

## A guide about objects of reference

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### What is an object of reference?

Objects of reference are tangible, multi-sensory objects used to represent a person, activity or event. Over time a child can learn that the object stands for something. Objects of reference are used to help a person understand what is happening in their environment.

### Who can use an object of reference?

- Children who do not yet understand photographs, signs and symbols.
- Children who have a visual impairment.
- Children who require adult support to explore objects.

### Why use an object of reference?

- Simple to find objects which represent daily activities.
- Versatile and can be used throughout the day in a variety of situations.
- Non-verbal students can be included into activities.
- They are easy to transport so can be taken and used in different environments.
- Promote understanding and help the child to predict what will happen next.
- Promote expression through requesting and choice making.

### Who can help?

The speech and language therapist can discuss the child's level of understanding in order to choose a suitable object. An occupational therapist can advise on size of object to allow the student to be able to explore it.

Further Information can be found on the following websites:

- <http://ace-centre.hostinguk.com/index.cfm?pageid=3CDC028A-3048-7290-FE7DEA7A0060EF46>
- <http://totalcommunication.org.uk/objects-of-reference.html>
- <http://www.communicationmatters.org.uk/page/objects-of-reference>
- <http://talksense.weebly.com/objects-of-reference.html>

### What object shall I choose?

#### Real life objects used in the activity

The bottle of bubble bath used when running the bath or a bubble wand mounted on a piece of card and removed to use for blowing bubbles.

#### Objects not used in the activity

An armband to represent swimming but not actually used in the pool.

#### Objects with a shared feature

A piece of material to represent a hammock swing.

#### Miniature objects

A toy car to represent a car journey.

#### Abstract objects

An elastic band mounted on a piece of card to indicate going outside.

#### Multi-sensory items

Songs, sounds, smells and texture associated with an activity or person.

## Golden rules

### Is it meaningful?

In order to make this meaningful for the child, ensure you are using the object with purpose to show that an activity has finished, to show what is happening next and to give choice.

### Is it motivating?

Children are most likely to understand and use objects which are most motivating for them e.g. a bright rubber duck versus a flannel, to represent bath time.

### Is it frequent?

Ensure there is plenty of opportunity each week to use the objects you have chosen and be consistent in your approach to show the child the object before an activity is about to take place.

## Stages of development

Stage	Characteristics
1	Child shows little tolerance of object, ignores, drops or throws it.
2	Holds or carries object but shows little understanding.
3	Child shows understanding of one or more objects.
4	Child will select an object to indicate a choice when prompted.
5	Spontaneously uses object to express needs.

## Contact the Children's Therapies Service

Please contact your Integrated Therapy Team if you have any queries or concerns regarding the information in this leaflet.

### Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley

Phone 01322 428242

### Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks

Phone 01892 501860

### Maidstone and Malling

Phone 01622 742333

### Canterbury

Phone 01227 783042

### Thanet

Phone 0300 042 0871

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Please say if you would like the team to call you back

**Text:** 07899 903499 **Email:** [kcht.cct@nhs.net](mailto:kcht.cct@nhs.net)

**Address:** Customer Care Team, Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust, Unit J, Concept Court, Shearway Business Park, Folkestone, Kent CT19 4RJ **Web:** [www.kentcht.nhs.uk](http://www.kentcht.nhs.uk)

If you need communication support, an interpreter or this information in another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read or large print, please ask a member of staff.

You will be asked for your agreement to treatment and, if necessary, your permission to share your personal information.

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