



Having a jam!

Essential resources

- A large collection of metal lids from jars
- Containers, such as biscuit and sweet tins and ice cream tubs
- A coloured rug
- Marker pen

Children of all ages like to explore large collections of objects. We only have to give them conkers, buttons, or stones, and they will immediately start to explore what they can do and make with them. The bigger and more varied the collection, the more excited and involved children become, and the more they talk about what they are doing.

We usually throw away or recycle metal jar lids, but they can offer many opportunities for play and learning. Glass jars usually come with a round metal lid, and it is only once we start collecting that we find that there are many colours and sizes. Many have writing and designs or logos, which older children will recognise and talk about.

With the very youngest children, we use the lids as part of what is known as heuristic (discovery) play. This popular approach works best when the adults and children sit together during a time

when there will be no distractions, so that the adults can concentrate fully on what the children are doing.

It sometimes helps to put down a colourful rug for everyone to sit on, and to remove other toys from the room or cover them with a cloth. This helps the children to give their full attention to the activity. As long as the adults remain with the children, and respond to what they do and say, then discovery play naturally encourages children to spontaneously find out about the possibilities of the objects. It also gives us a chance to develop an insight into how young children are thinking, even though they may not have developed verbal language.

Providing the children with a set of containers of different sizes and types, such as biscuit tins and plastic ice cream tubs, will extend the play and provide further opportunities for exploration. Lids need to be washed and sterilised regularly, and dried carefully to avoid them becoming rusty. A well cared for collection that is stored properly should provide hours and hours of fun!

There is also enormous potential for older children to learn through lids, and they will often spontaneously sort, count, construct and play imaginatively with lids of different colours and sizes.

To collect enough lids for an exciting activity, try asking local cafés, restaurants and hotels to put them by for you. Once they know that they are for children, staff are often pleased to give you as many lids as they have. Parents and friends are also good sources of lids

EYFS links

Exploring jars and lids helps children to:

- Use movement and senses to focus on, reach for and handle objects (Exploration and Investigation, birth-11 months).
- Sometimes focus their enquiries on particular features and processes (Exploration and Investigation, 16-26 months).
- Show understanding of cause/effect relations (Exploration and Investigation, 30-50 months).
- Explore objects and materials with hands and mouth (Designing and Making, Birth-11 months).
- Show curiosity and interest in things that are built up and fall down, and that open and close (Designing and Making, 8-20 months).
- Construct with a purpose in mind (Designing and Making, 40-60+ months).

Cross-curricular

- **CLL** Use talk to organise, sequence and clarify thinking, ideas, feelings and events (Language for Thinking, ELG).
- **CLL**: Show interest in print in the environment (Reading, 30-50 months).
- **CLL** Know information can be relayed in the form of print (Reading, 30-50 months).
- **CLL**: Read a range of familiar and common words and simple sentences independently (Reading, ELG).
- **CLL**: Know that print carries meaning and, in English, is read from left to right (Reading, ELG).
- **PSRN**: Match and compare the number of objects in two sets (Numbers as Labels and for Counting, 40-60+ months).
- **PSRN**: Begin to relate addition to combining two groups of objects and subtraction to 'taking away' (Calculating, ELG).
- **PSRN**: Begin to categorise objects according to properties such as shape or size (Shape, Space and Measures, 22-36 months).
- **PSRN**: Match sets of objects to numerals that represent the number of objects (Shape, Space and Measures, 40-60+ months).
- **PSRN**: Sort familiar objects to identify their similarities and differences, making choices and justifying decisions (Shape, Space and Measures, 40-60+ months).

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

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0-3-years-old

Children in this age range like to explore what they can do with the lids and containers. As long as you remain with young children, they can focus on the lid collection for a considerable amount of time. It is not unknown for children as young as 12 months to focus for 45 minutes.

Babies like to mouth, throw and bang the lids, and do the same to the containers. Children from 18

months can show signs of sorting, by picking up lids of the same colour. Children can become totally absorbed in putting lids in containers and taking or tipping them out again. It is important to check that the smaller lids are not a choking hazard, but most are too large to fit inside the standard 'choke tester'. However it is important to supervise the youngest children, and take care not to leave lids lying around.

3-5-years-old

Many older children like to make things out of the lids, including stacking them, making shapes, and beginning to use them in fantasy play. They also give a running commentary on what they are doing, and begin to ask questions like: 'What was in this jar?'

You can make a simple matching game by taping or glueing pictures or photos under the lids. Lids can also be used in playdough and printing activities, as they make very pleasing circular

shapes. Children of this age start to recognise brand names and logos on the lids, and this is an important stage in reading development.

Lids are particularly useful for mathematical development, as children will spontaneously sort them by colour, size, and other characteristics. Most lids make a clicking sound when you press them, and children quickly learn how to do this, and will go through the collection looking for those that click.



Extending activities for 5-8-year-olds

First of all, get the children collecting! Once they start they can become quite excited about this. Can they guess what was inside the jars, and perhaps think about whether the contents were healthy or not?

If you ask the children to bring in the labels from the jars, you can talk about nutritional content, including how much sugar and salt most processed food contains. Lids are ideal for counting practice, or for teaching multiplication, by making 'sets' of two, three, four, or five: 'We have three sets of two. That makes six altogether' and so on.

Michael Jones and Lou Threapleton

Tips on how older children can help younger ones

- Older children can help the younger ones to sort and make shapes and patterns.
- If they know what the younger children's favourite colours are, they can help them to sort them by colour.
- They can involve the children in fantasy play (one little boy liked pretending that the lids were biscuits, and he put them onto the biscuit tin lids and pretended to put them in the 'oven').

Getting parents involved

- Parents can help by donating lids and containers. Building a lid collection can often be a good starting point to help parents recognise the value of using collections of everyday objects to promote their children's learning, (and without having to spend any money!).