

TRANSCRIPT: Using objects of reference

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Where we know that children struggle to understand the spoken word, then we need to use other means in order to support their understanding. What we are trying to introduce, through the use of objects of reference, is the idea that we can use some form of symbol to refer to and to represent an activity that we're about to do. So, for example, we use a cup to represent the idea of, 'We're going to have a snack', but it's not like the word 'cup' that disappears as soon as I've said it, it's a permanent object. So that we are trying to encourage a direct link between seeing and holding the cup and then the actual event to which it represents.

One of the issues that we need to be very careful about with any symbolic system we use, is that we are not just using it for the children to receive things in a, possibly, very passive way. What we're wanting to encourage is the children to be using it themselves, as well, to express choices or decisions.

If we offer two objects as a choice, we actually need to respond appropriately. What we try to encourage is the child's understanding that, 'Oh, if I do this then there is a consequence to that', which, invariably, is going to be a positive consequence and so you're reinforcing that whole idea of the reasons to communicate and the benefits I accrue.

We are supporting and enabling the idea of that child having a voice, which is a very crucial part of personal empowerment.