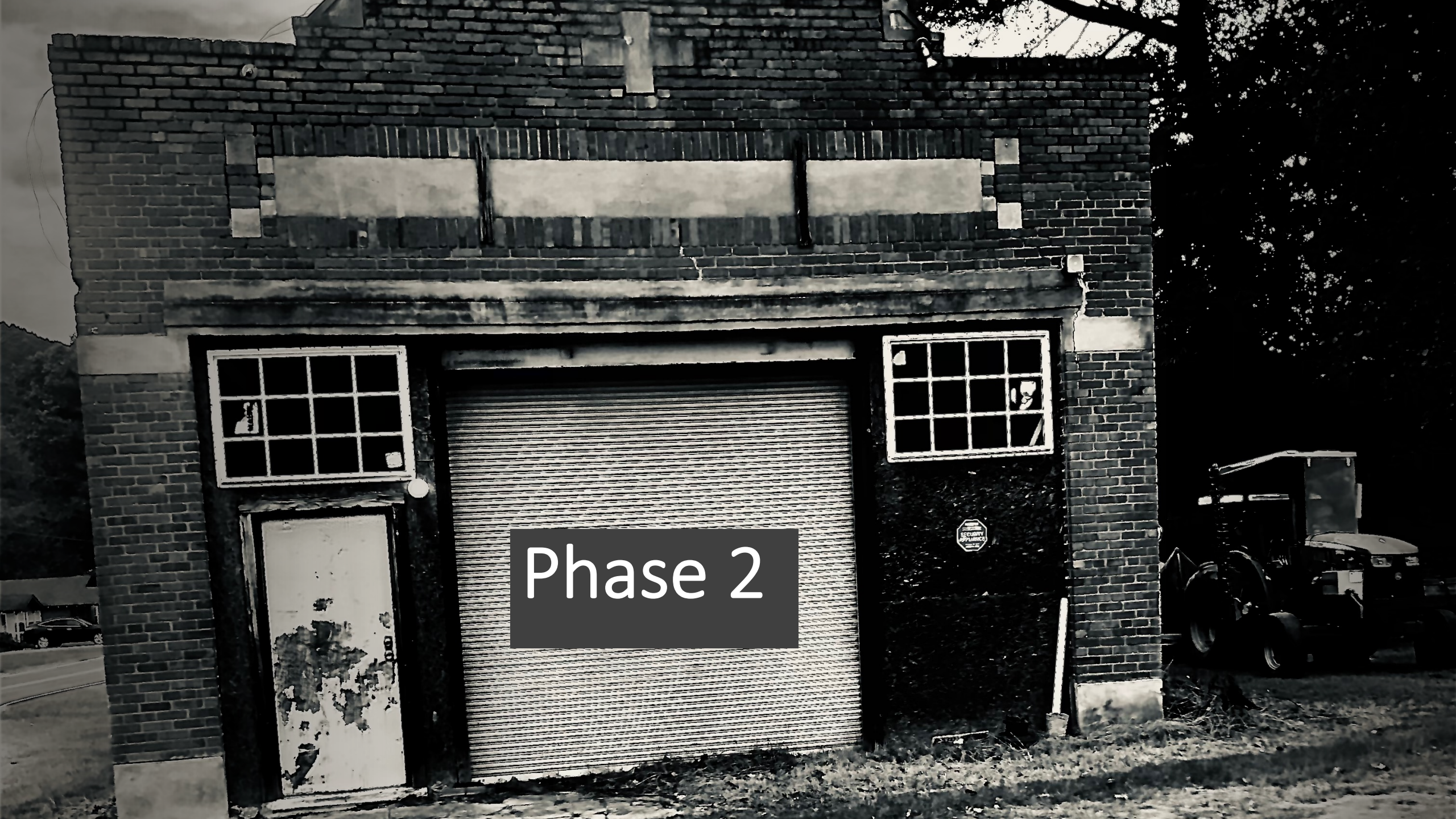
Entice with highly preferred item

- The item should be out of reach
- The environment should be sanitized and competing preferred items removed.

Entice with highly preferred item

One PECS card representing item available to learner

One extra adult to prompt the transfer of the one PECS card and then the learner receives item.

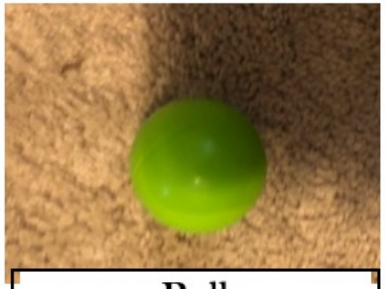

Phase 2

Distance and Persistence

- Still one PECS card and one highly preferred item/activity
- Position yourself so the learner must move to hand you the PECS card and receive the preferred item/activity.
- You can also make the learner move a short distance to obtain the PECS card before handing it to you.

