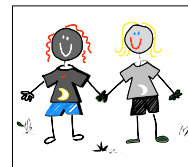


Information and advice from:



**Early Development and
Inclusion Team**
Supporting Inclusion at the
Early Years Foundation Stage

Using Treasure Baskets

Heuristic Play for Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

The term '*heuristic*' means to enable someone to discover or learn something for themselves. **Heuristic Play** is a specific session of exploratory play using **Treasure Baskets** which provide opportunities for children to engage with everyday objects rather than toys.

Early Stages of Play Development

Between 5-10 months is the mouthing stage where babies learn '*What is the object is like?*'

Between 10-20 months the child is becoming mobile and play develops as the child finds out '*What can be done with the object?*' and '*What else can be done?*'

From 20 months onwards as speech and communication become more sophisticated, play imaginative as the child begins to explore '*What can the object become?*'

Children with SEND may be within these early stages of play and will benefit from sessions of heuristic play

The aim of **Heuristic Play** is to provide a wide range of sensory stimulation to help children discover and learn things for themselves. For a child with SEND it can form part of their 'Sensory Diet' throughout the session.

The use of **Treasure Baskets** can support ALL children to develop the Characteristics of Effective Learning by:

- Safely finding out about objects and exploring with all of the senses
- Playing with what they know and be willing to 'have a go' – there's no right or wrong way to play
- Extending attention and focus skills
- Discovering how items relate and work together
- Having their own ideas and choosing what to do
- Making links and developing understanding of cause and effect
- Making greater sense of the world around them
- Developing their own unique trains of creative thought and imagination

Once a child can sit up, they are ready to explore Treasure Baskets.

Setting up Treasure Basket Collections

- Collections need to be clean and safe (nothing sharp or small enough to risk choking)
- Each collection will contain a wide variety of everyday items both natural and recycled and can be stored in boxes, baskets, or bags
- Choose items that can be held, felt, squeezed, banged, sucked, rattled, rolled, and give potential opportunity for threading, wrapping, filling, stacking, and sorting
- Items that work well are wooden, metal or silicone utensils, wooden pegs, corks, bottle tops, jar lids, beads and bangles, curtain rings, cotton reels, napkin rings, small boxes and containers, cotton wool balls, ribbons, tubes, material samples, paint, pastry, make-up, or nail brushes, shells, fir cones, coconut shells, sponges – the list is endless
- Raid your kitchen, bathroom, and recycling bin – be imaginative!

Examples of themed treasure baskets



Blues and greens



Black and White



Natural materials

Planning Treasure Basket Time

- Treasure basket time is a time for the other toys to be put away. The bright plastic toys commonly played with will often feel, smell, and taste the same
- Choose a defined area to offer the treasure basket (box or bag), such as a carpet space or tuff tray
- Play is incredibly open-ended, there's no right or wrong way to play, but there needs to be enough time given to let children explore, test, try and repeat. Allow for sessions of 30-60 minutes

The role of the adult *(other targeted strategies supported are in brackets)*

- Sessions need to be well supervised but it's important for adults to hold back and allow the child to discover for themselves *(Follow the Child's Lead)*
- Do NOT direct the play – be attentive and available enabling the child the opportunity to share space and interest *(Joint Attention)*
- Speech is minimal. Don't ask questions. Instead respond to what is happening with simple comments and expressions *(Developing Expressive Language)*
- Enjoy the discovery experience alongside the child – match how they play, how they move, the sounds they make *(Intensive Interaction)*