

(1 of 3) A parent's guide to...

Treasure basket and heuristic play

Giving your child opportunities to explore a variety of objects can aid their developmental progress. Penny Tassoni explains.



Babies, at the age where they can sit up, and toddlers **love exploring objects and are fascinated by sounds and textures**. For many years, treasure basket play and heuristic play have been used in nurseries to support their development. Indeed, you may have seen children playing with an assortment of objects and wondered what they were doing. So what is involved in these play approaches? And how do they benefit children?

FIVE THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PLAY

1. No toys: While there are differences between treasure basket and heuristic play, they

both involve children **playing with a group of objects rather than toys**. This is because by their very design toys have a set purpose, and this can be limiting. Playing with a range of objects provides more possibilities for children to explore. A baby may combine an enamel cup with a nail brush and bang them together before moving on to suck the end of the brush.

2. Natural materials: One of the main differences between treasure basket and heuristic play is that treasure baskets contain only objects made with natural materials. **The items are usually provided in a low basket that**

babies can reach into. It is thought that natural materials provide babies with more sensory feedback - and touch and taste are the key ways babies' process information. They move onto heuristic play once they start to walk.

3. A mix of everyday objects: The items for heuristic play are usually arranged on the floor in clusters. You can put out objects made from both natural and man-made materials, and a mixture of container types and smaller objects seems to work well.

Some of the objects in heuristic play are much larger than those in treasure baskets, as children are able to stand and also have more control over their movements.

This extra strength and control means that many toddlers use heuristic play to stack boxes or tins together and to post or drop smaller items into containers. As toddlers like to repeat their actions, you need to provide several of the same items - for example, ten corks that can be posted down a tube.

4. No adult guidance: One of the interesting features of treasure basket and heuristic play is the way that **adults avoid making any suggestions or guiding children as to how to play.** It is up to children

to decide what to reach out for and how to explore the objects. **This is thought to help with confidence and help them learn to concentrate for longer.** Adults are always present, though, for safety reasons and because babies and toddlers often want to share their discoveries.



5. Developmental benefits: Treasure basket play and heuristic play benefit children in various ways. Many adults are surprised by the length and level of concentration that even babies show. This play also stimulates the senses, develops hand-eye co-ordination and strengthens the muscles used to sit and squat. It enables children to explore the concepts of shape, size and texture, as well as learning about cause and effect.