

Using objects

Individuals with profound and complex difficulties can use objects to communicate. These could be personal objects, such as a pair of gloves to represent an outing or a hairbrush to represent a bath. Individuals who use objects to communicate can progress to using a standardised set of objects such as a plastic cup to represent break time.

These examples illustrate how objects may have clear personal significance to the individual but may be unclear to the observer.

“Josh is a reluctant traveller. He does not enjoy being in the minibus and, on the occasions when he has to travel, there are frequently difficult scenes in which Josh makes noisy and sometimes violent protests. Staff eventually discover that Josh will climb into the minibus with relatively little fuss if he is wearing a particular pair of gloves. The gloves come to represent travel for Josh and are used as a form of communication to help him anticipate and cope with the journeys he has to make. No one knows why the gloves are associated with vehicles for Josh or why they comfort him in this stress-laden area of his life.” *Enhancing the Quality of Life*

“Teri likes to take her hairbrush into the bath with her. Neither she nor her enablers use the hairbrush in order to brush Teri’s hair while she is bathing, but Teri likes to swish the hairbrush in the water and hold onto it, rubbing its bristles, while she is in the bath. The hairbrush has come to signify bath time for Teri and her enablers bring the hairbrush to her when they come to tell her that it is bath time. Teri will happily hold the hairbrush as she moves down the corridor, clearly anticipating the experience that lies ahead.” *Enhancing the Quality of Life*

Use of objects of reference and symbols for labelling in the environment is illustrated in the link:

[Labelling the environment](#)

[Photographs and pictures](#)

These ideas are based on the Enhancing Quality of Life Resource Pack, Byers, R., Dee, L., Hayhoe, H. and Maudslay, L. (2002) *Enhancing Quality of Life*. London: Skill and University of Cambridge which draws upon the experience of practitioners working with people with profound and complex learning difficulties across a range of contexts and in a variety of ways.

See [‘references’](#) for details of how to order this resource.