

TH Activity Plan – Nature Masks

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Photo by K. Haney & S. Sutcliffe



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Learn about animal and human social adaptation by making masks using natural materials from the garden.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Explore concepts using observational, educational, & independent ideas; discuss how animals attract attention/blend in/camouflage

Physical: Strengthen gross and fine motor skills

Psychological/Emotional: Explore empathy about living creatures and others' experiences

Sensory: Focus on tactile & visual sensory experiences

Social: Practice social cues; celebrate positive social interactions

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Prepare mask base as needed using paper plate or hotdog plate and cut two holes that will match to a person's eyes. Having blank purchased masks will skip this step.
2. Facilitator begins session using the hole punch to make a hole on either side of the plate and gently tying a string or ribbon to each side to create a strap to tie the mask on. Participants can do this step if appropriate.
3. Review pictures of different types of animal adaptations (e.g. grasshoppers, polar bears, leopards, birds with colorful feathers, animal camouflage, color & countershading, background matching to plants & environment (National Geographic, 2024).
4. Discuss how animal's markings or color helps with adaptation and survival.
5. Have each participant take a prepared blank mask and write their name on the back. Have them select a color theme or a design theme for their own mask by selecting available nature materials. Participants may also be encouraged to look for materials in the garden or to cut images out of garden catalogs.
6. Show participants how to glue the material onto the mask.
7. Carefully assist participants with placing the mask up to their face and share their mask with others. If possible, move around the room or garden and "hide" or "attract." Take pictures when possible!

Materials

Blank carnival eye masks, paper plates cut in half, or hotdog plates

String, ribbon, or twine

Single hole punch

Glue (glue sticks and/or washable glue paste)

Pencils or pens to write names

An assortment of nature materials (greens, yellow leaves, flowers)

Optional: chopsticks, scissors

NOTE: wilted materials glue better than dried materials. This activity can also be done using pictures cut out of garden catalogs.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: This therapeutic horticulture activity can be adapted for children/youth, older adults in residential care settings, adults in day programs or recovery settings, garden club activity for

Mardis Gras, Halloween or other social events. Materials (nature materials or garden pictures) can be pre-selected and trimmed ahead of time. Participants can point to preferred materials and therapist can assist with the application of glue as needed. Using stick masks (attaching mask to a chopstick or small dowel to be held up to face) decreases the need to have a mask tied over the face.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Dry or flaky materials can get into participant's eyes – avoid small particles near the eye holes. Consideration needs to be taken for skin irritants with certain plants, as well as possible thin or delicate skin of participants. Consider population with regards to string or other attachments. Use of scissors may be appropriate for some populations and materials.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: It's best to prepare the base masks ahead of time. Make the string attachments long enough to tie over hair or adaptive equipment such as helmets or glasses.

For groups of individuals where discussions are appropriate and part of the therapeutic process, facilitator can initiate themes related to empathy of animals and people, camouflage, human desire to blend in/attract others as coping/mating/social interactions, or adaptability of animals/humans/plants as demonstrated by mask making. This fun and interactive activity with a creative expression element can draw from concepts of adaptation in nature and apply those concepts to social factors with a strong intellectual goal component. Activity was originally inspired by curriculum from The Garden School Foundation.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Garden School Foundation <https://gardenschoolfoundation.org/>

National Geographic. (2024). Camouflage. <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/camouflage/>



Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2023.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2023.