

(3 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.



### FIVE TIPS TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS PLAY

**1. Choose a good time:** For babies and toddlers to gain the most out of this type of play, it is worth choosing a time when you know that they are not too tired. This will allow them to concentrate for a longer period. It is not unknown for babies and toddlers to spend at least half an hour enjoying this type of play.

**2. Avoid directing your child:** **Babies and toddlers are naturally curious, so there is no need to direct this type of play,** although you do need to sit close by. While some children start to reach out quickly for the objects, others take a

little time to get going. With you simply smiling and nodding, children should soon work out that they are allowed to touch and explore.



**3. Allow enough time:** As this type of play helps children to concentrate, it is

worth putting this type of play out when you are not in a rush to go and do other things. This is important, as children can sense when adults are fidgety. Instead, sit and enjoy not having to entertain your child and watch how creative and thoughtful they can be.



**4. Observe your child:** While your child is playing, you need to observe, for safety reasons and to see what interests your child. Your baby, for example, may be fascinated with a shiny item, and so at another time you could hold them in front of a mirror. With toddlers, you may notice that they stack tins or post corks into a bottle - and you could put out similar objects for other times.

**5. Introduce new objects:** Variety is the spice of life - and **when it comes to this type of play it is worth introducing a few new objects** into the mix and taking out others. Just by bringing in three or four new items, children will be able to make new connections between them. If you have observed your child, you will have a good idea of which things to keep and also what you might take out.

### COMMON QUESTIONS

**Q. I worry about the safety of treasure basket play.**

**A. This is a perfectly safe activity, provided that you choose items that are large and solid enough not to be swallowed** and don't have sharp edges. It is also a good idea to try any items out

for yourself. Feel the edges and see how it fits in your own mouth. Judge whether it might disintegrate if it is pulled.

**You should also be on hand and vigilant when you introduce items, so you can remove them quickly if there is a problem.** It is also important to inspect items each time you put them out to check that they haven't degraded with use.

Remember that babies have been given objects to hold for centuries, and toys especially for babies are something relatively new.

**Q. My child doesn't seem that interested in heuristic play.**

**A.** There are several factors that can influence the success of heuristic play. It may be that your child was tired at the time they tried it, or you may not have put out sufficient objects. The latter is often the reason children don't stay and play. Have another go and see if you can increase the diversity and overall quantity of what is on offer. Make sure also that you are relaxed and sitting fairly still. This helps children to settle and concentrate.

### NEXT STEPS:

**Children are usually interested in a range of everyday objects, but how they play with them changes over time.** You may, for example, start to see your child pretending to drink from a tin or pretending to cook by stirring shells around with a spoon. This is the beginning of a style of play where children use items symbolically - where one thing represents another.