



PARACHUTE PLAY

PRINCIPLES

Parachute games – exciting, fun and educational!

Parachute games encourage co-operative, non-competitive play and reinforce taking turns and sharing. While most gross motor activities for young children develop muscles in the lower body more than the upper torso, parachutes strengthen primarily shoulder, arm and hand muscles. They also refine perceptual motor skills and develop a sense of rhythm. Communication and language activities can be easily incorporated into most parachute games.

All can be played indoors (gym) or outdoors, unless otherwise specified. Suitable for all ages especially those between 5 and 12 years. Most games are best played using a mid to large sized parachute (i.e. 3.6m – 9m) but many can still be effective when using smaller parachutes.

WARM UP EXERCISES

- **See-Saw Pull:** From a sitting position, have the children pull the chute back and forth in a see-sawing motion.
- **Make Waves:** While gripping the parachute in a sitting or standing position, everyone moves their arms up and down to make small and large waves.
- **Object Manipulation:** Again sitting or standing, have children try to roll balls, or move other accessories across the parachute. Also try placing soft accessories into the centre of the parachute and have the participants flick /lift them up into the air and catch them again.
- **Chute Lift:** Ask the children to lift the parachute high over their heads and down again. Talk about the soft sounds and breezes that are created. Move the parachute faster and notice the different effects.
- **Mushroom:** From a standing position, lift the parachute from the ground to waist height; then rapidly lifting from waist, have everyone raise the parachute high over their heads and crouch down quickly, pulling the parachute down tightly. A mushroom effect is created as the parachute settles.

Variations:

- Everyone mushrooms, then lets go.
- Everyone mushrooms, takes one step in, sits down pulling the chute behind them, so everyone is sitting in a 'tent'.
- Everyone mushrooms, and then runs to the centre, still holding the chute.
- **Parachute Tag:** Lift the parachute high overhead. Call one child's name and have him/her run (skip, hop, twirl or crawl) to the other side before the parachute comes down and tags her.
- **One Hand Run:** Have each child hold the parachute with one hand, extending the opposite arm out for balance. Run around in one direction, then change and run around in the other direction. A variation would be to use music as the cue for changing direction (i.e. direction can be changed every time the music stops).
- **Parachute Run:** Lie the parachute down on gym mats and get the children to take turns running on the parachute as it lies on the ground, while the other children make waves. See how long the children can manoeuvre on the waves before falling down. The length of each turn can be determined by songs that the children choose to sing (i.e. everyone's turn lasts the length of one song.)

BEGINNER EXERCISES

Tent Pole:

Participants spread evenly around the parachute sitting down with one person under the parachute. This person is to be the tent pole and stands in the middle, holding the centre of the chute as high as possible. The tent-pole person calls out someone's name and goes and sits down in that person's place. The person called has to rush to the middle and take up the role of the tent-pole before the chute comes down. Repeat the procedure as long as you feel like it. Be careful the participants don't collide with each other as they swap positions under the chute.

Upside-down Tent:

An alternative way to make a tent is to have everyone lie on their backs under the chute, heads to the middle with their knees bent; stretch the chute tight and tuck the chute under your feet. You can place a soft ball on top of the chute for players to use their hands to bounce it around above the 'tent'.

Air Vent:

This game is good for recuperation after an energetic game. Hold the chute stretched out and have about a third of the people lie on the ground under it (best with heads near the middle). The rest of the group mushroom the chute up and quickly pull it down again repeatedly. Air rushing in and out cools those underneath like a giant fan, and the sensation of watching the chute rise up and then come down on top of you is very strange.

Variation:

- This by starting with participants holding the chute at waist level. Choose a start point and, moving clockwise (or anti-clockwise if you'd prefer) have them lift the parachute above their heads momentarily then down again to waist height in a **Mexican Wave** motion. Try this one with a light soft ball and keep it moving (see below).

Weather Station:

Pretend the parachute is a weather map. The leader then gives a weather report and participants move the parachute in response to the report they heard. For example, "I heard on the weather report this morning that there was a slight breeze over the Atlantic. What would that look like?" The children respond by making small waves in the parachute. Other suggestions have been high winds, snow (pull it tight to make ice), hurricanes, etc. Once they get the hang of it the possibilities are endless.

Hopping Kangaroo:

Set up an obstacle course. Have the participant hold the chute with one hand at waist height, all facing the same direction. When ready, start the chute bouncing by having children jump up and down on the spot, trying to get a consistent up and down motion. Once the motion is achieved, get the children to start moving forward, hopping around the course. For more advance participants, have a race with several smaller or mid sized parachutes around the course. Also try hopping and arm movements (lift chute from waist to overhead) at the same time.

