



Help Sheet

0 – 25 Specialist Teaching And Support Service

How to use objects of reference.

Why?

- An 'object of reference' is an object that symbolises an activity or routine and helps them to understand what's coming next.
- They can support to increase understanding of spoken word by linking a word with an object.
- They can support children in developing language, communicating requests and making their needs known.
- They can support in developing independence skills so they can learn to use the objects to make choices, request items.
- Objects can help reduce anxieties around the unknown.



You will need:

- A selection of objects that can be used. These can be:
 - a real object, for example a plate to represent meal times
 - part of a real object, a small piece of carpet to represent carpet time
 - miniature objects, for example a small toilet to represent going to the toilet
 - abstract objects, for example a string of beads to represent mum
- Examples of 'objects of reference':
 - eat – plate
 - drink – cup
 - change nappy – nappy
 - go to the toilet – toilet roll / toy toilet
 - go outside – stick
 - go inside – an indoor toy that interests them
 - sit on the carpet – piece of carpet



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- home time – key

How?

Show the child a familiar object that represents an activity before the activity begins.

- Ensure all staff use the same objects.
- Select a small number of regularly repeated activities and associated objects to begin with, for example, a cup for snack.
- Where appropriate use objects in the home to introduce activities.
- Take the object with you to the activity and keep it nearby.
- When the activity has finished, put the object of reference back where it is kept to show the activity has finished.

Things to note:

- Objects of reference need to be used consistently and by all staff working with the child for them to be effective.
- Children who appear to have some spoken language will still benefit from objects of reference to help them make sense of routine and to support in functional communication.
- You can also use Objects of Reference when playing. This could be done by using objects to represent favourite songs. The child can then learn which object represents which song and then use them to request their favourite song.

Reference / Evidence base – informed by:

Massey, G., & Wheeler, J. (2000). Acquisition and generalization of activity schedules and their effects on task engagement in a young child with autism in an inclusive preschool classroom.

Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, 35, 326-335