Swindon Borough Council

Speech and Language Therapy

Objects of Reference

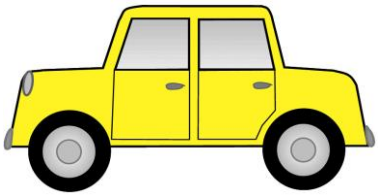
Some suggestions of the type of objects to use:

Place / Activity	Object
Drink	Cup
Mealtime	Spoon / plate
Bathtime	Duck / boat
Bedtime	Pyjamas / Teddy / Blanket
Going out	Coat / shoes
Nappy change	Nappy
Going in the car	Key
Wash hands	Soap / flannel

What are Objects of Reference?

- Objects of Reference are a way to help your child understand the world around them.
- They are objects which have special meanings for the child. If the child cannot see what is happening or where they are going and cannot hear or understand what you are telling them, objects give an alternative way of communicating this information to the child.

Andrea Friend-July 2020



Why use Objects of Reference?

- They help support the words you are using by associating the object with the activity or place.
- They help the child to know what is happening next and where they are going. This can help to reduce frustration or anxiety about what is happening to them.
- They help the adult to use consistent language.
- Objects “stand for something” in the same way words or signs can.
- They can be more meaningful to some children than pictures.

How to use Objects of Reference

- Choose objects which are only used in a certain activity or routine. For example, a toy duck to represent bath time but only if they do not play with the duck at other times. Use real objects where possible.
- Keep the objects in a box or bag when they are not in use so they are easily accessible.
- Before taking the child to an activity, give them the object to hold and touch as you say the word clearly.
- Be consistent in your choice of word. For example, always say “bath time” rather than sometimes saying “splish splash time” etc.
- After the activity is finished, help the child to put the object away in the box or bag and say e.g. “bath time finished”.
- Be consistent in your use of object and word by using them every time the activity happens.

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