



SHOOTING STARS

NURSERIES

A guide to heuristic play at home

Would your child rather play with the box the toy came in than the new toy? Do they like to explore your keys / necklace / utensils / zip and any other everyday item they can get their hands on? If the answer is yes, then your child is engaging in heuristic play and the good news is, it's great for their development!

How can I encourage heuristic play safely at home?



Try the 'treasure chest' approach - simply fill boxes/baskets with heuristic items and give your child a clear space to move around and plenty of time to explore without intervening. Keeping a watchful eye on them throughout is important because by definition, these items are not toys and as we all know, young children love to explore with their mouths!

Once they're satisfied, encourage them to replace all the items and remove the treasure chest ready to be used another time.

30-40 minutes of play has been suggested as a guide but each child is different and the size and type of the collection of items will also have an effect.

Nature is the ultimate loose part!

Take your child outside regularly to find and explore natural objects in the environment. Leaves, sticks, stones, pine cones and feathers all offer different textures, colours and weights that children find interesting, even if we as adults don't see the appeal! Your child may feel inspired to combine and incorporate natural objects they have found into other play resources such as crafts, mark making or play dough too.



How does heuristic play fit into my child's other play?

Heuristic play has a calm simplicity and many benefits for your child's learning and development. However, that isn't to say toys, games, TV and technology don't have a place in your child's learning too! Heuristic play fits in nicely with all of the other things that young children love to do and play with. Offering a combination of heuristic opportunities and outdoor exploration alongside active play, singing and dancing, role play, mark making, playing socially, discovering technology and relaxation with a book or their favourite TV programme will give your child a great balance and a rounded learning experience as they grow and develop.

Why not just give them toys to play with?

Children are surrounded by loud, colourful toys and while these might be good at stimulating some of the senses, they tend to lack the sensory and heuristic properties critical for supporting creative thinking and problem-solving skills. When exploring loose parts and objects, the child is free from the prescribed methods and functions and their limitless creativity takes over. Children are naturally curious and innovative and heuristic play offers them opportunities to explore and develop in a completely natural way.



What sort of items could I offer my child for heuristic play?



It's easy to create heuristic opportunities at home. Here are some suggested groups and items that you could gather to create your own heuristic play collection. Charity shops are a very good place to look for any objects of different textures, colours, weights, materials, sounds, shapes and smells! Remember to check items for safety first (e.g. sharp edges, choking hazards etc) and always supervise your child, especially when exploring items with their mouth.

Paper/cardboard objects:

Egg boxes, notebook, sturdy cardboard tubes, grease-proof 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, sand, soil, water!

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, everyday items.