Phase 3

Car



Ball

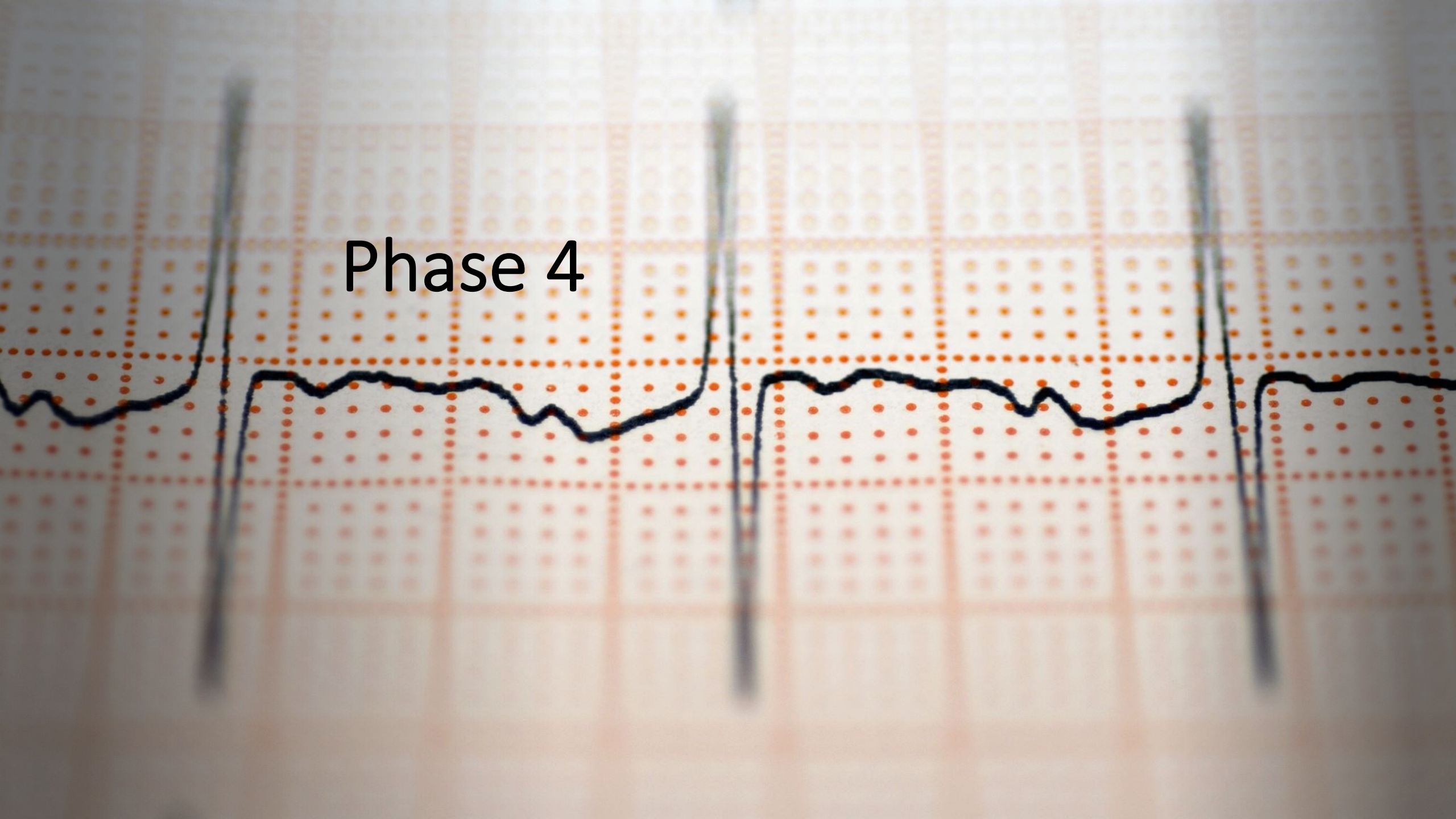
2 Cheerios

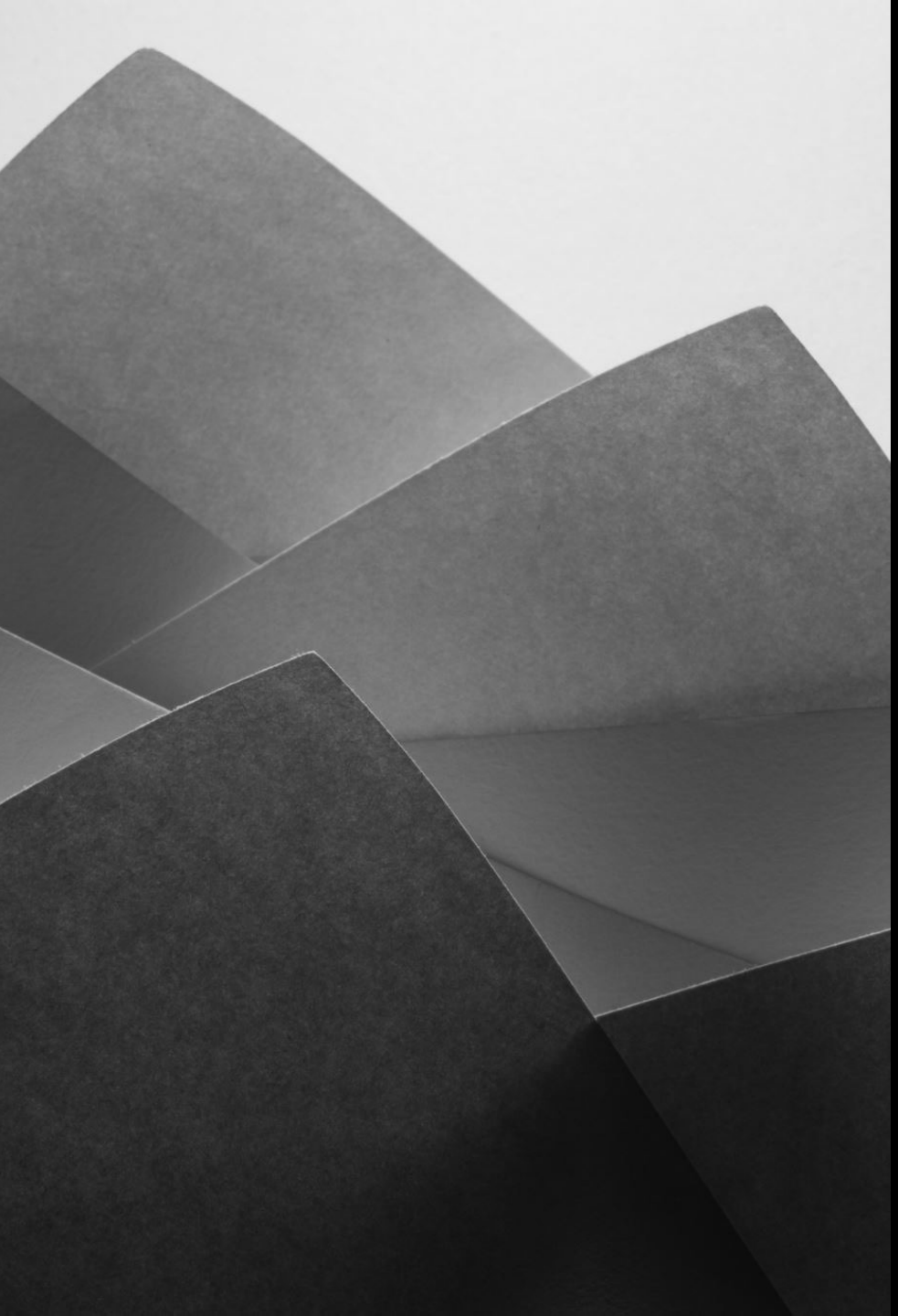
Music toy

Popper Tube

Picture Discrimination

- Add one PECS card to the array.
- Now there are two PECS cards and the learner must discriminate to get the highly preferred item.


Phase 4



Sentence Structure

Introduces the carrier pharses “I want”, “I see”

Enables the learner to tact and begin intraverbal training.

Phase 5

Answering Questions

Answering questions is intraverbal behavior.

Phase 6

Commenting

Phase 6 goes into more advanced verbal behavior

At this point, the BCBA should look at “high tech” AAC devices and assess the possibility of vocal speech or sign language.

PECS are limited in portability (going to the gas station with 3 binders of PECS)	Better options available for advanced language

Other Beneftits of PECS

- Teaches the communicative exchange
- Reinforces the dynamic of a speaker and listener
- Ability for learner to express wants/needs
- Can expedite development of vocal speech

Research on PECS

- There are over 190 published studies showing the efficacy of PECS
- Some noteworthy articles are cited below.

Research

- Adkins, T., & Axelrod, S. (2002). Topography-versus selection-based responding: Comparison of mand acquisition in each modality. The Behavior Analyst Today, 2(3), 259–266. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0099941
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