

Objects of Reference

Early Years Team

Objects of Reference – What does this mean?

Objects of reference are objects that can be used to represent an activity, person or place. These objects stand for something in the same way that words do. For example, a child may get excited when their coat is put on as they know this means they are going outside.

Why use Objects of Reference?

Some children need extra help to understand spoken language. By using objects of reference at every opportunity, the child begins to link the word, the object and the activity together. It will take time for the child to build up this link.

When objects of reference are used and understood, they can help to:

- Increase understanding of the spoken word
- Signal the beginning of a new activity
- Enable the child to make their own choices
- Encourage the child to request items and activities
- Provide a visual representation of their day

Who can you use Objects of Reference with?

Objects of reference can be used with a range of people who find it difficult to access other systems of communication (e.g. spoken language, signing and symbols). Children who often benefit from this system may have:

- Communication and language delay/difficulties
- Visual impairment
- Hearing impairment
- Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)
- Learning disabilities

How to implement the Object of Reference?

Think about the important regular events in the child's day for example, mealtimes, going outside, activity time, bedtime. Choose an object that is related to the activity and that you will always use with the child in this routine for example using a spoon to represent dinner, a teddy for bedtime, a nappy for nappy changes.

At the start of each activity, give the child the object to hold and explore using the child's senses such as look, touch, smell. Say the child's name followed by the word of the activity for example, child's name dinner time or child's name outside. It is important to use the same words each time, for example if you decide to say outside use this consistently, rather than saying different phrases such as garden and outdoors.

It may be helpful to keep the objects together in a box or bag so that everyone can use the same objects with the child. Helping the child to put the object away at the end of the activity helps the child to understand that the activity has finished.

Please remember to

- Start with only a few important objects when introducing this technique. Once the child is showing an understanding of these objects, start to gradually introduce more.
- Try to choose objects which are not too similar to each other, for example using a towel for bath-time and a blanket for bedtime, this may be confusing for child. Instead it would be more appropriate to use a towel for bath and a teddy for bedtime.

Video Links

[Introducing Objects of Reference - YouTube](#) – Using Objects of Reference
[Objects of Reference - YouTube](#) – Using Objects of Reference to support the child with communication and understanding routine.