Objects of Reference

Objects of reference are:

- a communication aid which over time teaches a clear link between an object and its meaning.
- a multi-sensory, tangible object used to signify an activity, people, or places.
- used to help an autistic person who does not yet understand words, pictures, or symbols.
- a tool to develop an understanding of what is happening in their environment.

Why use objects of reference?

- To develop an awareness and an understanding of what is about to happen.
- To support with timings, transition, and sequencing activities
- To support memory and recall
- To aid making choices and requests



Ways to use objects of reference

Objects of reference are nice and simple to put in place and involves selecting an object to signify what it is you wish to communicate. For example, use a coat to mean home time**,** a paint brush**,** to say we are going to paint. It works best to use familiar objects to the child, so choose an object that looks like their preferred toy car or use their favoured toy car. Listing suggestions is often not helpful and using standardised approaches does not work. It is important the chosen objects are personalised, make sense to the child and reflect the child's individual strengths and interests. However, some examples are here to get us thinking:

A cushion for carpet time, lunch box for the dining room, light up toy for sensory room, wooden spoon for cooking, sponge for bathing or a shower, bubbles for outdoor play, wellingtons for forest school, shorts for physical education, a book for story time, a bucket for sand or water play, a towel for swimming, a nappy for changing time.

Only use objects that make sense to the child, so if you do not use a wooden spoon for cooking choose an object you do use.

Using Objects of Reference with other communication tools:



Objects of reference can be used with now and next/when and then boards or with a choice board by placing the objects onto the board. For this you will need smaller objects that will fit onto the space.