

# Heuristic Play Materials

*Unstructured play materials for infants and toddlers*

*Heuristic play is supported with loose parts and materials not found in the bright and glossy catalogues.*

*The play materials are various found, made, household or low-cost purchased objects—the uses of which are not predetermined by educators. As such, the scope of heuristic play materials is unlimited, allowing children to further skill development and imagination.*

## Heuristic Play

The objects used in heuristic play, tend to be simple and perhaps the untrained eye could mistakenly label them 'junk'. Observe children, however, as they interact with the materials and witness them recognizing the potential of each item.



For the most potential laden materials, look for objects that can be **grasped** or **squeezed** and those with **texture** or the **potential for action** such as **rolling**.

## How Do I Store and Present these objects?

The materials can be presented and kept in treasure baskets, shoe boxes or stored in labelled "concept" containers. It is good to keep the infant's *essential question* in mind and provide things that may differ in length, weight, softness, hardness, roughness and shininess.

## Some more tips

Keep in mind that when a child is carrying a container without a handle they are required to utilise different skills than when carrying one with a handle. There are numerous variations of handles or lids: for example jug shaped handles, rope, cane and bucket handles.

A photo of the objects within the container could be tied or stuck to the front and the same image placed on the shelf where the item is stored to facilitate care of materials and assist in packing away. Materials can be rotated week in week out to allow further exploration opportunities. The materials provided should allow children to explore without educators determining how they are to be used nor the need for adult modelling. There should be enough materials and baskets/containers for a number of children play individually.

### Treasure Baskets

*Watch carefully ...  
random choice becomes a deep  
investigation ...*



# Heuristic Play Materials

*Unstructured play materials for infants and toddlers*

*Play interruptions should be minimised to allow focus and deep investigation.*

## Heuristic play and the Early Years Learning Framework

The Early Years Learning Framework highlights the importance of play as it recognises Learning through play as one of the practices.

Play provides opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, improvise and imagine. (EYLF p. 16)

## Play interruptions should be minimised to allow focus and deep investigation.

Purposeful planning needs to be executed to allow for:

- small groups supervised by attentive educators
- indoor and outdoor play
- sufficient materials for all children
- a relaxed and quiet atmosphere to allow for focused attention.



### **Heuristic Play: Treasure Baskets**

*Elinor Goldschmeid in recognition that babies investigate their world, put “the world in a basket”.*

These baskets contain a collection of objects made from different materials, including natural items. Most of the objects are from everyday “real” life, found around the house, chosen to interest, surprise and stimulate the senses. The objects lead to exploration of weight, size, shape, texture, sound, smell and provides an experience enabling them to make sense of their world and how things work (Goldschmeid & Jackson, 2000).

### **What do children do with these?**

They hold, rub, squeeze, sort, smell, put together, line up, drop, fill, stack, pile up, count and so much more. They combine the materials in ways we would not think of.

### **Safety Considerations**

**Always be aware of the hazards of materials.** Natural materials need to be screened for possible toxic properties (finishes or plant parts for example).

**Ensure items are safe to be explored by the mouth.**

Look for sharp edges or possibilities for a part to break off.

**Ensure items are of a safe size.** Know the correct size to prevent choking. Keep a 35mm film canister handy as a choke testing guide.

**Remember, as always, supervise, supervise, supervise children—especially in mixed age groups.**

### **For more information**

<http://www.childrenscentres.org.uk/>

[EY\\_B23\\_Heuristic\\_Play.asp](#)

<http://www.educate.ece.govt.nz/~media/Educate/Files/oldECE/infants%20toddlersissue4.pdf>

