

Introduction to Objects of Reference

An object of reference is an object which is used to represent an item, activity, place, event, or person. Objects of reference can be useful when used with people who find it hard to understand spoken words or signs.

In everyday life we regularly use familiar objects to represent places or daily activities and certain objects can help link our understanding to a particular task or situation.

To be effective an object of reference should be:

- Relevant to the person
- Consistent
- Presented at the right

Objects of reference may be:

- Whole objects - E.g., a cup to indicate time for a drink.
- Part of an object - E.g., part of a seatbelt to represent going in the car.
- Items that smell, feels, or sounds like the actual object - E.g., a pot of perfume to represent a specific person.

Objects of reference can be used for many things, including:

- Reinforcing a statement or key word
- Signalling the transition between activities or the start and finish of an activity
- Supporting a person to make a choice
- Supporting a person to make a request
- Developing expressive communication
- Preparing a person for something that is about to happen
- Representing a person

When introducing objects of reference, you should always seek the advice of a speech and language therapist where possible, however, there are some ideas you can start to consider for yourselves.

These include:

- Objects of reference should be introduced gradually; start off with one object and build this up.
- Keep your collection of objects in one place: Some parents tell us that they find it
- useful to have a collection of objects in a drawstring bag which can be carried around with them and used when needed.

- 
- 
- Ensure the objects of reference are accessible to the person, so they can be accessed to make requests.
 - When choosing objects think about which objects will be most meaningful to your child. For example, to you a blanket could symbolise nap time however if this blanket is used for things other than napping then it will be confusing and not nap time.
 - Before introducing objects of reference consider building up associations. For example, whenever it is nappy changing time show the person a nappy.
 - Complete an action immediately after showing an object of reference so the person links the object to the activity person or place.

