

# Treasure Basket

## Learning objectives:

To explore reused everyday objects safely using touch, sight, sound and movement.

To begin developing curiosity, concentration and choice through open-ended sensory play.

To support early fine motor skills by reaching, grasping, holding, mouthing, tapping and turning objects.





## **Practitioner knowledge:**

Toys can be expensive for families and settings, and many are made from materials that are difficult to recycle, for example, plastic packaging and batteries. These toys can be harmful for the environment,

Babies and young children do not need every resource to flash, sing or be brand new; they are often most interested in real objects they can hold, mouth, tap, turn and explore in their own way.

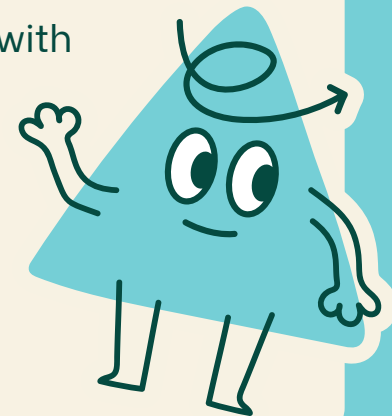
A reused treasure basket gives young children a rich sensory experience while showing that everyday items can have a second life before they are thrown away.



## **What is a treasure basket?**

A treasure basket is a collection of everyday objects and natural materials placed in a shallow basket for babies and young children to explore using all of their senses.

Instead of plastic toys, a treasure basket contains a variety of safe, interesting objects with different textures, shapes, weights, sounds and smells.





## Why are treasure baskets important?

**Sensory development** – children explore through touch, sight, smell, hearing and taste (mouth exploration is common in babies).

**Curiosity and concentration** – children choose what interests them and investigate independently.

**Fine motor skills** – picking up, grasping, transferring and manipulating objects.

**Language development** – adults can introduce descriptive vocabulary such as smooth, rough, heavy, cold, and shiny.

**Schema play and problem-solving** – children discover how objects feel, move, connect and make sounds.



## How to use a treasure basket

- Sit the child comfortably where they can access the basket.
- Allow them to choose objects freely.
- Observe and interact only when appropriate rather than directing the play.
- Rotate items regularly to maintain interest.
- Ensure all objects are clean, safe and large enough not to be a choking hazard.

**Safety reminder** – All items should be checked before every use, ensuring they are clean and large enough not to be a choking risk, they should also be free from sharp edges or loose parts, and used with close adult supervision.





## Items to include in your treasure basket:

**Clean cardboard tubes:** useful for rolling, posting, tapping and looking through, supporting curiosity and hand-eye coordination.

**Small fabric offcuts:** different textures such as cotton, fleece, satin or denim give babies a chance to scrunch, stroke and feel contrasting materials.

**Wooden or plastic spoons or spatulas:** easy for small hands to grip and safe for tapping, banging and exploring sound when supervised.

**Metal measuring spoons:** shiny, cool and noisy, helping children notice reflections, temperature, weight and cause and effect.

**Clean plastic lids from large containers:** light, colourful and easy to grasp, supporting reaching, holding and simple sorting by size or colour.

**Large corks or cork mats cut into safe pieces:** lightweight and warm to touch, offering a natural texture that feels different from plastic or metal.

**Old scarves or muslin cloths:** useful for peekaboo, pulling, waving and hiding objects, encouraging early communication and anticipation.

**Clean brushes, such as pastry brushes or soft nail brushes:** offer bristles and handles for babies to explore with their fingers, supporting sensory awareness.

**Small tins with secure lids:** can be tapped, rolled and filled with safe items by an adult to create gentle sound shakers.

**Natural sponge:** soft, lightweight and textured, giving babies a gentle sensory material to squeeze, press and explore with their hands.

**Clean plastic bottles with something noisy inside, such as pasta:** useful as homemade shakers so babies can explore sound, movement and cause and effect when the lid is securely fastened.

**Large pinecones:** interesting to look at and touch, offering a natural object with shape, pattern and texture for careful supervised exploration.

**Large wooden curtain rings:** smooth, strong and easy to hold, supporting grasping, transferring from hand to hand and mouthing exploration.

