

Treasure Baskets



This toolkit is designed to give you ideas to support the development of treasure baskets in your setting.

Treasure Baskets

A Treasure basket is a collection of every day objects chosen to stimulate the different senses. It is one way of giving non mobile babies, from around 6 months until they start crawling a wide range of experiences as well as the chance to explore and decide for themselves what to play with. Babies learn from the treasure basket by looking, sucking, touching, licking, banging, picking up and dropping, shaking, by moving things from hand to mouth and looking carefully at objects. Many commercial toys for young children look exciting and colourful and are classed as educational, but many are very limiting with the experiences a baby can get from them. Educational psychologist Elinor Goldschmied developed the idea of babies and toddlers learning through their own investigations of natural and household objects more than 30 years ago.



Links to Documentation

The Early Years Foundation Stage

Unique Child:

Practitioners understand and observe each child's development and learning, assess progress and plan for next steps.

Practitioners support babies and children to develop a positive sense of their own identity and culture.

Practitioners keep children safe.

Positive Relationships:

Positive relationships are warm, loving and foster a sense of belonging.

They are supportive of the children's own efforts and independence.

Enabling Environments:

Offer stimulating resources, relevant at all the children's cultures and communities.

Learning and Development:

They foster the characteristics of effective learning, including:

Play and Exploration, Active Learning, Creativity and Critical Thinking

Good practice also includes

Enjoy and achieve – by providing a wealth of opportunities and experiences to babies and young children, we encourage them to play and explore a variety of resources. Through play children learn at their highest level, practicing and building ideas, concepts and skills.

Making a Treasure Basket

- The basket needs to be made of natural material such as wicker, with no sharp points and it needs to be strong enough for the baby to lean on without tipping up. Low sides will ensure that the contents of the basket are easily accessible to your baby.



- Fill the basket with a wide range of objects, so that your baby has plenty to choose from. The greater the variety the better.
- Babies want to put everything in their mouths, make sure that everything you choose for the basket is safe – nothing should be small enough for the baby to swallow or have any sharp edges


A basket could contain

- Natural objects – fir cones, large pebbles, natural sponge, shells, large feathers, a lemon, an apple, pumice stone, Loofah
- Objects of natural materials – shaving brush (test bristles are firmly in place), wooden nail brush, small wooden cosmetic mirror, toothbrush, little baskets, raffia mats, bone shoe horn
- Wooden objects – curtain rings, clothes pegs, spoons, spatulas, small boxes, castanets, egg cups, small bowls, coloured beads on a string
- Metal objects – spoons (various sizes), small whisk, small tins, bunch of keys, garlic press, lemon squeezer, tea strainer, lengths of chain
- Objects, in leather, textile, rubber, fur – leather purse, tennis ball, bean bag, leather glasses case, coloured marble eggs, velvet power puff, small cloth bags containing lavender, rosemary, thyme, cd's, pom-poms, coloured ribbons, pieces of fabric of differing textures (e.g. fur, wool, cord)
- Paper, cardboard – little notebook, greaseproof paper, tin foil, small cardboard boxes, insides of kitchen rolls or wrapping paper



A basket could contain:

Natural Objects

fir cones, 
large pebbles,
natural sponge,
shells,



large feathers,
a lemon,
an apple,
pumice stone,
Loofah

Wooden Objects



Wooden spoons
Clothes pegs,
Curtain rings,
Wooden beads on a
string,
Egg cups



Small rolling pin
Honey spoon

Metal Objects

Small whisk,
Spoons (various sizes)
Tea strainer
Lengths of chain,
Sieve,
Bunch of keys



Bells,
Small tins,
Lemon squeezer

Textiles

Velvet powder puff,
Pompoms,
Small cloth bags (these
could contain lavender,
thyme etc),
Piece of sheepskin,
Leather purse,
Bean bag
Coloured ribbon,



