

Activity: Nature Goal: Cognitive/Intellectual Populations: Corrections

TH Activity Plan – What Plant Speaks to You? - Corrections

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Photo by L. Fleming



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will connect with nature by selecting a plant that resonates with them.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Discuss with others, how nature, gardens, greenhouses can provide serenity, beauty, distraction & vocational career opportunities

Physical: Walk throughout the garden or greenhouse, selecting & carrying plant back to classroom

Psychological/Emotional: Consider what in nature, specifically plants, provide some meaning, beauty or other to you personally

Sensory: Use visual & tactile senses to examine plant(s)

Social: Verbally share why the particular plant spoke to you & what is interesting about it; listen politely while others in group share

Materials

Plant specimens

Gloves, wipes

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Determine area that will be used for plant selection & ensure it is safe for the population (no access to sharp tools, chemicals or other). Have some examples of plants with various attributes (flowers, edible, weird shape, soft texture).
2. Facilitator begins session by commenting on nature's ability to transport people to spaces other than their current location (corrections facilities, toxic relationships). Prompt participants to identify benefits of nature engagement they have experienced, particularly if they are involved with an on-site horticulture program at the corrections facility. Facilitator names some research that supports nature engagement for children (inmates have children), incarcerated, and seniors.
3. Pass around the sample plants and do some sensory prompts – feel the leaves, smell the fragrance, is the bark rough? Present the session's focus where each participant is to choose a plant that speaks to them on some level. Suggest some ways this may be – beauty, family garden, color, toughness/resiliency.
4. Outline the rules: stay within set boundaries (of garden or greenhouse), avoid picking the only blossom but do bring the plant with the flower if possible, the plant should be small enough to be carried (not a full grown tree)...The search for *their* plant begins.
5. Once re-assembled in group/classroom or garden, go one by one identifying plant, plant name if possible, and the attributes that appealed to the participant, if they are willing to share. Be sensitive to potential ridicule after the session if too personal of information is shared. Further discussion of nature connections, particularly how incarcerated people can connect with nature can occur. Participants return plants to original location.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Incarcerated populations: People who are incarcerated may be able to participate in this activity if they are involved in a TH program at the corrections facility and have access to plants

or the outdoors. An adaptation can be selecting photos of nature. The “game” may appear an unlikely fit, and of no interest to inmates but may in fact be respite from indoor detention, and an introduction to the wonders of nature including items that may be small and seemingly inconsequential but providing a moment of awe. Some may prefer to think of the activity as a healing therapeutic exercise vs a game. Each of these can resonate with participants and be discussion points as they navigate their incarceration. Benefits of connecting with nature including nature photos can elevate mood, decrease stress, and may introduce outdoor leisure activities that are healthy and able to be shared with children and family (walking in parks post-release, visiting national parks, starting seeds indoors).

Social interactions in corrections facilities can be difficult. This TH activity allows inmates to show great interest, attentiveness, and care towards other participants when sharing ideas and perspectives within the group. It is helpful for the facilitator to highlight how well everyone listened, thanking inmates for sharing and those who listened without judgment. This reaffirms the behaviors that are acceptable and appreciated in the greater community outside the walls of the prison and coincides with advocating for respect in the prison.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Discussion of hallucinogenic plants should be avoided. Safety protocols may need to be enhanced so that no items, plants or other items are taken into confined areas other than the TH program space.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Therapeutic horticulture programming for incarcerated populations include vocational horticulture programs where certification from state agencies is available, beekeeping and programs with a food security focus including donations to local community partners. This TH activity may be an opening activity as part of any of these.

Studies are investigating food gardens at corrections facilities (Jauk, et al., 2022), horticulture programs and recidivism (Holmes et al., 2019), incarcerated juveniles- plant programming (Hardin-Fanning et al., 2018; Maloney, 2021), and career exploration (Park et al., 2022).

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