

A Practical Guide to Understanding Object Substitution in young children

What is object substitution?



Object substitution is when children use an object as if it were something else. The objects children use often are physically similar to those they are substituting (ex: using a block as a telephone).

Why is object substitution important?

- Children learn that many objects share similar properties
- Encourages children to problem solve when they may not have the exact object they want
- Supports children in pretending



Begins in the toddler years and continues through the preschool years

How does object substitution support children's development?

Object substitution promotes the development of:

- imagination,
- creativity,
- pattern recognition,
- concentration,
- problem solving,
- self-esteem,

and much more!

How can adults support object substitution?

- Provide age appropriate toys and objects the child can play with
- Provide toys that can have multiple uses (ex: blocks)
- Provide ideas for what children can use the objects as (ex: a pot can be a hat)
- Provide positive attention as the child plays
- Provide the child with plenty of time and adequate space to engage in object substitution

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