

# PARACHUTE PLAY

Parachute games encourage cooperative, noncompetitive play and reinforce turn-taking 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. When children work together to make the parachute billow, they also refine perceptual motor skills and develop a sense of rhythm. Language activities can also be incorporated into most parachute games.

## WARM UP PLAY

**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, everyone moves their arms up and down to make small and large waves.

**Bag Roll:** Have the children try to roll balls into the hole in the center of the parachute.

**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, counting one (lift from ground) and two (lift from waist). On three (lift over head), have everyone raise the parachute high over their heads and then (DROP!) crouch down, pulling the parachute tightly behind them. 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, then runs to the center, still holding the chute.

**Parachute Tag:** Lift the parachute high overhead. Call one child's name and have 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:** Have the children 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 turns can be determined by songs that the children choose to sing (i.e., everyone's turn lasts the length of one song.).

## **BEGINNING PLAY**

**Tent Pole:** Everyone spreads 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 center 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.

Variation: (Jellyfish) All the seated people sway about as much as possible for the tent-pole to stay upright. From the outside, the chute should look like a gigantic quivering jellyfish.

**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 feet up in the air. Stretch the chute tight and tuck the chute under your backs so it holds your legs up. You can bring in a soft ball and use your hands to bounce it around inside the tent.

**Air Conditioning:** 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 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.

**The Ocean:** Pretend the parachute is the ocean. The leader then gives a weather report and the children 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.

## **BALL GAMES** (suggested ages 5 - 11)

Most of these games can be played with balls of different kinds: Tennis balls; footballs; beach balls; and even a giant earth ball. Different sized balls will change the way in which the game goes, so feel free to experiment.

**Parachute Volleyball:** (large parachute) (Indoor, Outdoor & Gym, 10-25 children) Have the children stand around the parachute while holding it with both hands wait high. This is probably the simplest parachute game but it has multiple variations. First, put the ball on the parachute and start flapping and waving the parachute around. Next, try a contest. Split the parachute into two teams, *i.e.* this half versus that half, and have the teams try to cause the ball to go off the other side of the

parachute. Also, you can have 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 raise the parachute high above their heads. If done properly, this should propel the ball high into the air. (Copyright 1999 Edward Stanfield. All rights reserved.)

**Parachute Volleyball II:** (two large parachutes) (Outdoor & Gym, 20-50 children) Split the children up into two teams. 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. (Copyright 1999 Edward Stanfield. All rights reserved.)

**Chute Ball:** This game is best played with an earthball (a large beach ball). You simply place the ball in the middle of the chute and by pulling upwards and outwards, throw the ball as high in the air as possible.

**Competitive Chute Ball:** Mark a line across the diameter of the chute. Have equal teams hold the edge of the chute on either side. Throw a ball into the middle. The aim is to get the ball off the chute on the other team's side of the line, and stop it coming off your own side of the line (i.e., 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.

**Popcorn:** Start with everybody 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. Alternatively you can have half of the children trying to bounce the balls off and half trying to keep them on.

**Bouncing Balls:** Start as above and this time have two or three children under the chute. The children under the chute have to try and push off the balls while everyone else tries to keep them bouncing.

**Rollerball:** 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.

**Ball in the Bucket:** Two plastic balls are placed on the parachute while held waist high. Each team tries to shake its ball into the center pocket and keep the other team from putting its ball in the center pocket. A point is earned each time a team puts a ball in the pocket.

**Safe from the Storm:** The ball is placed on the parachute, representing a canoe. Participants wave the chute so it ripples. This is the waves and the stormy sea the canoe has encountered. Participants have to get their canoe to safety as soon as possible (through the hole in the center of the parachute).

**ABC Volleyball:** (large parachute) (Indoor, Outdoor, Gym, 10-25 children) 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.

The game can also be played without a parachute by having the children stand in a circle and tap the ball up volleyball style, with each person saying the next letter of the alphabet when they hit the ball. This, more challenging style, is better for older players. (Submitted by Lisa Burton, Copyright 2002 Edward Stanfield. All rights reserved.)

### **OTHER GAMES** (Suggested ages 5 - 11)

**Change Over:** 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).

**All Change:** (large parachute) (Indoor, Outdoor & Gym, 10-25 children) 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 kids running into each other while trying to switch. (Submitted by Alison Platt, copyright 2001 Edward Stanfield. All rights reserved.)

**Musicless Chairs:** 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 ballerinas", all of the number ones have to cross under the chute, acting like ballerinas on the way.

**Jaws:** 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 disappear under the chute. 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 a shark. The old shark can become a bather, or continue being a shark (depending on the teacher's decision).

**Alligator Attack:** (large parachute) (Indoor & Gym, 15-30 children) Have the children sit around the parachute with their legs underneath. Their legs should be straight and the parachute should be held at the waist. Choose one or two children to be alligators and two or three to be medics. The alligators hide under the parachute and eat people by tugging on their victim's feet and pulling them under. The victim then becomes an alligator. 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 alligators 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 alligator 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. (Copyright 1999 Edward Stanfield. All rights reserved.)

