

TREASURE BASKET FOR BABIES

We live in a world where plastic toys dominate toy shops, but plastic is dull and disappointing for babies, and while each rattle may look different each one smells, tastes and feels the same - it is unstimulating to a babies senses. Using heuristic play with babies stimulates all the senses, creating a rich learning experience.

HEURISTIC PLAY

Heuristic play with babies revolves around the use of the Treasure Basket - the Treasure Basket can be used with babies from the time that they can sit unaided to around 16-18 months, during this phase the primary question a baby would ask if they could talk would be 'What is the object like?'. The Treasure Basket is a ridged low sided round basket filled with 'objects' from the 'real world' these 'objects' are made from any material but plastic, and come from a variety of sources in nature and the around the house. Through handling and exploring the objects, a baby develops contact with the outside world, and begins to make choices and decisions.

SENSORY MOTOR DEVELOPMENT

The predominant way that babies under the age of one discover and learn about their world is through sensory motor development. During this stage a baby's primal instinct is to explore objects by handling and mouthing them in order to find out about their physical characteristics. By using a treasure basket with children at this age you are providing them with rich mental stimulation, which not only activates the growth of the brain but also provides richly satisfying experiences for the baby.

For a Treasure Basket to be an effective tool in the play and development of babies, the most important factor is an attentive and calm caregiver, who creates a relaxed atmosphere and is available to the child during their play and exploration.

The adults role in the use of the treasure basket is to sit nearby and be attentive, responsive and unobtrusive - the baby needs to be able to make their own choices about which objects they are going to pick up and how they are going to explore them without interference.

To an outsider looking in on baby exploring a treasure basket, it may appear that the adult is doing 'nothing', but a baby will have a much richer and more stimulating experience, developing confidence and concentration when they can explore at their own pace, without being 'shown' things and 'how' to use them by an adult, as there is no right or wrong way for a baby to explore or use the materials.

Another important factor in the effectiveness of the Treasure Basket as a learning tool, is when, where, how often and how long each 'play session' lasts. The treasure basket should never be left out 24/7 for a baby to play with, as they will soon bore of the objects and become uninterested in them. It is important that the time of day you allocate to a session exploring the treasure basket is when a child is fed, well rested and calm. The environment must also be calm: make sure there is minimum disruption. Ideally each play session should last between 30 minutes to an hour, and a baby should have an opportunity to explore the treasure basket every day, but only if all of the conditions are favourable.

A CATALOGUE OF MEMORIES



The treasure basket comprises of a ridged side round basket and 60-80 different objects. The treasure basket is not a static plaything, over time objects can be added, taken out and replaced.



Every time you go somewhere new, you can collect objects to go into the treasure basket (e.g shells from a trip to the beach or pine cones from a visit to the gardens), so that the basket grows, reinforces learning experiences and becomes a catalogue of memories.



Every treasure basket will be a unique collection of objects. To make the treasure basket, set aside a couple of days, where your main purpose is to build the foundations of a treasure basket for your child. Aim to establish a collection of 20-30 objects, which comprise a variety of textures and materials.

Once you have built up this 'base' of objects to go in your treasure basket, you can add more to it over time, which will keep your baby interested with a new object to explore every now and then, and will take the pressure off you to find all 60-80 objects at once.

Below you will find a list of ideas of objects to collect for your treasure basket:

- **Paper / cardboard objects:** Egg boxes, notebook, sturdy cardboard tubes, greaseproof paper.
- **Wooden objects:** Door wedge, small turned bowl, dolly pegs, egg cup, wooden egg, spoons, curtain rings, coaster, bracelet, block, napkin rings, dowel, empty salt and pepper pots.
- **Leather, textile, rubber, or fur objects:** Small knitted toy, bean bag, piece of flannel, velvet powder puff, bags of herbs, bag of lavender, leather key ring, coloured ribbons, leather purse.
- **Rubber objects:** Ball, bath plug (no chain), soap holder, door stop, coaster.
- **Metal objects:** Honey drizzler, an egg cup, curtain ring, egg poacher, measuring spoons, tea strainer, whisk, powder compact, bells, lemon squeezer, small bowl,
- **Natural objects:** A lemon or orange, coconut shell, grass rope, sheepskin, pumice stone, loofah, shells, pine/fir cones, driftwood, avocado stone, large pebbles.
- **Brushes:** Scrubbing brush, pastry brush, baby's hair brush, nail brush, makeup brush, paint brush, shaving brush, wooden toothbrush.
- **Other objects:** small vanilla essence or food colouring bottle, hair rollers, small mirror, scent bags, bone shoe horn, ceramic bowl

SAFETY

A note on safety - it is never a good idea to let small children and babies to chew on keys, as these frequently have lead and other heavy metals in them which can be ingested if mouthed - also ensure that you do not have any objects in the treasure basket made of pewter as this is also high in lead.

