

Mapledown School Communication – Objects of Reference, touch cues/smells and Makaton

Aim: To ensure that all pupils are given as much opportunity to gain a greater understanding of what is going on around them, to them, and to have as much opportunity to show preferences and choice.

We use a mixture of objects of references, on body signing, smells, touch queues and Makaton at school. I have included all the information on each of the techniques for your information. Although the examples I have included are the ones that we actually use each day to make up our version of a combination of these languages. The reason we use a combination is because we need to differentiate for our students and all of their different needs. Different techniques have different uses.

Objects of Reference:

An 'object of reference' is, as the name implies, an object which has a particular meaning associated with it. The object is closely associated with and comes to represent another object, an activity, a person or an event. These objects give the child information about what is going to happen if they are used consistently. They are often used in schools now to represent curriculum activities, or personal care routines, but they can be used at home in the same way. The important thing is that the same objects and methods are used.

Many pupils might start off with actual objects before moving on to, for example, photographs, miniature representations, line drawings and symbols - whatever works for them. Other pupils will remain using the objects.

Objects of reference are basically a simple method of communicating, but they can be used at a number of levels.

- Involving an actual object that the child uses in an activity; a cup that is used every time he or she has a drink would become an object of reference for a drink.
- If possible, the objects could be used to give him or her an element of choice in their day; once they understand what each object represents, they may be able to indicate a choice, perhaps through eye pointing, reaching, etc.

Objects of Reference in Mapledown School

- **Before school** (the use of **classical music/orange oil**)
- **After school** (the use of music, **Michael Buble "Home"** followed by **"Wishes"/lavender smell**)
- **Hydrotherapy**- **Towel/kit**
- **Sensory room**- **chimes**



- **Outings/community access**- **Seatbelt** (can get scraps of material sometimes from a garage/ black ribbon)



- **Work**- **bath sponge** used to stroke the arms of the pupils to stimulate blood flow.



- **End of the work session** (finished squeeze **whistle**)



- **Food and drink** - **dinner bell**, Oliver **"Food Glorious Food"**, dinner song



Objects of reference at home. It is preferable that the object is as closely related to the activity as possible e.g

- **Toothbrushing** - use own toothbrush to feel before you start
- **Hairbrush** - feel own hairbrush before you start
- **Food** give own spoon to hold before you start

We also use smell to signify different times of the day and different rooms in the school. This is good for students who have difficulties with vision and hearing. It lets students know either the time of the day or the room that they are in.

At the **start** of the day we smell **orange** oil and at the **end** of the school day we smell **lavender**.

In the **toilet** we use **eucalyptus** oil.

At home you could use a specific scent or air freshener for each room too. When it is bedtime you could choose a soothing scent or wake a student up in the morning to a zingy scent.

You can choose whatever scent you like, what is important is that you stick to the same scent each time so that you do not confuse the student.

Touch Cues

Individuals who have little functional use of their vision or hearing are often unable to understand what is going to happen to them. The purpose of touch cues is to give those individuals a way of understanding activities, people and places through the use of touch and/or movement. It is especially useful for students who are deaf-blind.

Touch cues are signals placed on the person's body to give a specific message. Using touch cues consistently in daily routines allows the student to understand his own surroundings and the people they meet in their daily schedule.

Each student needs a set of cues specific for his own situation at home, school, and work. It is very important to encourage everyone working with the student to use the same cue to help the student understand the meaning of the cue.

Use of Touch Cues in Mapledown School

Some pupils will come to Mapledown School with their own set of "touch cues". These should remain the same and consistent. But the ones we generally use are:

- **Moving a student in their chair** (tap pupils shoulders with both hands just before moving)
- **Going up in the hoist** (brush your hand from their elbow to shoulder upwards)
- **Going down in the hoist** (brush your hand from their shoulder down to their elbow)
- **Finishing a task** (Brush your hands on both of pupils arms from shoulder to hands)
- **Use of senses:** Adult to tap twice on ear (listen), temple of face (look), nose (smell) or side of mouth (taste) to reinforce the sense to be used.
- **Toilet** (Make Makaton sign on student using their right index finger and rubbing it on their left shoulder)



Makaton

Touch cues are for an adult to sign on a student's body what is happening and are not used for choice making.

Makaton is used by a student to sign to someone else what they want. Makaton is a form of simplified British sign language. We turn the original Makton signs into touch cues by helping a student to sign it together with us.

We use a few makaton signs e.g toilet/snack/more/toy. We also use the makaton alphabet to represent someone's name. E.g for Tamara we sign the letter T.

You can pay to go on a course or download online resources on the makaton website. But there are also some great free places to learn some signs!

<https://www.youtube.com/user/SingingHandsUK> - singing hands UK sign popular kids songs and stories!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dZyWQWZ-Gk&list=PLsCxuE6TBzJwkjmRYjDmLashbbgmznzcaY> - learn to sign with Mr Tumble from something special

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pid4PLNY0a0> - the lightyear foundation have put together some useful signs

<https://www.makaton.org/shop/shopping/browseStore/Free-resources> - the makaton store also has some free resources you can download and use