**Cat and Mouse:** Everyone should stand in a circle holding the chute stretched out at about waist height. Someone becomes a mouse and goes underneath. Someone else becomes a cat and goes on top. The cat tries to catch the mouse, but with everyone billowing the chute, it is impossible to see where it is.

Every now and then you can give the cat a clue by lowering the chute to reveal the mouse, then raise it again to help the mouse get away. You can try the game with two or three mice and two or three cats.

**Shark Hunter:** (large parachute) (Indoor, Outdoor & Gym, 10-25 children) Have all the players sit around the outside rim of the parachute. Choose one player to be the hunter and two or three players to be the sharks. The hunter is on top the parachute (no shoes) while the sharks hide below. When the game starts, all the players around the rim wave the parachute up and down to simulate water and to mask the sharks' movements. The hunter must crawl around the top of the parachute and find each of the sharks within a predetermined amount of time (a minute or two). When a shark is caught they leave from under the parachute and take their place around the rim. The hunter wins if they catch all the sharks, if there are any sharks remaining, the remaining sharks win.

**CAUTIONS:** Sometimes the children around the rim like to give away where the sharks are hiding, this should be discouraged. (Copyright 2001 Edward Stanfield. All rights reserved.)

**Washing Machine:** We do a washing machine routine - ½ the children are the machine; ½ the washing.

Just like washing routine: in goes the washing (children sit under the parachute) in goes the powder - and mix - give the parachute a good shake. The washing turns one way - run around in a circle turning the parachute - then the other. Rinse (shake) turn (circle) again. Shake and then dry - up and down in big movements.

Repeat - reversing roles of children.

**Blob:** Four people hang onto the parachute. Other children try to get eaten. The four with the chute run after the other children. 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.

**Same Name Exchange:** Go around the circle and assign one of four different names of something (i.e., fruit, sports, food, drinks, seasons) to each child. Then as everyone has their arms up (Ohhh!), call out one name and these participants have to run under the parachute to another spot before it collapses on them (Ahhh!). Continue until everyone has been called at least twice. Then try random exchanges such as “Who has eaten a banana today?”, etc.

**Doughnut Making:** (large parachute) (Indoor, Outdoor & Gym, 12-24 children) Have the children sit around the parachute but not touching it. The players should be evenly distributed by the colors around the chute. Tell the children that it is time to make doughnuts and that each color of the parachute is a color of sprinkles that will go on the doughnuts. Take turns calling out what color sprinkled doughnut you want to make. When you call a certain color, all players who are sitting in front of that color work together to lift the parachute high up and then settle it back down to the ground again - symbolizing the doughnut rising in the oven. Have the different colors try to make the best doughnut. The group can discuss why some doughnuts are different shapes and come out different than others. Ask them how they think they can make the best doughnut. Then have them try to make a multi-colored 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 shaking. This will create a problem when the chute goes to settle. Some students have a tendency to throw the chute towards the middle when they should be placing it down on the ground when it's time to make the doughnuts. The chute may fold over itself. This is a good time to briefly (a sentence or two) discuss scientific principles of air flow and why the chute should be placed on the floor or ground so it lies flat. (Submitted by Anita L Kotoris, Copyright 2002 Edward Stanfield. All rights reserved.)

**Jellyroll:** (large parachute) (Indoor, Outdoor & Gym, 10-25 children) Have children assemble around the parachute. Pick 1-5 children to sit or lay down in the middle of the chute. Have 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 and 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, this tends to be bad. (Submitted by Adam J Horney, Copyright 2001 Edward Stanfield. All rights reserved.)

**Predator:** (large parachute, 3-4 blindfolds & socks) (Indoor, Outdoor & Gym, 10-25 children) Have all the players sit around the outside rim of the parachute. Choose four players to be in the middle. Blindfold all four players. When all players are blindfolded and on the parachute the game begins and they start moving about (you may want to have them remove their shoes). Shortly thereafter a sock with other socks stuffed inside is thrown onto the parachute. The players, listening closely for

where it lands, try to be the first to get the sock. The player who gets the sock becomes the Predator and everyone shouts out “the Predator is born.” The Predator then tries to hit the other three players with the sock. They have one minute to get all the other players out. If they do, the Predator wins, but if the players elude the Predator, then the surviving players win. The children who are not in this round sit around the outside of the circle and help guide the players from straying off of 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. (Copyright 2001 Edward Stanfield. All rights reserved.)

Ideas and games from the following sources:

[www.vbsstuff.com/information/parachuteplay](http://www.vbsstuff.com/information/parachuteplay)

[www.compusmart.ab.ca/yowochas/games/parachute\\_1](http://www.compusmart.ab.ca/yowochas/games/parachute_1)

<http://home.san.rr.com/rstuff/games>