

## Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service

# Objects of Reference

## What are objects of reference?

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 do we use them?

Some children need extra help to learn 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 understood, they can help a child

- To anticipate (know what is about to happen)
- To sequence events (know what is happening now and what will happen next)
- To understand when an activity is finished
- To be able to make choices (show you what they want)

## How do you start?

Think about the important regular events in your child's day e.g. mealtimes/going out/bedtime. Choose an object that is related to the activity and that you will always use with your child in this routine

e.g. spoon = dinner

teddy = bedtime

At the start of each activity, give your child the object to hold and explore (look, touch, smell it). Say your child's name followed by: "Dinner Time"; "Time to go out"; "Bedtime." It is important to use the same words each time, for example if you decide to say "bed time" use this consistently, rather than saying different phrases e.g. "time to go to sleep"

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

## Some things to keep in mind

- Start with only a few key objects when introducing this technique. Once your 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, may be confusing. Instead it would be more appropriate to use a towel for bath and a teddy for bedtime.
- Below is a table of suggested objects you may want to use, please note these are only suggestions

## Object list

Activity	Object
Brushing teeth	toothbrush
Brushing hair	Hairbrush/comb/bobbles
Bath/ wash	Sponge, towel, bubble bath
Drink	Cup/bottle
Meal time	Plate/spoon
Bed time	Blanket/teddy/nightlight
Going outside	Coat/shoes
Going in the car	Car keys
Going shopping	Shopping bags
Going to the park	Bread ( for ducks)/ welly boots
Going to nursery/school	Book bag
Going to see a family member or friend	This has to be very specific to that person, consider if there is something they often wear/have at the house/ eat at the house etc. that would remind your child of that person.

### How to personalise these objects for your child

- The table above has some suggestions for objects you might like to use, however many children might need something more specific.
- It will be helpful to think about what is the most memorable part of the activity for them, do they focus in on small details, are there smells/tastes/sounds that they associate with certain activities?
- Your child might need an object that is an actual part of what you are going to be doing, for example, when going to the park, your child might be interested by the chains on the swings, so you could use a small section of chain to represent the park. Alternatively, if you always feed the ducks at the park, your object of reference could be bread.
- Consider what is meaningful to your child, this might be something quite unique and unusual, and that is fine, but remember to keep it the same once you have chosen what you are going to use.