

Supporting Babies Play and development through Treasure Baskets

Presented by Niki Buchan



Stages of Play with objects:

Approx 5-10 months – What is this object like? Treasure Basket

Approx 10-20 months – What can I do with it? Heuristic Play

Approx 20 months onwards – What can this object become? Imaginative Play

Treasure baskets:

Created by Elinor Goldschmeid (1911-2009) as a means for babies to have some control while they choose sensory objects they want to explore.

These baskets consciously offers a non-mobile baby the opportunity to make their own choices and decisions – this is often the first taste of freedom! It promotes the development of concentration and allows babies to learn many abstract concepts such as hot/cold, heavy/light, smooth/rough, hard/soft etc. It also offers the opportunity for a baby to take risks and be courageous as they explore new sensory objects.

A Treasure Basket consists of a sturdy basket with rigid sides and a flat bottom about 12 centimetres in height and 30 centimetres in diameter. The basket is placed on the floor at the side of the baby, to easily access the items. The adult is seated to one side of the baby, to see and observe the play, but not be in the line of vision as the intention is for the baby to interact with the objects and not with a person.

The objects in the basket should offer maximum stimulation to the baby's senses as they search for objects to stimulate:

- **Sight** - different colours, form, length and shininess
- **Smell** - a variety of scents
- **Sound** - ringing, tinkling and banging noises
- **Taste** - could be restrictive, but possible
- **Touch** - texture, weight, shape and temperature

Objects can be made of metal, wood, shell, stone, bristle, raffia, rubber, leather, material, but all should be natural and not derived from plastic.

When offering a treasure basket -

- There should be no adult participation - this aspect of heuristic play is a non-social activity (other than to offer reassurance, smiles and positive body language)
- Allow the baby to have control - apparently very simple objects offer babies significant and deep experiences, such as making choices, and having control over what they are doing independently.

- If the adult becomes involved and offers a baby a specific object, the play changes as the baby is no longer in control and making their own independent choices
- Babies need plenty of time to settle and concentrate on any activity and should be emotionally calm and content.
- Offer 30 – 45 min peaceful and uninterrupted play daily if possible
- if a baby is only interested for 10 or 15 minutes, accept that this is the baby's limit and find another activity to attract their interest and attention

The adult should not:

- Attempt to direct the play by offering objects to the baby
- Talk to the baby and distract them or disturb their concentration
- Talk to other adults whilst the babies are engrossed in the treasure basket play, as this will not allow you to observe and respond to the baby
- Regard the session as a time to catch up on paperwork or another activity. Doing this means you are not focussing on the baby and their learning.

Suggestions for observations: Do they explore more than one object, maybe one held to the mouth and the other in the hand? Watch how a baby handles each object: which grasp do they use, do they use one or both hands, do they turn the object over? This would include fine motor and fine motor manipulation skills. Watch how a baby expresses their feelings (remember the wiggly toes!) Make note of their body language, facial expressions, gestures and vocalisations. What feelings and emotions can you observe: pleasure, excitement, frustration? Observe the baby's levels of concentration, how is this evident? Look at body language, gestures, facial expressions and vocalisations.

Suggested sensory objects

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 cellars.

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 with 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.



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She is a strong advocate for children's right to a high quality childhood, including having regular access to nature and to having their voices heard. Published books: [Children in Wild Nature](#), [Adventurous Play](#) and STEM Detectives

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