

Seedling Nursery

What is Heuristic Play?

The word 'heuristic' comes from the Greek 'Eureka' meaning discovery, and so the purpose of Heuristic Play is to find out and discover proceeding by trial and error. 'Heuristic Play' describes the activity of a baby or toddler when they play with an array of everyday objects.

As babies develop, they have a natural growing curiosity to explore items and see what can be done with them. Heuristic Play consists of providing children with a large number of varied objects and receptacles with which they are able to explore freely for as long as they desire. It is a natural stem on from Treasure Baskets.

Examples of items that can be used in Heuristic Play sessions include :-

- Natural objects such as fir cones, seashells, corks, pebbles and conkers.
- Fabric pieces such as ribbon, woollen pom poms, velvet, silk, lace and shower puffs.
- Metal objects including beads, chains, jar lids, keys, spoons, bowls, tea strainers, whisks, bells and tins of any size.
- Wooden objects such as curtain rings and dolly pegs, small bowls, egg cups, spoons, pastry brush, rolling pin and off cuts.
- Open ended resources such as cardboard tubes of all sizes.
- Small bags and boxes.



Who and when do we have Heuristic Play?

Heuristic Play is suitable for babies and toddlers therefore the Seeds Room at Seedling Nursery have these sessions. Our Heuristic Play sessions are offered two times a week during the morning from 10.15am to 11.15am. It is recommended that Heuristic Play sessions are held in a calm atmosphere where there will be limited interruptions so our sessions are based on the rooms daily routine.

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Why do we have Heuristic Play?

Heuristic Play provides children with the chance to strengthen cognitive development, fine muscle control and also hand eye coordination. Toddlers have the urge to handle objects and like to gather them, fill them, stack them and manipulate them in any way they can. Heuristic Play sessions allow children to do this with a wide range of real objects in a safe and secure environment for as long as they wish. It also helps their attention span as children of this age tend to have difficulty in staying focused on something for more than a few minutes. In addition to this, children benefit from handling 'real' objects made from metal or wood rather than plastic as it helps the refinement of their senses as they explore the items. Heuristic Play sessions are a time for children to interact together socially; they will explore items together or in groups and imitate each other. The children make the choices for themselves, adults do not interfere, they ensure that the materials are attractively displayed and safe.

How do we carry out Heuristic Play?

At Seedling Nursery, the teachers set up all the Heuristic Play objects in an attractive and appealing manner in a large area of the classroom in order for the children to begin their session. Large quantities of each item are provided to prevent conflicts although this may still occur occasionally. Once ready, children are able to freely explore and experiment with everything as they so wish. The role of the adult during the session is to sit back and observe and only intervene if necessary such as when a child is clearly frustrated. The reason the adult should sit back and observe is because the children should be given their own opportunity to make their own choices and discoveries. If a child approaches an adult then that is fine as it is the child's choice to interact with them. Whilst the session is taking place, the items need to be repeatedly set up and tidied in order for the objects to appeal and welcome the children. It is also the role of the adult to maintain the resources, check they are safe and clean to use, discard unsuitable items and also collect new items.

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What are Treasure Baskets?

Treasure Baskets are baskets that contain a vast range of everyday objects that are usually made from natural materials for babies to sit next to and explore. Treasure Baskets are usually made from natural woven materials such as wicker and straw. They have a broad base and a large opening at the top so the baby can see all in the basket and access it easily if they wish. The basket should also be stable to ensure it does not topple or tip onto the baby as they lean in to take an item out of it. Items in Treasure Baskets should be clean, safe and hygienic as babies enjoy exploring with their mouths.

Examples of items that can be placed in a Treasure Basket for babies to explore include :

- Natural objects such as fir cones, big shells, pumice stones, big feathers, loofahs and corks.
- Disposable natural objects such as fruit and kitchen roll tubes.
- Wooden objects such as curtain rings, egg cups, spoons, small rolling pins, coasters, pegs and bowls.
- Metal objects such as spoons, tea strainers, tin lids, small whisks, mirrors, magnets, bells and keys.
- Fabric pieces such as towel, flannel, net, silk, ribbon, woollen cloth, leather, suede and fleece.
- Fragrant items such as small bags of pot pourri, lavender bags, perfumed candles, soaps and citrus fruits such as oranges or lemons.
- Musical instruments such as triangles, shakers, castanets and tambourines.

Who uses Treasure Baskets?

Treasure Baskets are suitable for 'non-mobile' babies therefore at Seedling Nursery we use Treasure Baskets with Les Nounours, the 3 months to 14 months group.



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When do we use Treasure Baskets?

It is recommended that Treasure Baskets are introduced to children when they are at their most relaxed and happiest. They require a calm atmosphere where they can have time which will not be interrupted; soothing music can also be played to aid the atmosphere. At Seedling Nursery Les Nounours find it best to use Treasure Baskets each day from 4.00pm to 6.00pm.

Why do we use Treasure Baskets?

We use Treasure Baskets at Seedling Nursery as they assist babies in developing a number of skills. Young children enjoy learning and exploring through sensory play. They respond to their surroundings through the senses of touch, smell, taste, hearing, sight and movement. Treasure Baskets provide babies with a wide range of experiences which aid the brain to make connections and develop. Babies learn from Treasure Baskets by looking, touching, sucking, licking, banging, picking up and dropping. It gives babies the opportunity to explore and decide independently whatever they wish to play with. Babies enjoy the situation that these objects provide, for example the textures, weight, temperature and taste of each item. Their attention and concentration expands as they sit next to the basket concentrating on the many items in the basket for prolonged periods of time. Treasure Baskets are a great opportunity for babies to practice and refine their fine motor control and hand eye co-ordination.

How do we use Treasure Baskets?

So that babies can make the most of their Treasure Basket it needs to be placed within easy reaching distance next to the seated baby. The Treasure Basket is be filled with a collection of objects so there is plenty for the baby or babies to choose from. An adult always sits nearby so they are able to observe and supervise. It is not necessary for an adult to intervene unless it is clearly required; in fact adult interference is discouraged. The objectives for Treasure Basket sessions are for the babies to explore the contents of the basket in their own time.