

Activity: Plant Care Goal: Psychological Populations: Children

## TH Activity Plan – Waiting for Water Chant

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**ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:** This highly motivating chant and game uses a spray of water on a hot day to increase self-regulation when children want to get wet while watering plants.

**THERAPEUTIC GOALS:**

**Cognitive/Intellectual:** Develop counting skills; develop awareness of time; join in chants

**Physical:** Develop running, coordination & balance skills

**Psychological/Emotional:** Increase self-regulation with an emphasis on waiting & delayed gratification; increase the ability to maintain boundaries and follow directions

**Sensory:** Seek the cooling stimulation of water on a hot day; tolerate bursts of excited energy and noise

**Social:** Engage in guided group games

**Materials**

Plants that need water

Hose with spray nozzle

First aid kit/band-aids

Dry clothes post session

**STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:**

- 1. Pre-Session Preparation:** Choose an open area of the garden or playground where plants need to be watered and where open space allows for short but forceful bouts of running. Ensure the play area is clear of hazards such as rocks, logs, and holes. Check with the teachers to ensure the children may enjoy mild-moderate sprinkle play in the hose. Some programs may prefer the children enjoy this game on a scheduled splash day when they are in their swimming suits; on other days the water spray may remain light enough to allow clothing to dry before returning inside. Have Band-Aids readily available for falls. Run a hose with a spray attachment to the garden area. The attachment should allow the water to be turned on and off.
- 2. Facilitator begins session** by lightly spraying the plants with the hose. Children will naturally gather to the area and attempt to put their hands in the hose-water. Turn the nozzle off and let the children know they can play a game that will let them get wet when it is their turn and let the plant get wet when its their turn.
- 3. Explain the game:** “When I spray the plant, it is the plant’s turn to get wet. It’s your turn to wait... and you can wait by chanting with me... (chant and demonstrate) “pat your hands on your knees, pat your hands on your knees, pat your hands on your knees, now 1--2--3--Go!” When I say “Go” I’ll spray the water in the air and it will be your turn to get wet. Are you ready to try?”
- 4. Play the game:** Spray the plant and say the chant. Encourage the children to say the chant with you and pat their knees. They will enjoy saying, “One... two... three... go!”. When you say “Go!” spray the water in the air; the children will most likely scream, turn, and run away from the water. For the children to get less wet, spray the water slightly behind you or switch to the “mist” setting. After spraying in the air for a short time, return to watering the plant and chant. Repeat the process as often as the children enjoy the game.
- 5. Guide and Redirect:** If children have a difficult time waiting for their turn to get wet and try to put their hands or other body parts in the water, turn the water off. Let them know that you will start the game again when they take their hands out of the water. If children push other children when they start to run, turn the water

off. Redirect the child who pushed, “You got very excited and pushed your friend. Your friend could get hurt when you push. It is important that you run with your hands to yourself. Are you ready to try again?” If pushing continues, give the child an adult partner to hold hands with, or move them away from the others.

6. **Document:** Take note of children who played the game independently, those who needed limited prompting, and those who needed extensive prompting. Some children may also choose not to participate. Observe or work with those children one-on-one to determine if it is the excitability of the game, the water contact, or another reason.
7. **Conclude:** Provide positive reinforcement as you conclude the game. “You did it! You let the plant get wet and you waited for your turn to get wet. “That was fun, turning difficult tasks into a game.

**APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS:** This activity was developed for early childhood: 18 months to 8 years. It has applications as both an educational and therapeutic activity or a combination of the two depending on the participants and the setting. The focus is on increasing self-regulation and delaying gratification. Older children may enjoy taking turns being the person with the hose. They will benefit from a system to determine whose turn it is to lead the play. They also may enjoy having a boundary to run to when they run away, these also important components of self-regulation.

The concept and practice of [Conscious Discipline](#) “believes that trauma-responsive social and emotional learning (SEL) is a lens through which transformational change in the areas of racial equality, equity and inclusion is not only possible, but essential” (CASEL, 2020). It is an evidence-based approach being used across disciplines including education, addiction recovery, mental health and now horticultural therapy and therapeutic horticulture. Discussed as an alternative to programs that use external controls, [the conscious discipline approach uses a self-regulation model](#) fostering self-control, compassionate care, shared power in decision-making and behavior, independence and internal motivation (Bailey, n.d.). Using a neurodevelopmental model, the Conscious Discipline Brain State Model on which conscious discipline is based, provides a framework to understand internal brain-body states and their impact on behaviors, thoughts and emotions for increasing self-awareness (Conscious Discipline, n.d.).

**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS:** Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Ensure the play area is free from hazards and has a soft landing. Position the hose so the children do not trip over it. Children are likely to fall when running. Ensure that the program has a policy that tolerates minor scrapes during play. Falling on grass or a padded surface will result in less injury. The game should not be played on concrete or sharp mulch such as shell. If a minor scrape or cut occurs, clean the wound, offer a bandage, and encourage them to rejoin the game. These minor injuries in young children build resiliency for outdoor play.

**NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:** This game was created by the author when children struggled to keep their hands out of the water while gardening, leading to competition for space with the hose. While working in the garden with young children, stay open to ways to transform challenges to successes through games and fun.

#### REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Bailey, B. (n.d.). [How does conscious discipline compare.](#)

Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL). (2020). [SEL as a lever of equity: 5-part webinar series from CASEL.](#)

Conscious Discipline. (n.d.). [Conscious discipline methodology.](#)

Fleming, L., Bethel, M., & Roberts, T. (2023). Self-regulation, its neuroscience foundations and horticultural therapy: Growing the connections. *Journal of Therapeutic Horticulture*, 33(1).

Grimes, K. (2019). Program and case example: Utilizing a sensory garden to cultivate the experience of safety in homeless children. In Haller, Kennedy & Capra (Eds.), *The profession and practice of horticultural therapy*. CRC Press.

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