Activity: Nature Goal: Cognitive Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Matching Game: Photos to Live Plants

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Photo by J. Fleming

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will match photos to live plants.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Compare and match photos to live plants; practice process of elimination where appropriate; strengthen recognition & memory skills

Physical: Walk through garden increasing physical movement & coordination; breathe in fresh air

Psychological/Emotional: Participate in a challenge; complete task & feel sense of accomplishment

Sensory: Compare 2-dimensional photo to live plants; touch & smell live plants recognizing these attributes are different from photos

Social: Compete against other group members; demonstrate friendly competition behavior; assist others

Materials

Photos of plants in the garden (laminated photos last longer)

Live plants to match photos in garden, containers, vases

Mobile device (personal phone), tablet (school's or facility's)

Wipes

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Prepare photos of plants that appear in the garden, meadow, greenhouse or plant setting.
2. Facilitator begins session by introducing the matching game. Verbally explaining the concept & rules, facilitator shows some examples, having live plants inside or available.
3. This game can be played by individuals or small groups. Organize participants to maximize fun & in consideration of therapeutic goals like demonstrating friendly competition, assisting others. Discussion of these should occur before game begins giving examples of how it can be a competition and still be friendly.
4. Plant photos are distributed, game boundaries are identified and the game begins. It is helpful to have volunteers or older students assisting, supervising and/or coaching.
5. The photos can be exchanged in groups or between individual participants so that there are a few rounds of the game.
6. As a concluding part of the session, facilitator can ask questions like "Was the photo really like the plant? What makes the live plant different (sensory elements)? Did you use process of elimination (explaining this if necessary)? What plant smelled the most – good or bad?
7. For children under six years of age the game can be modified into a "search & find". In an early learning center setting, divide the children into small groups. Each group has a volunteer or teacher to help them "find" the plant in the photo. Once all groups have found their plant, they can take turns showing the others their picture and live plant. Adults can guide the storytelling by asking questions. In a parent-child family resource center, the family teams of parent-child working together can be supported as needed to find the plants.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: The importance of cognitive skills cannot be underestimated. "Complex matching skills are a type of cognitive skill that require the ability to recognize abstract or subtle similarities and differences between objects, pictures, or words. This skill is assessed using the Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills (ABLLS), which measures a range of pre-academic and academic skills in learners with developmental delays or disabilities. Complex matching skills involve identifying relationships between items, grouping items based on categories or attributes, and making comparisons between different objects or concepts" (Russell, 2024). For children in particular, matching skills support the development of a variety of skills including language development, math concepts, problem-solving, attention span and focus, visual perception, visual memory and short-term memory. Therapeutic goals for children living with an autism spectrum disorder or who have visual perception challenges often involve matching activities.

Cognitive skills of matching, comparing and contrasting, and memory recall are important for most populations, some of whom may have complex challenges in these areas, or where strengthening these can be helpful with activities of daily living.

For children ages 2 to 6 (other populations), and older students, the matching game can include goals related to fairness, following rules, sense of integrity and friendly competition, the latter seemingly incongruent but prevalent in school settings. To promote honesty and integrity in the game, a technique where volunteers move between places (depending on the available number of volunteers) taking photos of participants at places holding the search photo to the plant match can be a way of demonstrating boundaries and instances where dishonesty and integrity are not always evident, revealed subtly or overtly in different ways. Making a quick slide show, on a phone or tablet for a group showing or for individuals to share and pass between them, can prompt a fun review and discussion of the integrity/honesty concepts.

This TH activity can address mood, wellbeing and practice being in the present, experiencing nature moments, and social interactions in the outdoors.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. The plant setting where the game will take place should be accessible, free of hazards and well supervised.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Color photos of plants can come from old calendars, plant catalogues, old books or Teachers Pay Teachers website and resources (see reference below). Or use the Google app that takes photos (of the plants in the garden where the game will occur), identifying them and available to be printed into hard copy. Laminating photos will maintain their durability for longer periods. Extensions of this activity can include painting plant specimens, propagating some of the plants, plant pounding artwork, or playing nature's bounty game. Recommended plants include some that are familiar and common such as rosemary, geranium, lilac, apples, and roses. Less familiar plants, which can be introduced, describing their horticultural uniqueness or attributes might include feathery dill, johnny-jump-up (fun name), pussy willow (soft tactile texture), or any plant with an animal name like lion's mane mushroom (*Hericium erinaceus*), Buffalo grass (*Bouteloua dactyloides*), or bear's breeches (*Acanthus mollis*). These may need to be in containers because they may be difficult to purchase and thrive in a garden outside of their preferred plant zone. Adding another element to the game with more complex horticultural information can engage older students, wellness groups and adults. Refer to THAD Games with Weird & Wonderful Plants for more plant names.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Google Play. (2022). Plant identifier from photo.
How We Montessori.com. (2013). Why matching work is good for brain development.
Teachers Pay Teachers. (2024). Plant picture match.
Russell, G. (2024). Building up to complex matching skills. The Autism Helper.com

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