

TH Activity Plan – Watering Can Pass-Off

Text by Kathryn E. Grimes, MAT, HTR

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Young children will practice pro-social turn-taking behavior while watering plants in the garden, following a motivational structure and reinforcement.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Follow directions; learn about gratitude

Physical: Develop balance, strength & coordination skills

Psychological/Emotional: Maintain emotional regulation while taking turns & waiting for the next round of watering

Sensory: Practice listening skills; react appropriately to verbal cues; improve sensory tolerance to textural experiences in water

Social: Take turns with others; practice pro-social communication & behavior skills; develop patience in group settings

Materials

1 small watering can per 3-4 students

A large water source such as a hose, large watering can, or Igloo dispenser

Plants to water

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

- 1. Pre-Session Preparation:** Identify the plants to be watered in this session setting up a water station nearby. The water station includes 3-4 small watering cans and a “large” water source such as hose, large pre-filled watering can, or igloo water jug with dispenser. Identify a location along a fence, cones, or other boundary for children to line up to wait their turn.
- 2. Facilitator begins session** by welcoming children to the garden and lets them know that they will practice taking turns while watering the plants. Taking turns is important because everyone likes to help. Taking turns is sometimes hard; facilitator encourages them that they can do it. This makes our friends feel happy to receive a turn. Invite children who would like to help to line up in the designated space. Hold the small watering cans until you have finished sharing the instructions.
- 2. Model the process** with another adult: Say, “Use your eyes to watch me closely as I take a turn with the watering can. I’ll ask the teacher to fill my can, then I will water a plant. When my watering can is empty, I bring it back to the person first in line, look them in the eyes, hand them the watering can and say, ‘It’s your turn!’ When they receive the watering can they say, ‘thank you!’ (*Draw attention to the face of the receiver who will be smiling.*). Look! When we take turns, it makes our friends grateful. They are happy, and now they can take a turn to help a plant by giving it water. After I pass off the watering can, the teacher will fill it with water for the next person, and I can join the end of the line to wait for another turn.”
- 3. Reinforce the practice:** As children practice taking turns, reinforce their social interactions and their helpfulness. “You did it! You passed off your watering can to your friend. They are excited and grateful. Now they can help the plants get water, too.” Guide and reinforce as children find the person in the front of the line and then take their place at the end of the line. Waiting in line can be a difficult skill for young children. To help them extend their attention spans, engage in conversation, fingerplays, or look for bugs
- 4. Redirect from refusals to share.** For some young children or people with cognitive disabilities, sharing or taking turns can be difficult. They may not want to give another person a turn with the watering can. Empathize and remind the child of the process in a non-judgmental tone. “I know that taking turns can be

hard. After you pass off the watering can, it will be refilled. You can have another turn later.” Ensure that the teacher/facilitator/therapist only refills the watering can after a pass off. Some children may choose not to pass off the watering can. They might continue to water the plants without water, or might change activities, like filling the watering can with sand. If they do not willingly pass of the watering can, allow them to continue to use it, but do not refill it with water. Eventually they will get bored and will drop the can, which can then be picked up by another person.

5. **Document:** Track the number of times children passed the watering can, using pro-social communication, assisted, with prompts, or independently.
6. **Conclude:** Reinforce the children for working together to help the plants get the water they needed. “You did it! You took turns! Each person had a turn to be helpful and water the plants. How did it feel when it was your turn? When you gave your friend a turn, they felt that way too. When we are all happy to work together, we can accomplish big tasks.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: This activity was initially developed and delivered with children ages 3 through third grade in a preschool/school setting. This process may be applicable to people with intellectual and developmental delays (IDD). Change the language or tone as needed to reflect their comprehension level and/or provide other ways for turn taking rather than standing in line-taking a numbered ticket or called by their name.

Using plant-based hands-on activity, registered horticultural therapist Kathryn Grimes shared insights about self-regulation, conscious discipline and its application to TH in THAD activity *Waiting for Water Chant* (link). “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.)” (2024).

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Standing water in an open container, like a bucket, must always be monitored around young children to prevent drowning, and must be emptied after use to prevent mosquitos. Have a plan to manage the hose so that children do not trip on it as they move around the garden. Use a potable water source in case children get the water in their mouths. Have fresh drinking water available, and redirect children to the fresh water when they try to drink from the watering can.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Keep watering cans small and fill them only halfway to decrease the amount of time between turns. Keep in mind the participant’s strength for lifting the water-filled can. If using a large watering can as your large, refill source, remove the shower spout to make pouring easier.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

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.](#)

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.

Grimes, K. (2024). [Waiting for water chant.](#) *Therapeutic Horticulture Activities Database.*

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.