BALL GAMES

Most of these games can be played with balls of different kinds (e.g. tennis balls; footballs; beachballs or even a giant cage ball). Different sized balls will change the way in which the game goes, so feel free to experiment.

These games suit mid size to large parachutes, with 10-25 participants

Chute Ball:

Best played with a large beach ball or ultra light volleyball. Everyone kneel down, place the parachute on the ground and pull it taught, and then put the ball in the middle. At the same time have everyone stand up and by pulling upwards and outwards, throw the ball as high in the air as possible.

Parachute Volleyball:

Have the children stand around the parachute while holding it with both hands waist high. Mark a line across the diameter of the chute. Split the parachute into two teams, one half versus the other. Throw a large lightweight ball into the middle. The aim is to get the ball off the chute onto the other team's side of the line or even to throw it over the other team's heads. You mustn't let go of the chute or touch the ball with any part of the body. Keeping score is optional. After several minutes of wild flapping and little progress the group should realize that coordination and strategy are needed to flick the ball off the chute.

Variation:

- Using 2 parachutes, split the children up in to two teams and put one team around each parachute. Each team should be standing, holding the parachute with both hands. Place the ball on one of the parachutes. The object is for the team with the ball to propel the ball into the air and have it land on the other team's parachute. This process then repeats itself going back the other direction. Once they have accomplished this move the teams increasingly further apart.

Popcorn:

Start with every body holding the chute stretched out. Throw as many soft balls as you can find on to the chute. Then see how quickly you can bounce them off without letting go of the chute.

Variations:

- Have half of the children trying to bounce the balls off and half trying to keep them on.
- Have two or three children under the chute. The children under the chute have to try and push the balls off while everyone else tries to keep them bouncing.

Mexican Wave Roller Ball:

Everyone holds the chute taut. Place a large ball near the edge. Try to make the ball roll around the edge of the chute. To do this, someone starts the ball rolling. As it comes towards you, you lower the edge you are holding, and as it goes past you raise your edge. When all the players do this in synchronisation, it creates a kind of wave going round the edge of the chute which pushes the ball in a smooth steady circle. It can not be done without concentration and co-operation, but it is very rewarding for a group to eventually achieve the correct motion. Once you have mastered the correct motion try changing the direction or speeding up.

ABC Volleyball:

Have the children stand around the parachute holding its edges. The group must then bounce the ball once for each letter in the alphabet without dropping the ball. If the ball is dropped, begin again. This game is best played with younger children. It's great for 5 years and younger who are beginning to learn their ABC's.

ACTIVE GAMES

Changing Places:

Mushroom the chute and call out a command, i.e. "Change over if you are wearing red." Everyone wearing red has to run under the chute to the opposite side, before the chute lands on them (although that is part of the fun) changing places with someone else (or at least finding an open spot).

Variations:

- **Name Change:** Have the children hold onto the edge of the parachute. On the count of three, have them lift it high into the air. Call out the names of two players. These players quickly change places under the canopy. Begin calling three or four names at a time. When the game is at its ending point, call out "all change" to have all the players switch. CAUTION: Watch for children colliding while trying to switch.
- **Performance Change:** Number the children by threes around the chute, so that you have an equal number of ones, twos and threes evenly spread out. Mushroom the chute, then call out a number and also a description of who you would like them to act as. For example, if you call out: "Mushroom. Number ones are monkeys", all of the number ones have to cross under the chute, acting like monkeys on the way.

Wash and Dry Machine:

Half the children are the machine the other half are the washing. Put the washing into the machine (children duck under the parachute) in goes the powder (put a small soft ball under with the children to pass around)- and mix - give the parachute a good shake. The washing run around in a clockwise circle while the machine (parachute holders) run around in an anti-clockwise circle; pause (stop both groups) then start them in the reverse directions to before. After a couple of 'turns', pause, rinse (shake) then spin (both groups run in the same direction). Stop, shake and then dry by raising and lowering the chute in big movements. Repeat - reversing roles of children.

Wicked Web:

Four people hang onto the parachute, holding it overhead. Set the play area alive with the other children pretending to be bugs and seeds blowing in the wind, trying not to get eaten. The four with the chute run after the other bugs and seeds trying to eat them by dropping their head (chute) onto the food. If they succeed in covering the child with the parachute, the child is eaten and must now attach themselves to the parachute. Now they join in, to catch the other children.

Running Number Game:

Have the children around the parachute count off by fours. Start them running lightly in a circular fashion holding the chute in one hand. Call one of the numbers (one- four). Children holding the number immediately release their grip on the chute and run towards the next vacated place. This means they have to put on a burst of speed to move ahead to the next vacated space.

