



## **Using Objects of Reference to support your child**

**Objects of Reference are objects that have meaning and represent an item, activity, event, place or person. These objects are used to:**

- Communicate with your child if they find it difficult to understand spoken words, signs, symbols or photographs
- Support your child through transitions during the day to develop a sense of routine
- Help your child anticipate what is going to happen
- Provide a stepping stone toward using other visuals such as photographs or pictures
- Provide continuity and consistency especially if Objects of Reference have been used in your child's early years setting or if recommended by the Speech and Language Therapist

- ✓ Select objects which will make sense to your child, e.g. for garden time, if your child always plays with a ball in the garden, use the ball as your Object of Reference to represent the garden.
- ✓ Use objects which can be easily moved around the home and are not too large.
- ✓ Try to use Objects of Reference during key events that happen during the day, e.g. mealtimes, handwashing, toilet, play time, garden etc.
- ✓ Start by introducing one or two objects and build up gradually.
- ✓ Use the same objects to represent an activity or event each time, e.g. if you use a toilet roll for toilet time, then use this all the time.
- ✓ Remember when you introduce something for the first time it may not always go to plan but be patient, try different Objects of Reference until you find the ones your child responds to best.





## What you need

### Objects

Select from the following types of objects:

- Whole objects e.g. a cup for drink.
- Part of an object e.g. a sheet of toilet paper for toilet.
- A miniature version e.g. a toy toilet for toilet.
- Abstract object e.g. twig for the garden.
- See below for further suggestions.



### Basket or container

- This could be anything you have around your home e.g. an old cardboard box, basket, plastic tub.
- It needs to be large enough to contain several objects but not too large that you cannot move it around.



### Finished box / basket

- Try to make this different to the basket that you keep the objects in.
- You can put the sign or word for 'finished' on the front.





## Suggested Objects of Reference and when to use them:

### Meal times / snack times:

- Actual food items e.g. banana, orange, apple etc.
- Empty packets / wrappers e.g. bread, crisps
- Mini packets e.g. cereal boxes
- Bowl
- Cup
- Plate
- Spoon / fork
- Toy food items e.g. toy fruit or plates



### Self Care routines:

*Bath time, hair brushing, hand washing, teeth brushing, toilet, nappy changing, bed time.*

- Toothbrush / paste
- Soap / shampoo bottle
- Hair brush / accessories
- Bath toys
- Face flannel / sponge
- Toilet roll
- Nappy / pull up / pants
- Wipes
- Comforter

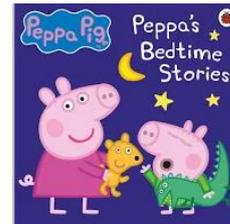




## Play:

*Any toys or activities that your child enjoys and likes to play with.*

- Puzzles
- Transport toys
- Small world characters
- Bubbles
- Books
- Electronic devices



## Outside the home:

*This could be for the garden, car journey, a walk in the pram etc.*

- Piece of artificial grass / pebbles for garden or park
- Small ball
- Small outdoor toys
- Keys (for car)
- Pram blanket / toys
- Shoes
- Coat



## When something is about to finish:

*Can be used as an Object of Reference to help your child know when something is going to finish.*



- Sand / egg timer



Once you have decided on which objects you will be using,  
prepare these each morning depending on what is happening that day.  
Put the objects into the basket.  
Keep the 'Finished' basket nearby.

Use these Objects of Reference consistently to help your child with  
**transitions.**

### How to do it

1. Just before a **transition**, take the relevant object from your basket.
2. Take the object to your child and **show** them.
3. Say your child's name and then the name of the transition activity, e.g. '**Saima, bath time**'. 
4. **Wait** a few seconds for your child to respond.
5. If your child **looks** at the object, wait to see if they move toward the object.
6. As soon as your child shows a response, guide them to the activity. You may wish to hold out your hand and then take them with you. You can let your child hold the object as you go to the activity.
7. When you arrive at the activity, name the activity again, e.g. '**Saima, bath time**'. 
8. If your child is holding the object, they could continue to do so during the activity if it is appropriate or you could place the object nearby whilst you complete the activity ~ always keep the Object of Reference nearby or in sight.
9. At the end of the activity, show the object to your child again and say the name of the activity and let your child know it has finished, e.g. '**Saima, bath time finished**'. 
10. Put the Object of Reference in the **finished basket** or encourage your child to do so.



*What if my child does not  
show a response when I show  
them the Object of  
Reference?*

- ✓ Wait a couple of seconds for your child to process the instruction ~ they might need some time to respond especially if they are absorbed in something else.
- ✓ Repeat the instruction to see if they respond.
- ✓ Watch your child closely when you show them the Object of Reference. If they look at the object and seem interested, hold out your hand with the Object of Reference to see if they approach you.
- ✓ Try to respond immediately when your child shows a response ~ take them to the activity straight away so that your child learns the connection between you showing them the Object of Reference and the activity.
- ✓ Leave the Object of Reference in view of your child and try and again a few minutes later.
- ✓ If your child still does not show interest, try again at a later time.
- ✓ Try a different Object of Reference ~ it might be that the Object of Reference did not make sense or was not motivating enough, e.g. if you showed your child a bowl for breakfast, try a box of cereal to see if this makes more sense.
- ✓ If you are using the Object of Reference for an activity or event that your child dislikes, then this may be the reason for them not following you. In this case, you might wish to try a 'First / Then' strategy. This involves showing your child two objects, the first one is the activity you would like your child to do, the second is something that your child is very motivated by e.g. '**First breakfast, then train**'.



When your child has begun to learn the meaning of some Objects of Reference, you might like to consider using these to build a routine. You could try using a 'First and Then' strategy as a next step ~ refer to the 'Using First and Then in the Home' information sheet.

When you use Objects of Reference remember to keep your language simple throughout:

'Garden finished'

'Dinner time'

'Milk'

'Finished'

## When to use Objects of Reference

- ✓ You can use Objects of Reference at any transition point in the day.
- ✓ When you feel your child needs additional support to understand what is happening.

## To find out more / Useful links

- If your child has a Speech and Language Therapy programme or report, use of Objects of Reference may have been recommended. Refer to the report for further guidance.