




Objects of reference guide – dos and don'ts at every stage



Objects of reference are a great tool to help early communicators. You can use them with children who do not understand words, pictures or symbols yet.

Objects of reference can help children to be aware of what is happening. They can help children to know what happens next. Some children learn to use objects of reference to choose what they want to do.

Use objects of reference in everyday routines at home, school or short breaks.

See our dos and don'ts to help children at each stage. It can take children a while to get to know an object of reference. You should start at stage 1 with each object of reference you use.

It is ok for children to be at the same stage with objects of reference. Give them the help they need.

Stage 1 – Introducing objects of reference (OOR)

I don't understand OOR yet – I am getting to know them

Do



Give the OOR right before the activity

Keep words clear and simple

Use the same words each time

You can use a touch cue or physical prompt

Your child might throw the OOR or not hold it

Start with fun activities your child does a lot

Keep a note of reactions your child has to the OOR

Children begin at stage 1 with every OOR, even if they know others

Do not



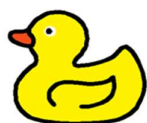
Have a gap between the OOR and the person, object, location or activity

Worry if your child doesn't notice or hold the OOR to start with

Use the OOR in the activity – have it in eye sight

Pick an OOR which is difficult to get again if it gets lost

Give up. Be consistent



Stage 2 – Awareness and tolerance

I am noticing my OOR more

Do



Give the OOR immediately before the activity

Keep words clear and simple

Use the same words each time

You can use a touch cue or physical prompt

Notice if your child is accepting the OOR – holding or looking at it

Wait for a few seconds after giving the OOR – keep a record of what your child does

Notice what activities your child likes or does lots of. It helps you plan when to use an OOR

Build up the number of OOR you use gradually

Do not



Have a gap between the OOR and the person, object, location or activity

Worry if your child doesn't know what the OOR means yet

Use negative language (e.g. no ...)

Use the OOR in the activity – have it in eye sight

Pick an OOR which is difficult to get again if it gets lost

Give up. Be consistent

Stage 3 – Understanding the object of reference

I am starting to know what the OOR means

Do



Start to show the OOR just before going to the activity

Keep words clear and simple

Use the same words each time

Your child is starting to react to an OOR they know. They start to go or look to the activity

Start to remove physical prompts

Start to increase the distance between giving OOR and the activity

Keep a record of your child's responses

If your child reacts negatively to the OOR, look at the activity. Can you change something for it to be more positive?

Do not



Expect your child to move to the activity on their own each time. Be ready to give physical or spoken help if needed

Use too much language. Keep signs and words simple

Use negative language (e.g. no ..)

Expect your child to be at stage 3 with a new OOR. Start at stage 1 with each new OOR

Stage 4 – Expression, choosing between 2

I can get the OOR I need with help

Do



Help your child to take the right OOR out of their bag. Give lots of support

Help your child to 'choose' the OOR. Have it at the top of the bag

Keep words clear and simple

Use the same words each time

Your child will go to an activity when shown the OOR they know
Take your child to the activity they 'choose' even if it's not right.
If they choose the 'incorrect' OOR take them to it. Then show them the right OOR and take them to the activity

Be ready to help if you need to

Do not



Use negative language (e.g. no we need).

Take your child to their choice then model the right OOR

Do not move to this stage until your child understands 3 or 4 OOR at stage 3

Use lots of language. Keep signs and words simple

Go too quickly. Give your child lots of time.



Stage 5 – understanding the OOR

Using OOR to make choices

I use OOR to show you what I want to do.

You show me OOR to tell me what I'm doing next.

Do



Use all the strategies mentioned in the stages 1 to 4

Respond to a choice your child makes

let them go to the activity they choose

Use OOR in a timetable to help your child what is happening now/next

See if your child is starting to understand photos or symbols.

Some children at this stage might be ready to move to paper symbols

Be positive with your communication

Do not



Worry if your child is not at this stage.

Use OOR at the stage they can follow

Rush. Give your child time to make a choice between the OOR

Use negative language (e.g. no ..)

Use too much language. Keep signs and language simple

