Heuristic Play

What is heuristic play?

- The word ‘heuristic’ means to discover or gain an understanding of something and is derived from the Greek word ‘eurisko’.

- It is a very simple approach to helping young children and babies learn. It involves the children / babies exploring a variety of natural and household items independently. These items will have been presented to them in a way which encourages discovery and experimentation and creates ‘Eureka’ moments in their understanding.

- There are no right or wrong ways for the children / babies to explore the objects, children / babies have free choice in what to explore so creating the maximum opportunity for them to discover and create. It is unrestricted and totally child initiated which allows children / babies to make choices and develop preferences as they take part in spontaneous and focused play sessions.

- Heuristic play is open ended, the items and objects can be used in many different imaginative ways that are selected by the children so supporting their unique learning styles and stimulates their senses through the children / babies own first hand experiences.

What is the adult’s role during the session?

- During these sessions your role is to resource the collections ensuring they are safe and age appropriate. You need to think of collections that will stimulate interest, exploration and discovery by the children / babies.

- You need to set out the collections in an attractive and appropriate manner to encourage exploration and investigation.

- You are responsible for ensuring the collections meet the health and safety requirements of your setting (risk assess prior to use) and are kept in good condition. You need to clean the materials regularly and check them before and after each use for damage.

- During the session you need to sit close by and sensitively observe your key children to inform your future planning also to recognise when the group have had enough or are losing interest. You should give appropriate supervision to ensure the children / babies are safe at all times as they play but you should not interfere in their play unless a child begins to throw things (in this instance offer the child a container and encourage them to throw things into it as a distraction).

- At the end of the session you would support the children to tidy up in an unhurried manner, giving you the opportunity to develop their language skills.
**Observation and Assessment during Heuristic Play.**

When the children are taking part in heuristic play sessions where practitioners are not actively involved it will provide a boundless range of opportunities to observe key children, take photographs and assess their development across the six areas of learning.

*When observing your key children you may consider thinking about:*-

* Have the children learnt to put objects inside each other?
* Can the children make a loud noise with objects?
* Can the children balance objects on top of each other?
* Which materials are the children mainly engaged with?
* Are the children beginning to repeat actions deliberately?
* What feeling and emotions can you observe e.g. pleasure, excitement, frustration?
* Are the children exploring any particular schema during their play such as, positioning / rotation / orientation / connection?
* How are the children expressing their feelings, look at their body language, facial expressions, gestures and vocalisations (don’t forget babies wiggling toes!)?
* What are their levels of concentration during the session?
* Do the children explore more than one object (babies may have one object in the mouth and another in their hand)?
* How are the children handling the objects e.g. pincer or grasp movements, one hand or both hands?
* What skills are the children learning during the session e.g. hand - eye coordination / foot –eye coordination, concentration & confidence levels?

*Some key learning tools you may notice are children / babies:-*

* **Placing** – a baby / child deliberately placing an object to the side so they can return to it later in the play session.
* **Banging** – in the first instance accidently banging two objects together, but repeats this after the discovery a noise can be made.
* **Pairing and matching** – a baby / child holding two similar objects and studies them intently, toddlers may seek out items that are the same for a specific purpose.
* **Sorting** – a child sorts objects that are the same into piles or packs them away into the same box.
* **Piling** – babies / children deliberately putting objects on top of each other.
* **Sequencing** – the children sequence their activities during play and whilst clearing away.