

# Surprise Box

## Why use a Surprise Box?

**Surprise Box** is an activity that supports children:

- to develop their attention and listening skills
- to develop their interest in other activities.
- to develop turn taking and anticipation
- to be able to attend to adult directed activities
- to develop receptive language skills (understanding of language)
- to develop expressive (spoken) language and non-verbal communication skills

Surprise box can be used with individual children but it works much better with small groups of children alongside supporting adults.

## What do I need for a Surprise Box?

- You will need a box, bag or container with a lid
- A variety of exciting objects or toys that are interesting to the child
  - Light up toys: flashing toys, wind up toys, windmills or light up spinners
  - Movement toys: wind up toys, spinning tops, rain makers, bubbles, pull string toys, pop up toys
  - Noisy toys: shakers, musical box, squeaky toys, singing animal toys
- Make sure that you only have 3-4 toys in the box for each session and remember to mix it up so that the children are excited every time.
- A whiteboard and pen

## What are the Rules of Surprise Box?

When introducing a surprise box, there are some important rules for the group that all children must follow:

- Children are not allowed to touch the toys
- The toys are only used during Surprise Box time
- Children should be encouraged to remain seated at all times
- Adults should model what is expected of the children (e.g. not touching toys and staying seated as well)

If the child attempts to touch the toy, the adult should model language saying 'Mummy's toy' or 'Mrs Jones' toy' so that they are clear the toys are for watching and not for playing.



## How do I get started with Surprise Box?

The adult who is in charge of the box sits at the front. Other adults (supporting adults) and children should sit in a semi-circle in front of the adult. They should be sat on chairs, but ideally not at a table.

- The adult draws the box on a whiteboard and writes the word 'box' (or whatever container you are using). The adult then says 'it's time for box' and places the whiteboard next to them.
- The adult introduces the surprise box with a song, you should model being really excited about this as it builds excitement for the children.
  - You can use any made-up song to any tune (As long as you are consistent each time).
  - For example:

"What's in the box? What's in the box? Tell me, tell me, What's in the box?"	(Sung to the tune of "The Farmer's in the Den")
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  - Another example is:

"I've got something in my bag In my bag, in my bag I've got something in my bag Let's have a look"	(Sung to the tune of "here we go round the mulberry bush")
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- Take out one toy at a time and play with it for 30seconds or so
- Use simple repetitive language e.g. lights, wow, spinning
- Put the toy back in the box.
- Take out each toy in turn, modelling simple language when you use each toy. (include action words such as 'push, twist', opinions such as 'wow' and/or descriptions such as 'fast, colours')
- Once you have used all the toys, the session is finished
- Pick up your whiteboard and say 'box has finished' whilst crossing it out with your whiteboard pen.
- The children are then free to go and enjoy whatever is next in their routine.

## The Supporting Adults

- The supporting adults sat in the semicircle should model looking at the toys and commenting using simple language
- If a child gets up and tries to get the toy, the supporting adult should support them to sit back down on their chair.
- Make sure you change who is in charge of the box in individual sessions.

## Top Tips for Surprise Box

- Surprise box is a really short activity that should last no more than 2-3minutes in total.
- You and the box of toys are the most interesting thing in the room.
- You need to make this activity interesting for the children so that they want to engage in the activity each time it is on offer.

