

Objects of Reference

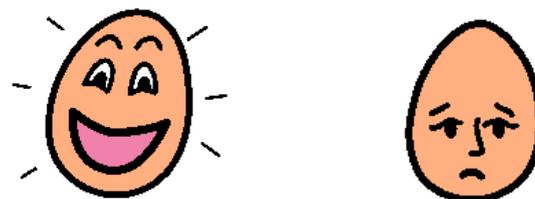
What are objects of reference?

Objects of reference are objects which have special meanings for the user. If the child cannot see what is happening or where they are going and cannot hear or understand what you are telling them, objects give an alternative way of communicating this information to the child. Objects “stand for something” in the same way words or signs do for children who can understand them.

Why use them?

There are several reasons why a child might need them and the reason for using objects may be different for different children.

- Behaviour – may reduce behaviours caused by fear, frustration or the insecurity of not knowing what is happening next or where they are going.
- Multisensory skills– encourages children to use all their available senses (touch, smell, sound, sight) to explore objects. This is particularly useful for children who are tactile defensive. (very sensitive to touch)
- Object recognition - leads on to the use of senses to recognise and differentiate between objects.
- Association - develops the ability to associate objects with a specific activity/room.
- Understanding - Once they know what the object stands for, their understanding of language may develop as they repeatedly hear the word relating to that object and activity/place.
- Expression - some children may quickly learn the meaning of the objects and use them to tell us a message either by their reaction when given an object (they may pull a face or refuse to take an object if they know it means an activity/place they don't like), or by choosing between objects to show what they want.



How to use Objects of Reference

Choose objects which are only used in a certain activity/routine. For example, use a favourite toy to show playtime, but only if the child would not have the toy at other times such as to cuddle in bed .

Try and keep the objects in a box when they are not in use so they are easily accessible.



Before taking the child to an activity, give them the object to hold/touch. Allow them time to explore it and talk to them about what it means. If the object makes a noise, help the child make the noise.

After the activity has finished put the object away in the box. Draw the child's attention to the fact that the object has gone and the activity has finished, for example, 'drink finished'

Try to use real objects at first, although you may build to the use of some miniatures or objects with more abstract associations, for example, a star for song time

Be consistent in your use of the object, even though the child will not understand at first.

Some suggestions of the type of objects to be used.

PLACE/ ACTIVITY	OBJECT
Drink	Cup
Mealtimes	Spoon
Bedtime	Pyjamas/teddy/dummy (if not used for rest of day)
Going out	Coat
Playtime	Ball/rattle/favourite toy
Music	CD (old one)
Nappy changing	Nappy
Going in the car	Key (an old one)

