

Playful springboards: ANY PLANT

Icebreakers and warm ups

These activities can be adapted to use plants or plant-based items and can help to stimulate conversations about plants.

Leaves in the Wind

Aim:
Warming up / listening and observing
Learning / reinforcing leaf vocabulary

The game:
Every player should collect four different leaves each. They then stand in a large circle with space to run about in. One person stands in the middle and is the 'caller'. The caller chooses one of their leaves, holds it up, and makes a descriptive statement about it e.g. leaves that are pinnate, leaves with opposite veins, with multiple leaf-lets.
Each person for whom the statement is true runs across the circle to another place.
The last person to find a space becomes the new caller.

Name 6

Aim:
Self disclosure

The game:
Chose an object that is made from a plant. The object is passed around the circle until the person who is 'it' with their eyes closed says stop. The person holding the object then has to answer the following:
Places you have seen, jobs you have had, things you are good at, things you like/dislike, plant at that you like. Edit the questions according to the group and the desired aim. Once this is done, this person is then 'it' and the game continues.

The above game is from Brandes (1990).



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Mindfulness

Just 'looking and being' for a few moments, regularly, (everyday if possible) in the natural world. There is overwhelming evidence of the importance of immersion in nature, or even just looking at plants, to the mental health and well-being of us all. The natural world can help to calm children, be life enhancing and restorative, and lead to greater attainment in the long term. Access to the earth is important too, as there is much evidence now that children's immune systems are compromised if they do not access the beneficial microbes in soil. Some of the activities below focus on mindfulness, but many others in these toolkits are just about engaging with nature whilst learning and playing. Taking learning time outside, in and with nature, builds over the weeks to have significant beneficial effects for the mental health and wellbeing of children and adults. This is even more important for children living in urban areas and in social deprivation.



Silent walk

Outdoors – If you have even the smallest green area take a regular 'quiet walk' there, in all weathers, in silence all the way there and back. The children will learn to do this with practice. This could be an activity that is carried out immediately after morning break perhaps, (while children still have their coats on), or after lunch break, (and registration can take place outside too). If there is time, try the 'sitting contemplation' exercise below as well.

Indoors - If you have no green area, or the weather is very bad, then bring the green in and have a quiet focussed circle time examining green foliage. (see section on indoor plants too)

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Risky Games

The aphorism 'to grasp the nettle' means to force yourself to be brave or do something likely to be unpleasant. Here are a few group games that promote the idea of emotional and physical risk taking.

Spin the bottle

Aims:

Self-disclosure, trust development, vocalising needs, sharing.

The game:

Players sit in a circle- they spin the bottle in the middle, whoever it points to, they have to answer the question 'what are my personal needs from this group?'

Variations: Any questions can be prepared by an adult leading the session or it can be played more informally with truth or dares set down by the group.

Can be used as an icebreaker or to develop confidence in a group.

Feely Boxes

Aims:

The fun of this game is reaching inside a box or bag without knowing what you might be about to touch.

The game:

Place a diverse range of natural objects into a dark bag or box – choose items that look and feel different, have textures, shapes and weights that vary. The players sit in a circle. Pass the bag around the group and the players take turns to explore the contents with their fingertips, describing the items' qualities – e.g. it is soft, squishy, slimy, rough, spikey and trying to guess what it is. Use blindfolds if you have them or players can just close their eyes.