If you intend on putting objects made from leather into your treasure basket, make sure they are genuine leather, and not imitation leather (which is made of PVC, and is very toxic for babies to be mouthing).

In regards to choking, a good guide is a film canister to test object to make sure that it is not a choking hazard (anything that fits into the canister is small enough for a child to swallow or choke on).

Give everything a good wash and rinse before offering it to your baby to play in the treasure basket, and check the treasure basket regularly for broken objects.

TREASURE BASKETS FOR TODDLERS

As babies grow, they develop further curiosity about the world around them. As the question of 'What is it?' is fulfilled with the exploration of the treasure basket, they are no longer content to simply hold, feel and mouth objects, they want to know what they can do with them!

For toddlers, the question posed when participating in heuristic play is 'What can I do with this object?'. Toddlers have a natural curiosity to explore, and experiment with the different ways that objects interact with each other.

INVESTIGATION

A toddler will investigate with all the physical possibilities of an object, by rolling, filling, stacking, dumping, fitting things inside each other, balancing and manipulating an object in every possible way.

Toddlers who are able to freely explore in this way can make satisfying discoveries about how the world works, by exploring areas such as gravity, spatial awareness, density, and simple physics, which builds their cognitive development, hand/eye co-ordination and fine and gross motor skills.

OUR ROLE AS SUPPORTER AND OBSERVER

As with the treasure baskets, it is important that children are able to engage in heuristic play without instruction or interference. The role of the adult in this type of play is to support and observe children during their play.

For toddlers who want to know 'What can I do with it?', it is important to provide a range of objects that can be used together. It is a nice idea to make up a range of 'activity kits' with a purpose in mind, but then to let the children explore them and use them as they would like to, remembering that there is no right or wrong way to engage in this type of play.



Try and think of all of the different ways that objects can interact with each other, and provide objects that allow your child to experiment with these different ideas:

Stacking

Boxes, tins with lids, cotton reels, cones, coasters, pieces of wood etc.

Posting

A box with a small slit in the top, tubes, pegs, shells, stones etc.

Balancing

Dolly pegs to peg around a box or a stainless steel bowl etc.

Threading

Curtain rings, paper towel holder, cup tree, bangles/bracelets, lengths of chain/beads, ribbon, scarves etc.

Rolling

Balls of different sizes and textures, tubes, a ramp made from a cardboard box, cones, pompoms, wooden door knob, cone shaped shells etc.

Pattern making

shells, stones, pine cones, leaves etc.

Matching

Containers and lids, pairs of objects etc.

Collecting

Baskets with handles, large jars, bags, containers with small and large openings etc.

Nesting

Baskets that fit inside one another etc.

Making noise

Metal objects, small objects to put in jars and be shaken, a wooden stick for banging etc.

REMEMBER - SCHEMAS – this type of basket will also help us define & support particular schemas for the individual.

CAUSE AND EFFECT

By being able to use their imagination and explore without interference or direction, through sequencing, manipulation, anticipation and rearranging of objects, children can discover concepts such as same and different, spheres roll in all directions, tubes roll back and forth and cones roll in circles. Shiny reflects, metal resonates, flat objects can be piled up, heavy and light, little and big, things of the same shape/size can have a different weight, floating and sinking. Plus many more basic scientific and mathematical concepts.

Through this experimentation and exploration children develop their imagination, problem solving skills, concentration, fine and gross motor skills and overall cognitive development.

As with the Treasure Basket, other important factors in a successful Heuristic Play session include the when/where/how long and how often.

Make sure that the time of day that you choose to implement an heuristic play session, is free from disruption from visitors, when a child is well rested and has eaten. It is important that the environment that this type of play takes place in is free from distraction and interruption.

Sit calmly and observe the child during play and be available to them. A child will happily engage in this type of play for an hour, but try to limit the sessions to this length of time to keep a child interested in the contents of the heuristic play kit for future play sessions.

SAFE AND CLEAN

Ensure that you check over the play materials every time you use them to ensure that they are safe and clean regularly.