Wild Animals:

Go around the circle and assign one of the four different animals, Platypus, Goanna, Wombat and Dingo to each child. Start the participants running lightly in a circular fashion holding the chute at waist height with one hand. Call out an animal name and the participants take the following action:

Platypus – chute stops, these children dive under the chute as the others lower the chute to knee height. Platypuses need to 'swim' under the chute to the next vacated position.

Goanna – chute stops and lowered to the floor. Goannas need to 'scurry' on top of the chute on all fours to the next vacated position.

Wombat – wombats let go of the chute, the chute keeps moving in a circular direction while the wombats walk in the opposite direction back to their original position.

Dingo – these participants release the chute, everyone else lifts their arms up making a howling noise and then lower it down making a growling noise. As the chute is in the air the dingos have to run under the parachute to another spot before it collapses on them.

Continue until everyone has been called at least twice.

Games particularly suited to indoor use:

Bondi Beach Shark Attack:

Everyone should sit on the floor in a circle, holding the parachute stretched out with their legs underneath it. The chute is the sea, and the children are all sitting on the beach, happily dipping their toes in the water. By shaking the edge of the chute, you will produce a realistic rippling wave effect.

Once the waves are going well, choose someone to be the shark, and tell them to wriggle under the chute on their stomach. They should move around underneath, and because of the waves, it is difficult to know where they are. The shark chooses a victim and grabs them by the feet. The victim will then let out a scream and disappear under the chute. The new person then becomes the shark.

Crocodile Attack:

Have the children sit around the parachute with their legs underneath. Their legs should be straight and the parachute should be held at chest height. Choose one or two children to be crocodiles and two or three to be medics. The crocodiles hide under the parachute and eat people by tugging on their victim's feet and pulling them under. The victim then becomes a crocodile. The medics run around the outside of the circle and hold people when they begin to be pulled under and are yelling for help. After there are so many crocodiles that the integrity of the parachute circle collapses, start a new game.

CAUTIONS: Caution the children not to play tug-of-war with victims. If a person is being saved, then the crocodile has to find a new victim, not continue to pull. Also, victims should allow themselves to be pulled under. This will help to avoid rug burns and other injuries.

COOL DOWN

Doughnut Making:

Have the children sit around the parachute but not touching it. The players should be evenly distributed by the colours around the chute. Tell the children that it is time to make doughnuts and that each colour of the parachute is a colour of icing that will go on the doughnuts. Take turns calling out what colour iced doughnut you want to make.

When you call a certain colour, all players who are sitting in front of that colour work together to lift the parachute high up and let it settle back down to the ground again - symbolizing the doughnut rising in the oven. Have the different colours try to make the best doughnut.

Ask them how they think they can make the best doughnut. Then have them try to make a multi-coloured sprinkle doughnut. This should be the best and you can explain how teamwork and everyone working together around the circle works better. Relate this to teamwork in general and how everything works better when everyone does their part.

CAUTIONS: In their excitement some students will move forward while lifting. This will create a problem when the chute goes to settle. Some students have a tendency to throw the chute towards the middle. The chute may fold over itself. This is a good time to briefly (a sentence or two) discuss scientific principles of airflow and why the chute should be placed on the floor or ground so it lies flat.

Bag-O-Tricks:

Have children assemble around the parachute. Choose 1-5 children to sit or lie down in the middle of the chute while the remaining children grab the sides of the parachute tightly and walk slowly in a circle around the middle. Watch as the children in the middle become encased within the parachute, then pull outward to release the encased children.

CAUTIONS: The children need to walk the circle slowly so they do not harm the encased child(ren). Do not put any claustrophobic children in the middle.

Parachute Brandings:

- 3-4 blindfolds
- Soft foam rubber ball

Have all the players sit around the outside rim of the parachute. Choose three or four players to be in the middle. Blindfold all four players. When all players are blindfolded and on the parachute the game begins with them moving about (you may want to have them remove their shoes).

Toss the foam rubber ball into the centre of the parachute circle. The centre players search for the ball, the player who gets it is the brander and everyone shouts out "You're In". The Brander then has one minute to hit the other three players with the ball and get them out. If the brander gets the other blindfolded participants he/she wins, but if the players elude the Brander, then the surviving players win.

The children who are not in this round sit around the outside of the circle and can assist the Brander by calling out directions such as "Over here" as well as helping guide the players from straying off the parachute.

CAUTIONS: Encourage the blindfolded children to crawl around with one hand extended forward to feel for the other players. This should reduce the chance that they will bump heads with one another.