

Activity: Creative Expression Goal: Physical Populations: Children

## TH Activity Plan – Mini Evergreen Doorknob Decorations

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**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participants will make evergreen holiday doorknob decorations using natural materials.

**THERAPEUTIC GOALS:**

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Self-regulate during material selection

**Physical:** Practice fine motor skills by knot tying & manipulation of materials

**Psychological/Emotional:** Expand feelings of acceptance & welcome of the winter season; use nature experiences as positive time

**Sensory:** Touch, smell & look at materials from nature; expand connections to nature

**Social:** Assist younger participants, taking the initiative to do so; practice positive social skills

**Materials**

Small pine boughs - pre-cut, pinecones, Eastern red cedar cuttings, other natural items

Pruners, scissors

Natural jute or twine, bells, bows, ribbon



**STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:**

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials from nature, some purchased. Schedule activity.
2. Facilitator begins session by welcoming children & showing them some samples of the doorknob decorations. A basket of materials is set out on an accessible table beforehand. Items are observed, touched, smelled & discussed as part of nature.
3. Children select materials they want to use, with a prompt – self-regulate or take only what you need leaving some for others.
4. Facilitator lets participants tie together materials for the decoration, with a jute loop for hanging on doorknob, assisting when needed, but allowing children to be creative & have time to work. Encouraging older children to help others promotes mentorship & social skills.
5. Throughout session facilitator can share some horticultural facts like why tree trimming/pruning of lower branches helps growth & doesn't hurt tree, environmental lessons of treating plants with care, & type of trees being used. Comments related to therapeutic focus can include self-regulating amount of materials selected - leaving some for others, & changing their mood & environment by making decorations for example.
6. Once group has completed doorknob decorations, a show & tell time as well as suggesting participants tell parents about how they made their decoration promotes language skills & sense of pride. Encourage the families to hang the decoration together & think about other ways to use seasonally appropriate objects to decorate their spaces.

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** This activity was delivered to children aged 5-7 who had experienced drug use or recovery from drug misuse by parents or family members. It is appropriate for other ages and adults as

well. The TH activity goals as noted above, included several intervention focuses, depending on each child's circumstances and experiences. Children in this population may present with the following behavior: family dysfunction, role reversal where child assumes adult responsibilities, loss of developmental experiences, stress, forms of neglect, bonding problems, weaker social skills for age, outbursts, separation anxiety and need for attention.

The American Addiction Centers (2024) identify adverse consequences for children with parent(s) who/have misuse substances: higher risk for substance misuse, lifelong mental and physical health problems, physical/emotional/sexual abuse, inability to regulate emotions, anxiety/depression/anger, involved with juvenile justice system. Not all children will have these, but some behavior will be affected. Note that ChildGuard, a drug test that can detect passive exposure to drugs, distinguishing between native drugs and drug metabolites uses hair specimens. Drug metabolites are evident only when drugs have been ingested.

Physical domain therapeutic goals for elementary school children can focus on fine motor and sensorimotor skills, hand dexterity and strength, and hand-eye coordination. During this developmental stage tasks like tying knots, holding several items together or developing [proprioception](#) skills doing such tasks without watching are mastered through a variety of experiences.

Facilitators may use a [Montessori model](#) which emphasizes the child's autonomy and gives them the opportunity to self-lead. Easy to follow graphic depictions of knot tying can help the children try on their own before assistance is offered. Physically modeling is another effective technique.

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

Do not use berries, toxic or other, particularly if young children are creating the decoration or in the house where it will be hung. Live or artificial berries may be choking hazards. Avoid sharp pinecones. Supervision of scissors or pruners is recommended.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** Plant material used in this session should have texturally pleasing tactile elements, with several different specimens used [Loblolly pine](#) (*Pinus taeda*), [Eastern red cedar](#) (*Juniperus virginiana*), spruce, and variegated leaves. Materials with fragrance and color differentiation is recommended. The session can include identifying and harvesting materials or facilitator may have pre-cut materials available. Auditory stimulation can be provided by bells. Note that both Loblolly pine and Eastern red cedar needles can cause stomach upset if consumed in large quantities, and young red cedar needles are awl shaped and therefore sharp. Select mature cedar branches with scaled foliage, cut to smaller size appropriate for doorknob decoration.

**REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:**

American Addictions Centers. (2024). [Children of addicted parents guide: The impact of substance use on families and children](#). American Addictions Centers.org.

Federal Interagency Task Force on Drug Endangered Children Federal Partnerships Subcommittee. (2011). [Promising practices toolkit: Working with drug endangered children and their families](#).

Office of National Drug Control Policy. (n.d.). [Drug endangered children](#).

UConn Library (n.d.) [The American approach to Montessori teaching and learning](#). UConn Library.edu.

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2025.

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