

Activity: Nature Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: All

## TH Activity Plan – Bird Feeder

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### Materials

Twine, pinecones, bird seed,  
edible seeds (humans)

Toilet paper rolls, paper, small  
paper cups, tape

Peanut, almond butter, jam,  
seeds

Stickers, markers, knives for  
spreading,

Gloves, wipes



**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participants will make bird feeders promoting creativity and connecting with nature through observation.

### THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Follow mini-step directions; learn about local bird species & their behaviors

**Physical:** Maintain fine motor skills by spreading peanut butter, rolling pinecones in birdseed

**Psychological/Emotional:** Foster a sense of responsibility in caring for wildlife; foster sense of accomplishment, meaning, purpose & connection with nature; experience joy & relaxation through observing birds

**Sensory:** Practice appropriate responses to sensory defensiveness; practice sensory integration

**Social:** Work independently with reducing number of cues; communicate with the group

### STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather & set out materials. Cut appropriate lengths of twine for hanging the bird feeders. Set up – place materials on table.
2. Facilitator begins session by explaining the activity & displaying a sample bird feeder.
3. Encourage participants to pick out pinecones or paper rolls.
4. Tie a string to the bird feeder crating a loop for hanging. Leave a long piece to hold it.
5. Some pre-assembled bird feeders may be suitable for decorating, with participants personalizing with paint, markers or stickers.
6. Participants spread peanut butter, almond butter or jam on the pinecone, wooden bird feeders, small paper cups, rolled paper or cardboard toilet paper roll feeders. Note that feeders made from paper will be more challenging due to their flimsy structure. They can however be made from recycled paper as a sustainable alternative.
7. Bird feeders are then rolled in the tray of seeds.
8. Hang feeders in a suitable outdoor location like a tree, or prepare them for transporting to home locations.
9. Discuss with participants how, when & where to observe birds & what characteristics to look for. Relating this activity to human behavior, care for the environment, the need for nurturing behavior can conclude the session. If the group will meet again, suggest bringing their bird observations to the next session.

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** This nature-based activity offers educational, recreational and therapeutic opportunities depending on how it will be used with individuals or specific populations. Incorporating the educational and environmental focus on nurturing and observing birds, and moving it towards more therapeutic interventions, practitioners would identify who they will be working with and what health deficits and goals are going to be addressed. For example, children with sensory challenges might have a sensory therapeutic goal of developing and practicing automatic and appropriate responses to sensations like touching and smelling sticky peanut butter and various sizes and textures of bird seed. An accommodation might be using gloves for a specified period of time with some tactile exposure without gloves, depending on their sensitivities and ability to tolerate this (as a first step or subsequent intervention). Facilitator would discuss, encourage, assess the individual's responses, working towards appropriate verbal, facial and physical autonomic responses. Assessment tools used for sensory processing and sensory integration include sensory integration and praxis test (SIPT), and sensory processing and self-regulation checklist (SPSRC) (Gomez et al., 2021; Lai et al., 2019).

For senior populations, therapeutic goals of fostering a sense of accomplishment can be partnered with maintaining fine motor skills spreading peanut butter on unusual surfaces like the bird feeder's paper, cardboard or wood. For some, practicing a pincer grip tripod finger formation might be a therapeutic goal in itself, used to hold the paper feeder in place while adhering sticky substances like almond butter or jam. Or use of a clip (photo)

Intellectual and social goals might include working independently where the number of cues are reduced, and where attention to following the step by step directions are practiced and mastered. Emotional benefits of enjoying, caring for and observing birds using the feeders can be expanded into physical and psychological domains with these targeted goals, moving the bird feeder activity beyond a recreational one. Accommodations for people living with dementia could include applying peanut butter but not using bird seed if this will be a choking or swallowing safety issue. The same consideration/accommodation might be appropriate for people living with an autism spectrum disorder.

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts.**

For people who might put items like bird seed in their mouths, using edible seeds or eliminating seeds all together would be an option. Small items can be potential choking hazards with some populations more susceptible to this. Allergies to peanut butter, almond butter, jam or other materials should be identified prior to session. Some pinecones have sharp points and may not be appropriate for some.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** Using a therapeutic horticulture intervention vs a recreational/educational delivery is done by using therapeutic techniques of therapist-client communication, therapeutic alliance (relationship based on trust), and therapeutic process of identifying health deficits, goals, activity and measurable health outcome (the latter measuring outcomes may not be part of a TH activity but understanding and thinking about it in these terms is appropriate even if outcomes are not formally charted or measured).

#### **REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:**

Fleming, L. & Creus, E. (2024). Therapeutic techniques applicable to people-plant programming. *Cultivate*, 4(3).  
Gomez, I.N.B., Calsa, A.P., Esguerra, J.T. et al. (2021). Psychometric properties of the sensory processing and self-regulation checklist: English version. *Occupational Therapy International*, 2021, 6658786.  
Lai, C.Y.Y., Yung, T.W.K., Gomez, I.N.B., & Siu A.M.H. (2019). Psychometric properties of sensory processing and self-regulation checklist (SPSRC) *Occupational Therapy International*. 2019, 9.

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2024.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2024.