

## TH Activity Plan – Outdoor Obstacle Course: Swinging & Spinning

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**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** Participate in an obstacle course that provides fun interactions with plants.

**THERAPEUTIC GOALS:**

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Practice reading skills; complete all tasks; practice remembering instructions (or going back to re-read instructions)

**Physical:** Increase physical activity swinging, spinning, & bear walking

**Psychological/Emotional:** Build self-confidence in physical abilities; connect with nature & plants

**Sensory:** Regulate sensory response through swinging, spinning & bouncing; stimulate the senses through touch, vision, smell, & movement

**Social:** Practice taking turns

**Materials**

Outdoor or garden area

Written instructions for each station's tasks

Nature Collage THAD materials list –see link

**STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:**

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Examine & mark if necessary, boundaries where activity will occur. Identify & set up stations near plants that will be explored (touching, smelling, selecting). Write instructions for obstacle course & each station's tasks, placing these where they can be seen. If combining obstacle course with [plant collage](#), gather these materials and read THAD instructions .
2. Facilitator begins session by introducing outdoor obstacle course (see below for description of physical task).
3. Facilitator identifies obstacle course's physical activities & plant tasks for each station (smelling, touching, swinging). Facilitator shows samples of plants that will be at the various stations. Written instructions for obstacle course at each station are in place where they can be seen or reviewed. If this activity does not include *Nature Collage* activity, plants are used for touching, smelling & locating stations. Participants do not pick or take plant material.
4. Rules are reviewed with participants such as staying with the class in the designated area, smelling but not eating items, and staying away from large ant hills.
5. Adults lead participants to the outdoor areas.
6. This outdoor obstacle course can be combined with [THAD Nature Collage](#).

**Outdoor Obstacle Course Stations (3 or more)**

- 1) **Swing** 10 times (on playground swing) (at maple tree – touch the leaves, look at colors)
- 2) **Spin** on “merry-go-ground” 10 times (or spin to the left 5 times and spin to the right 5 times) (at pine tree – touch the pine needles, smell fragrance)

- 3) **Bear walk** (walking with hands and feet on the ground) on grass (or sand or pine straw etc...) for 30 seconds (at flowering shrub – look at blossoms, smell them, remember flower shapes)
- 4) Other physical tasks could include bouncing on a therapy ball, jumping up & down or jumping jacks, rolling on ground, somersaulting, balancing on one leg, touching hand to nose with/without eyes closed, stepping over logs, raking leaves into a pile, digging & filling sand pail, skipping around the tree 5 times.

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** Incorporating an outdoor obstacle course into a TH session can connect physical activity, techniques for addressing appropriate sensory responses and integration of mind-body efforts, nature engagement used for health purposes, and therapeutic intervention. People living with an autism spectrum disorder, people with ADHD, developmental delays, and others, may benefit from participating in type of physically active TH activity.

Adding movement and engaging the muscles in this way adds additional strategies to support physical development as well as self-regulation including opportunities to activate the vestibular system (moving the head in a variety of positions), proprioception (or heavy work activities that activate the muscles), and body awareness (noticing textures and sensations when moving across surfaces with different textures) in addition to regulating sensory responses by spinning, swinging and bouncing.

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts.** Talk to classroom teacher or group leader about safe outdoor location or completing this activity indoors based on participant and group strengths and needs (including insect bites & allergies). Ensure area where students/participants will be, are free of toxic plants, excessive amounts of insects and ant hills, with no tripping hazards. Avoid plants with excessive sap, thorns or sharpness. Sun protection and access to drinking water is recommended.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** If plant material is high, such that participants can't easily reach and touch leaves or flowers at the designated stations, and to avoid damage to plants, samples of the leaves, flowers, stems can be available in baskets located beside the plant, and near the written instructions.

This activity can be done in conjunction with a [nature collage](#) using cardboard templates and plant materials inserted into cardboard to create a nature artwork. Therapeutic goals include developing bilateral hand use, and hand-eye coordination. Combining *Nature Collage* with *Outdoor Obstacle Course* offers a range of therapeutic activities and goals, and can be adapted to suit participants of all ages, abilities and delivery sites.

**REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:**

Berger, R. (2023). [The benefits of obstacle courses.](#)

Kinsner, K. (May 2019). [Rocking and rolling. Fresh air, fun, and exploration: Why outdoor play is essential for healthy development.](#) *National Association for the Education of Young Children.*

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.