

Using Objects of Reference (OOR)

An 'object of reference' is, as the name implies, an object which has a particular meaning associated with it. For example, a spoon may be the OOR for dinner. The object is closely associated with and comes to represent a **Person**, another **Object**, a **Location** or an **Event (POLE)**. These objects **need to be used consistently** to give the child information about what is going to happen and can be used to support the development of their understanding.

So OOR are basically a simple method of communicating, initially to inform the child of what is going to happen next and then for them to use to make choices and requests.

The objects should have relevance for the child, for example, an orange arm band to represent swimming is not suitable if they use a different flotation aid.

How to use Objects of Reference

- OOR are kept in an OOR bag. New users will need to be provided with their own OOR bag containing a suitable set of OOR.
- OOR should be safe for unsupervised use.

OOR can be used at a number of levels:

1. Real life objects used in the activity

Involving an actual object that the child uses in an activity; a cup that is used every time he or she has a drink would become an object of reference for a drink.

- Example: Chris enjoys cooking. He has a wooden spoon that is kept in his OOR bag and is removed and given to him to indicate that the cooking activity is about to begin. He uses the spoon in the cooking, and when the activity is finished the spoon is put back in the bag until the next time it is used.

2. Objects not used in the activity

A different cup could become an object of reference, a smaller one perhaps, or just using a part of one, e.g. the lid or handle. (This would be useful if the child uses a large amount of objects to reduce the space they take up).

- Example: James has a lid from one of his cups in his OOR bag that indicates a drink. He is given the lid before he has a drink, so he understands that he will be getting a drink. The actual lid is not used in the activity.

3. Objects with a shared feature

An object of the same material/feel could be used.

- Example: Lucy enjoys sitting in the swing chair, which is made of cane material. She has a small twig of this to indicate 'swing chair'.

4. Miniature Objects

A miniature representation of the item could be used.

- Example: Nazma has a miniature spoon from the dolls' house to indicate 'dinner'. At school her teacher lays out a number of miniature objects each day to indicate the sequence of activities. Nazma uses a miniature brush for 'brushing hair' and a miniature car for 'going in the car'. Most of Nazma's objects are miniature but these have only been chosen because she has demonstrated that she understands the connection between the object and the activity.

How to use OOR

- Make sure your child has a set of OOR.
- Initially the child's OOR set will be limited in number. Start with 3 to represent very frequently occurring events such as personal care, drink, food, favourite activity/toy etc. The more frequently the OOR can be used the greater the chance the child will develop understanding of what it represents.
- As the child becomes more familiar with OOR, more OOR may be included in their OOR bag.
- OOR should be presented **immediately** prior to a change of POLE.
- Once the OOR has been given to the child, the child should be given/led to the POLE with NO delay.
- The adult should always accompany the presentation of an OOR with **simple language** and **sign** where applicable. Encourage the child to explore the feel, sound, look of it. If the child has physical problems in interacting, the adult may assist with this process by (for example) gently rubbing the OOR on the child's skin (where the feel of the OOR is seen as important).
- When the POLE is reached/has finished the child should return the OOR to the bag.
- It may only be after many thousands of presentations that a child may begin to make an association between OOR and the POLE. Therefore, it is essential that adults are consistent in their use of OOR.

Children's Speech and Language Therapy

- Where possible, the OOR may itself be labelled with a symbol/photo of it (laminated and attached to the OOR with a treasury tag) when presenting the OOR to the child, the fact that the two are paired allows opportunity for future progression to symbols.
- When the child indicates a need for their OOR bag or presents an OOR to an adult, the adult should **immediately** react to this presentation as if it is intentional i.e. the child really meant to communicate. They should move to the POLE or provide the requested object or event. The OOR should then be returned to the bag, as is the normal procedure.
- Once the OOR have been fully established, they should be used to give the child an element of choice in their day; once they understand what each object represents, they may be able to indicate a choice, perhaps through eye pointing, reaching, etc.
- The child should take their OOR sets with them if they move on from one preschool/school to another or from one class to another.

Problem Solving

- The child drops or throws the OOR. The adult should pick up the OOR and repeat the activity. This should happen approximately three times on each occasion. The adult can then carry the OOR him/herself and accompany the child to the new POLE occasionally displaying the OOR for the child to see.
- The child ignores the OOR. The adult should attempt to get the child to acknowledge the presence of the OOR and then place it in the child's line of vision (on the child's knee for example) before moving to the POLE.

See also

Ockelford, A (2002) Objects Of Reference, RNIB , London

Objects of reference: Supporting understanding no commentary

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHPcV_Vb45M

Objects of reference: Supporting choice with commentary

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCjfp5Myd8>

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