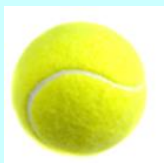# Objects of Reference

Why use objects of reference?

Some children need additional support to understand and process language, objects can be used to communicate meaning and are particularly useful in early stages of development when a child is not ready to use more abstract systems such as symbols

Objects of Reference Can

- Support Receptive language
- Support understanding of the routine
- Support child to anticipate next event
- Support the child to make a choice
- Support child's autonomy
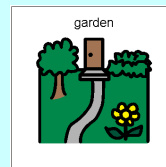- Support child to develop symbolic understanding

Basic Development of Symbolic Understanding

Object → Photo → Symbol → Spoken Word

Choosing Objects of Reference

- Objects of Reference are most useful if they are meaningful this will usually be:
    - Used as part of the activity/ routine
    - Something the child focuses on in the activity.
- Initially start with a few key routine activities e.g. toilet, outside, home etc.
- Be careful not to use something that changes regularly e.g. hat only used in winter.
- Objects need to be small enough that you can bring them to the child.
- Occasionally a miniature replicas can be used e.g. a dolls trike but these are often more abstract so need careful consideration.

How to use Objects of Reference

1. Each time that activity is about to occur present the object to the child.
2. Say the same script each time e.g. "time for lunch" "time for snack" or simply "snack"
3. Support the child to go to that activity/ routine even e.g. leading by the hand, physically guiding, keep the object with you in sight of the child.
4. If the child refuses to go continue show the object calmly repeating the script and gentle guiding (on occasion a child may need an alternative manner e.g. enthusiastic)
5. When the child is familiar with the object of reference present it to the child saying the script and pause for the child to make steps to independently go to the activity/ routine, if they don't guide them to nearly there e.g. two steps away

Top Tips

- Objects of Reference are most useful if they are used regularly and consistently
- Ensure all staff are aware of the objects of Reference being used if the object is not part of the routine, keep the objects in a box/ bag in a consistent place.
- Write a list of objects and their corresponding activity, and the script you are using