Objects of Natural Materials



Shaving brush,
Wooden nail brush,
Small wooden cosmetic
mirror,



Little baskets,
Raffia mats
Toothbrush

Paper & Cardboard

Greaseproof paper,
Small cardboard boxes,
Small note book,



Tin foil,
Tubes from kitchen
rolls/wrapping paper,



Sandpaper

Using a Treasure Basket & the role of the Adult

- Clear an area in a comfortable room, ensuring adequate seating for the adults at such a distance from the baby that they could not take over the activity but would be close on hand to deal with any problem and to give the baby reassurance of being able to see their carer. Try not to use the treasure basket when filling in time or at the end of a day - plan a specific session when you know there will be less disturbances.
- Make sure that your baby is seated comfortably and safely, with cushions for support if necessary
- Let your baby freely choose objects to pick up and examine.
- Ensure adequate supervision throughout the session intervening only when the baby clearly needs your attention.
- When using a treasure basket the adult role is very different in that we are not actively involved or directing the baby's play. The adult will sit close by to the baby and observe how they respond to the objects along with offering quiet reassurance and support to the baby. The adult needs to respond with smiles and gestures to the baby's delight and interest in the contents of the basket and may mean accepting objects that they pass to you.



Health and Safety

A treasure basket must always be used under the supervision of an adult.

- When choosing objects for the treasure basket look out for any sharp edges on objects, objects which have splinters or split wood, loose bristles on brushes or
- Do not put any items into the basket which you think are small enough for a baby to swallow.
- Do intervene in the session if you become worried about a particular object whilst the baby is using it.
- Make sure that any items you put in the basket can be washed or wiped clean or something that can be easily disposed of at the end of each session.
- Check the contents of the basket at the end of each session, cleaning objects and removing any damaged items.

Learning and the EYFS

A treasure basket can offer a baby many different learning experiences. The variety of objects within the basket enables them to develop their concentration skills and assists them in making simple choices – this in turn develops a child's confidence and self esteem.

A baby's hand/eye co-ordination and the development of fine motor skills are also promoted when using a treasure basket.

It offers the opportunity to stimulate all of the baby's five senses. When creating a basket try to ensure that there is a variety of sensory experiences for the baby to explore.

Touch – objects provide the baby with experiences of weight, texture and shape.

Taste – a baby uses their mouth to explore objects and taste can be explored when adding fruit into the basket.

Sound – the crinkling of an emergency blanket, the clunking as a chain falls in a tin, ringing of bells, banging objects together all add to the wonderful sounds the baby or the object can create.

Smell - all of the objects will have their own individual smell, but the basket could be enhanced with small material bags filled with natural scents such as lavender or sage.

Sight - fill the basket with a range of shiny, metal, wood materials and introduce a variety of colours and shapes into the basket.

By providing materials to stimulate all of the five senses you are also meeting some of the learning and development areas of the EYFS (see Key Learning Opportunity Sheet).

The treasure basket also provides a wealth of opportunities to develop schemas. How children learn through schemas was first introduced by Jean Piaget and has more recently been continued through the work of Tina Bruce and Chris Athey. A schema is described as a repeated pattern of linked behaviour which children use to make sense of the world around them.

Some of the schemas that you may see beginning to develop are:-

- Enclosing – filling and emptying containers
- Enveloping – covering objects up or wrapping up objects
- Positioning – developing an interest in lining up objects or placing things carefully at their side
- Trajectory – an interest in dropping things
- Rotation – rolling objects and spinning things around, may have a fascination with wheels.

Through play and exploration the schemas that children use will change over time and become more sophisticated. Children may also display a variety of schemas within their play and using observations we can plan to further enhance the development of their schemas.

Further Ideas

Once you have developed your first treasure basket you may find that you wish to enhance your children's learning further through the development of themed baskets. A bathroom basket is one idea where you can create a basket containing items that you may see within a bathroom. You could fill the basket with pieces of sponge, a loofah, a pumice stone, a plug and chain, a flannel, a shower puff, a nail brush, a shaving brush, a small mirror, shells and cotton wool.

For further great ideas see the 'The Little Book of Treasure Baskets' by Featherstone Publications

Useful Resources

Heuristic Play, Play in the EYFS - Sheila Riddall-Leech – Practical Pre School Books.

The Little Book of Treasure Baskets – Featherstone Books.

Developing Play for the Under 3's - Anita. M Hughes – Routledge.

Play and Learning in the Early Years – Jennie Lindon, Kevin Kelman & Alice Sharp – Practical Pre-School books.

Again, Again: Understanding Schemas in Young Children – Featherstone Books

Web links include:

www.littleacornstomightyoaks.co.uk/Articles/Treasure_basket

www.surreycc.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/childcare-professionals/early-years-foundation-stage-eyfs/physical-development-in-the-eyfs/treasure-basket-ideas-for-childcare-professionals

www.communityplaythings.co.uk/learning-library/articles/treasure-baskets