

Early Years Team
Objects of reference

Objects of reference are objects which have a meaning assigned to them. They stand for something in much the same way as a word does. Whilst children are learning language, it can be helpful to use objects to help them communicate.

Objects of reference can represent:



A drink is represented by a cup.



Painting is represented by a paintbrush.



Nursery is represented by a bag.



Toileting is represented by a nappy/potty.

Objects of reference can be used to:

Help understanding: Objects give more information than a spoken word, symbol or sign and so can be easier to understand. They are also permanent and some or all of the senses can be involved, e.g. touch, sight, smell, hearing.

Help expression: e.g. child goes to a place where objects of reference are kept and removes the one representing 'drink', indicating they want a drink.

Help a child anticipate what is going to happen next: e.g. adult shows child a nappy indicating they are going to the nappy change area.

How to use objects of reference:

Start with a maximum of two or three objects. The objects need to represent something which is meaningful and happens frequently so that the child has lots of opportunities to learn what the object stands for.

The objects should be kept in the same place, for instance a bag, box or basket. This will need to be accessible to your child if we are aiming for them to be able to use the objects to make requests.

As you are taking your child to an activity, give them the object of reference, e.g. a nappy and tell them what is going to happen, i.e. 'nappy change'. When the activity finishes, put the object back.

If your child shows interest in an object of reference, take this as a request for that activity and fulfil the request, e.g. if the child picks up the cup, get them a drink (if this is what the cup represents). Do this even if you think they don't want one, as this will help them learn what the object represents.

Links

Using Objects of Reference [Introducing Objects of Reference](#)

Using Objects of Reference to support the child with communication and understanding routine [Protect your child's vision with MiYOSMART](#)