

# The use of Objects of Reference as part of a Multi-Sensory Communication System

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# Objects of Reference

Much of AAC support is based on symbol or text based materials, therefore need to explain Objects of Reference.

- What they are
- How they are chosen
- Uses of OoR

# What are Objects of Reference

Objects of Reference are objects which have special meanings assigned to them (Ockelford 1993)

An Object of Reference is accessible to people who are blind, partially sighted and have a complex learning complex need by:

- Providing information through touch
- Being easier to interpret than pictures for those with visual perceptual problems
- It is a concrete object linked to the symbolic words in language
- It remains in place giving time to process

# Choosing Objects of Reference

- Objects of Reference are chosen to have a specific meaning. There are no fixed objects which should be used but certain criteria are important.
- Distinct tactile differences
- Distinct visual differences
- Relatively unique
- Could have an association with the activity but not necessarily used.

# Uses of Objects of Reference

- To support receptive language  
An Object of Reference is presented just before the associated activity to give extra tactile and/ or visual information on what is about to happen.
- To support memory
- Having a permanent tactile reference can act as a reminder.
- To communicate expressively.
- Objects of Reference that are well known to the individual can be used to make requests /choice.

# Using Objects of Reference to Remove Barriers

- Where Objects of Reference are labelled with a symbol, this could act as a bridge to learning symbols.
- Research by RNIB and SeeAbility indicates that there are children and adults with learning disability in the UK that have unidentified visual difficulties, which could make accessing symbols difficult.
- As Objects of Reference are individualised and created locally, the use could be easily implemented in low resource countries.

# The Multi-Sensory Communication Environment at RNIB Pears Centre for Specialist Learning

- Pears Centre for Specialist Learning is a school and residential children's home for young people with visual impairment and complex learning needs, in the UK. Communication disability and challenging behaviours are a key feature of the young people's difficulties.
- A Multi-Sensory Communication policy has been devised, written and implemented to include the range of communication strategies used at Pears Centre.

# Strategies include use of:

- Objects of Reference
  - Signing (visual and on-body)
  - Simple VOCAs
  - Symbols
  - Simplified Verbal language
  - Music Cues
  - Body language
  - Communication Passports
  - Object Exchange
  - Tone of voice/intonation
  - Intensive Interaction
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- Staff training and monitoring of the system is included to ensure consistency of implementation. The 5 Good Communication Standards, set out by RCSLT (2013) will be used for monitoring.



# The Pears Centre Objects of Reference System

- A standard set of Objects of Reference is used, in 3 categories:
- Activities: swimming, swing, a fan, go for a walk, go in the car.
- Places: residential bungalow, school, and rooms in school,
- Lessons: numeracy, music, science,
- Regular and consistent use is essential.
- Objects of Reference can be presented on a black background board to give increased visual contrast, or as a “Now and Next” board.

# Environmental Objects of Reference



# Environmental Object of Reference



**RNIB** Pears Centre

Specialist Learning

# Environmental Object of Reference



# Using Objects of Reference in an exchange system at Pears Centre

- Using Objects of Reference to exchange is taught in 4 stages based on PECS (Bondy and Frost)
- How to communicate, to learn to make a request by exchanging an object with a person.
- Objects have meaning, to learn a small number of objects have different meanings.
- Discrimination, to make an intentional choice between 2 or more objects.
- Distance, to use a range of objects, kept in a specific container, to make a spontaneous request.

# Examples of use

- Some blind young people at Pears Centre use this system effectively to make requests.
- In 1:1 time to choose an activity: play a music CD/sing a song/have a story read.
- By requesting the object container and selecting an object to make a request.