

Chatterboxes are covered shoeboxes containing toys, objects and books based on a theme that reflects children's interests. Planning and collecting the contents with the children and parents stimulates language and makes links with home.



Chatterbox!

Essential resources

- A shoebox
- Wrapping paper
- A collection of objects based on a theme
- A storybook and/or information book

Chatterboxes were originally developed for school-age children with communication difficulties. They are now widely used with pre-school children. They can provide hours of fun and develop children's knowledge, language and communication. You can prepare this activity with the children, or do it yourself and present it as a 'surprise'.

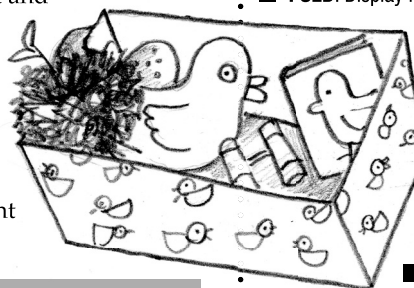
Decide on a topic that you know your children are interested in, or that you think might spark their excitement; for example diggers, aliens, farm animals, football, or birds. Or you might choose a favourite story like *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* or *Brown Bear, Brown Bear What Do You See?*

Collect toys and objects that are related to the topic. For example, a bird watching chatterbox could contain a soft toy bird, a simple information book about birds, a pair of toy binoculars and a recipe for bird cake (food for our feathered friends, not a cake containing garden birds!) Cover the shoebox with bright wrapping paper, or help the children to make

their own wrapping by decorating plain paper.

This need not be an expensive activity. In fact some practitioners pride themselves on seeing if they can make a box at no expense at all, by using library books and asking parents to contribute toys and everyday objects. Local charity shops are often the only place you need to go to get all you need, especially if you enlist the volunteer staff's support!

The most important part of the chatterbox experience is how the adult gets involved. Ideally, the chatterbox should only be opened when the adult is able to give the children their full attention, and closed when the adult has decided that the children have had enough. The talk and exploration that goes on between children and adults, as they share the contents of the box, is vital for maintaining the children's engagement and learning.



EYFS links

Chatterboxes help children to:

- Be intrigued by novelty and events and actions around them (Language for Thinking, Birth-11 months).
- Use language to imagine and recreate roles and experiences (Language for Thinking, ELG).
- Learn new words very rapidly and be able to use them in communicating about matters that interest them (Language for Communication, 22-36 months).
- Use vocabulary focused on objects and people that are of particular importance to them (Language for Communication, 30-50 months).
- Use vocabulary and forms of speech that are increasingly influenced by their experience of books (Language for Communication, 40-60+ months).
- Interact with others, negotiating plans and activities and taking turns in conversation (Language for Communication, ELG).

Cross-curricular

- **PSED:** Display high levels of involvement in activities (Dispositions and Attitudes, 40-60+ months).
- **KUW:** Explore objects and materials with hands and mouth (Designing and Making, Birth-11 months).
- **KUW:** Construct with a purpose in mind, using a variety of resources (Designing and Making, 40-60+ months).

Tear out and file these pages so you can use them again and again

0-3-years-old

Very young children like to play with and explore collections of everyday objects. This type of discovery or heuristic play is valuable to stimulate interest, and develop concentration and communication.

Collections of natural and man-made objects – such as metal jar lids, wooden 'dolly' clothes pegs, pine cones, shaving brushes, or shiny objects – can keep even the

very youngest children involved for surprisingly long periods of time, provided you join in with them and comment on what they are doing.

A set of bath time toys and paraphernalia – such as brushes, a loofa, nailbrush, soap dish and shampoo bottle, along with a photo book about bath time – can be a huge attraction, and a rich stimulus for play and language development.

Tips for getting older children involved in helping younger ones

- Ask the older children to remember what toys and activities they liked when they were younger. Can they use their old toys and books to make up a chatterbox for the little ones?