

Objects of Reference

What are Objects of Reference?

Objects of Reference are objects used to represent a person, activity or place. With regular use the child learns that the object represents the person, activity or place.

Why use Objects of Reference?

Objects of Reference are used to help a child:

- understand simple, spoken language
- understand what is happening in their environment
- manage a change in routine
- make choices



How to make Objects of Reference?

Choose an activity that occurs frequently, and is meaningful and motivating for your child. Choose an object that your child uses in, or associates with, the activity. For example, Tom listens to the windchime when outside whereas Jerry plays football. Tom's Object of Reference for outside is a windchime whereas Jerry's is a football.

The Object of Reference should be easy to understand. There are different types:

- An object that you would use in the activity. Avoid using the Object of Reference itself in the activity. For example, prepare your child's drink in his usual cup or beaker, then show him the Object of Reference (e.g. a blue cup) before giving him his drink.
- A miniature object (e.g. a toy car to represent 'car', a toy plate to represent 'dinner').
- A part of the actual object or something like the actual object (e.g. a piece of rope for 'swings', a piece of material from a chair your child sits on within a routine).

- Something that is not directly related but can symbolise the activity (e.g. a twig to symbolise going on a walk, a feather to symbolise 'rough and tumble play').

Remember to talk to your child's school or pre-school about what Objects of Reference they are using with your child, and what you are using at home. It is important that the same Objects of Reference are used in all environments.

How to use Objects of Reference

- Just before your child starts the activity give or show them the Object of Reference. Use simple language as you do this (e.g. 'park now').
- After giving the Object of Reference it is important to immediately begin the activity. This will help your child understand the connection between the object and activity.
- It is important that the Object of Reference is used consistently every time you do that activity.
- When an activity starts, take the Object of Reference from your child and put it away.
- Once your child has understood that the Object of Reference represents an activity, you can start to use it to offer choices to them.

Activity/ event/ person	Object of Reference

What to think about now?

- Where are the Objects or Reference kept? _____

It is useful to keep Objects of Reference in the same place so that everyone knows to use them and they can then be portable (e.g. in a string bag, velcroed to a tray).

- How many objects to start with? _____

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