

(2 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.



WHAT TO USE:

You can buy ready-made treasure baskets and heuristic play items, but it is easy to gather together groups of objects. For children to benefit from treasure basket play there needs to be variety. For babies, **the idea is that each item they handle is different so that they feel different weights, textures and materials.**

For heuristic play, the style changes slightly. A mixture of containers and clusters of small items seems to work well, although a good variety is also

needed. There is no 'set' list of objects, but it is important to keep safety in mind.

The objects that you choose for both kinds of play are likely to be put in the mouth as well as handled. So avoid sharp edges, items that can disintegrate and small objects that might be choking hazards.

Treasure basket play:

Use objects made from natural materials only, for example:

- objects made principally from wood, such as a nail brush, honey dipper, make-up brush, shaving brush, wooden spoons of different sizes, wooden tongs, a small wooden bowl, a thick cork coaster, or wooden curtain rings

- objects made principally from metal, such as a metal teaspoon, a tea strainer, small and medium metal bowls or a small metal tin

- leather and fabrics, such as a wallet, a purse, a woollen scarf, a cotton handkerchief or a piece of lace

- other objects, such as a make-up mirror, a plunger, loofah, a fresh whole lemon, a grapefruit or a large flat pebble.

Heuristic play:

Provide an assortment of everyday objects, including those above plus:

- containers, holders and tubes - such as a kitchen towel holder, a mug tree, saucepans, metal biscuit tins, roasting tins, poster tubes, plastic cylinders, funnels, cardboard boxes with lids, plastic bottles or flower pots

- smaller objects such as corks, curtain rings, bracelets, wooden spills, shells, spoons, dolly pegs or very large buttons.

PRESENTATION:

Treasure basket play takes place on the floor. You will need about 30 or so items grouped together in a pile. **Ideally, they should be put in a very low basket so that your baby can reach them easily** (a high-sided basket is likely to tip up and so may be unsafe).

If you don't have a suitable basket, you could just put them in a pile on the floor or use a low-sided sturdy cardboard box. If your baby can't quite manage to sit up unsupported, you might like to sit behind them.



Heuristic play requires a clear space so that your child can focus on the objects.

Choose several types of containers, along with ten or more of each of the smaller items.

Group each type of object in a cluster so that children can see them easily - for example, the biscuit tins together, and the shells together. This is important, as once children have discovered an action it is likely that they will want to repeat it in exactly the same way and they may become frustrated if they cannot find the objects they need.

Once your child begins to lose interest, **encourage them to help tidy away the items.** Tidying away is seen as part of this activity and, ideally, try to keep smaller items in individual bags or boxes so that your child learns to do a little sorting.