

TH Activity Plan – Game: Gathering Nature’s Treasures

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants play a game finding items from nature to be shared with others - show and tell.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Look at items in nature and decide if it is interesting to share with others; follow instructions; practice counting skills

Physical: Increase physical movement; explore physical abilities of jumping, bending, running; experiencing “risky” play

Psychological/Emotional: Explore independence; make choices

Sensory: Use visual skills to find an item from nature; practice self-regulation being patient & quiet when needed; explore a variety of sensory inputs from textures, smells & sounds

Social: Follow rules of the game so it is fair for all participants; show interest and respect for others

Materials

Baskets, plastic pails, bags suitable for gathering items

Whistle

Gloves, wipes



STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Organize baskets, bags or plastic buckets for collecting nature items. Walk through garden, meadow or forest prior to session to ensure there are smaller-medium size items the participants can gather without harming the environment.
2. Facilitator begins session by introducing *Gathering Nature’s Treasures* game collecting items from nature.
3. Facilitator explains the rules: items must be small enough to fit in the basket and not pulled out of the ground; collect at least 3 items, not more than 6; don’t touch sharp things or eat anything; stay within the boundaries (ie. school yard); ask volunteer or facilitator for help when needed (especially children under 6); return to starting point when whistle blows or visually shown to return.
4. Game begins. Allow enough time to explore as is appropriate for the age or ability of participants. It can be played by individuals or in small groups. Restrict or outline the physical boundaries for game.
5. When the participants come back together, gather in a sharing circle. Have each participant share what they want to from their basket of treasures. Facilitator can ask questions of the group or person with item. “What interests you about this item? Where was it found? Have you seen it before? What can you do with it?” Items can include pinecones, twigs, sticks, flowers, bark etc.
6. An extension of this game can include facilitator led prompts: anyone with a pinecone – hold it up, something that is green – hold it up. This can relate to categorizing, sorting and visual identification, skills important in child development. Other ideas - display nature items inside or do artwork with pinecones, twigs or leaves.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Originally used with young children ages 3-6, this game can be adapted for all ages and abilities. Partnering with volunteers or older students as mentors for example, can provide safe parameters of knowing plants to avoid, sharp pinecones or paths that are too steep. Clearly defining the search/game area, possibly using the concept of staying within eye sight, will help younger participants.

Young children: The game can promote a sense of exploration, independence and curiosity, all of which address cognitive, social-emotional and physical development in a child. Nature based play can also help reduce anxiety, improve self-regulation, and offer safe spaces for children to explore their physical world. Using the game in TH sessions with parent/family-child participants, the game can incorporate therapeutic goals related to fostering attachment, introducing the concept and need for risky play (leading children and parents to develop problem solving skills). This demonstrates the TH activity's versatility with populations like parents/family groups.

Applications for other populations with physical therapeutic goals can target wide-ranging challenges like sedentary behaviors, sense of touch, bending and kneeling practice, and time outdoors breathing fresh air. These can be appropriate for different populations including people with nature deficit disorder, stroke recovery patients, recently diagnosed medical conditions where confidence in going outside has been affected, and people with developmental disabilities. Appropriate supervision is required and will vary by individuals and populations. Game rules can be adapted to increase physical activity, focus on specific physical challenges and appropriate for participants. An indoor application of the nature's bounty game can accommodate people with mobility issues who are more comfortable indoors moving on smooth surfaces, or other reasons.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Ensure the garden, meadow, field or forest areas are safe and free of barriers, tripping hazards or other potential safety concerns. Facilitator should be in the same area and have visual sight of participants. It is recommended that safety rules be outlined before the game begins (don't touch thorny items, don't eat anything, don't go into water, stay within view of an adult). Plastic pails are recommended for lighter weight and less likelihood of injury if falls or swinging occurs. Long sleeves and pants are recommended if going into areas with long grass where potential hazards may be difficult to see. Gloves, hats and sunscreen are also recommended (UV indexes exist year-round). Children's gloves are available online.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Connecting with nature is important for early learning opportunities for children. In addition to mental health for all ages including developing fundamental motor skills (Lim et al., 2017; Dankiw et al., 2020), prosocial behavior (Putra et al., 2020) and rebuilding connections to self and community (Stuart-Smith, 2020).

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

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- Putra, I.G.N.E., Astell-Burt, T., Cliff, D.P., Vella, S.A., John, E.E., & Feng, X. (2020). The relationship between green space and prosocial behaviour among children and adolescents: A systematic review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 859.
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