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Rainbow Parachute Games

Parachute play is educational in the widest sense.



The basic concept of parachute play is that it involves a large group of children in an activity, which is non-competitive, where everyone works towards a common goal and has fun.

Parachutes are usually made of brightly coloured, flame-retardant lightweight nylon. They are either equipped with reinforced handholds or have thick rope sewn around the edge. There is usually a tennis ball sized hole in the middle. They come in a number of sizes, usually 2, 3, 4 or 6 metres in diameter. They usually come with a carry bag.

- Used for co-operative games, parachutes can help develop a wide range of social skills.
- They can help to mould a group into a working unit before progressing onto other projects.
- They can be used for a wide range of therapeutic purposes.
- They can provide for diverse physical exercise, including dance and gymnastics.
- Parachutes are a valuable aid in encouraging co-operation and social interaction in pre-schools, primary schools, dance groups and children's clubs etc.
- 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.
- Younger children enjoy rhythmical and musical activities. Older ones find fun and challenge in tossing a ball and moving as a team to catch it.
- For the elderly, parachutes are a wonderfully motivational resource for exercise, movement and social interaction.
- They can be used as a tool to overcome language barriers and shyness.
- The use of parachutes can help address issues such as child abuse, bullying, truancy, racism and sexism in a non-confrontational manner.
- A close group environment can be created by sitting on or under the parachute, when activities require quiet and concentration.
- Beautiful and sometimes calming, a parachute can create soft, whispering sounds or loud, rippling noises, depending on how quickly it is moved.
- 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.

What's so special about parachute games?

At their heart, all parachute games are sensory. They involve touching the soft parachute fabric, moving beneath it or over it, lying beneath the parachute, watching it rise and fall or even being lifted in it or wrapped up like a birthday present!!

For many children and adults these will be new and exciting sensations, and working together can not only encourage co-operation, communication and social skills, but can create unforgettable experiences and a great deal of FUN!!

Because of its novelty, even those who would normally opt out, tend to get involved.

SAFETY

- Check the ground underneath the parachute. Grass is by far the best surface, but needs to be dry, not slippery.
- If inside, a non-splinter floor is important if the children are barefoot.
- Space children and adults alternately around the edge, if both are taking part.
- Give everybody clear warnings about head bumping, kicking and looking where going.
- Leader needs to be in charge at all times.
- A second adult is helpful to field children, any balls and generally assist.

GETTING STARTED

Drop the parachute from the bag and instruct everyone to take hold of the edge with both hands. Once everyone is holding on, move them around the perimeter until they are evenly spaced out. Holding the parachute with knuckles on top works best. Get everyone to hold the parachute taut and still at waist level. Get everyone moving together by raising the parachute and allowing it to fall. Don't pull it down but allow it to fall naturally so that it billows up. This is best done to a steady count. On the third lift, try to get the parachute as high as possible. The development of this is to take one or more steps in towards the middle, still holding the parachute, creating a mushroom shape. As the parachute collapses, move back out. Practice this basic co-ordination until everyone is happy.

CAUTION - *You will sometimes see games described which involve putting one or more children (or adults) on to the parachute. These games are extremely dangerous and should not be attempted. Particularly dangerous is anything which involves using the parachute rather like a trampoline with the margin held taut and the 'victim' bounced in the middle. The problem is that the player does not know where the ground is and it is all too easy for him to be bounced on hard ground as the parachute is slackened, with consequent injury to spine or head. Even games involving walking on a tight parachute are to be avoided, as it is possible to damage an ankle by a sudden unexpected contact with the ground, even though the drop is 10 cm or less*

There are more ways to use parachutes in movement activities than you have ever imagined! This handout contains more than 60 games that help develop creativity, co-ordination, verbal contact, problem solving and more.

Here are some great games to play with a parachute.....ENJOY!!

GAMES

Ball in the Bucket: Divide the group into two teams down a central line. Two plastic balls are placed on the parachute, while held waist high. Each team tries to shake its ball into the hole and keep the other team from putting its ball in the hole. A point is earned each time a team puts a ball in the hole.

Blob: Four players hold onto the parachute. The other players try to get eaten by the parachute. The four with the parachute run after the others. If they succeed in covering a player with the parachute, the player is eaten and must now attach themselves to the parachute and join in, to catch the others.

Blow Up: All the players are underneath the parachute and they must try to keep the parachute inflated by just blowing.

Ball Surfing: All players hold the parachute tight. Place a large ball (for example a beach ball) on the parachute. Each player should lift the parachute just after the ball rolls by. You will have to get the timing just right. Too late and the ball will run off the parachute or into the player. Too soon and the ball will stop rolling. The smaller the ball the harder the game is.

Basketball: Start by giving four or five players some balls (they have to be small enough to fit through the hole in the middle of the parachute). The other players must make a mushroom then the players with the balls attempt to throw them through the hole. Change the players round after a few attempts.

Cover Up: Everyone lies down on the parachute. The players then must find enough fabric to cover themselves up. You can vary the game a little by calling out specific body parts to wrap.

Centipede: Have the players lift up the parachute and they all take a step inside so the parachute comes down on top of them. When everyone is inside start walking! Try not to bump into anything!

Circular Sit-Ups: Everyone starts by sitting along the edge of the parachute with legs underneath holding it tight. Have one side lean backwards while the other side leans forward. Keep this going creating a see-saw effect. Now to make it harder, instead of doing the normal up and down motion, everyone has to do a circular motion from the waist and the parachute will move accordingly. You may need to dictate which players should be leaning back and then circling to the side.

Climb the Mountain: Start off by making a giant mushroom. On the command everyone pulls the parachute quickly down and kneels down on the edge. Now the players must start "climbing" up the parachute on their knees.

The Cave: Grasp the edge of the parachute with an overhand grip, and inflate. Take a few steps toward the centre while the parachute is inflated. Release one hand from the parachute. Pull the parachute down behind the head and back with remaining hand. Kneel down holding the edge against the ground. Stay inside the parachute until it starts to deflate. Hold up the parachute, stand up and duck under to the outside.

Cat and Mouse: Stand holding the parachute at shoulder height, making sure there is a space between each child around the perimeter. Place an object - the cheese - in the centre of the circle under the parachute. Choose one child to be the cat and one to be the mouse. The cat starts off under the parachute guarding the cheese - the mouse starts off outside the parachute and has to get to the cheese, running in between the children holding the parachute. The mouse has 20 seconds to get the cheese; the cat has 20 seconds to catch the mouse. Once the game starts, count to 20 (everyone else counts). Score one point to the cat if the mouse is caught or one point to the mouse if the cheese is eaten. Score no points if 20 is reached before either the cheese is eaten or the mouse is caught.

Change Over: Number the children around the circle, say one to six. Lift the parachute and on the third go shout a number, these children then have to swap places under the parachute before it falls to earth. They need to be told to head for gaps, keep their eyes open and try to avoid bumping into one another. Make sure that those who remain around the edge allow the parachute to fall rather than pulling it down hard.

Dodge 'em: Have some soft balls (about soccer size). A few players go under the parachute while everyone else holds onto the parachute about head high. Someone must now throw the soft balls at the players underneath the parachute, while still holding onto it.

Drag Race: This is a great game to get the parachute wrapped up into a small bundle. Everyone pretends to be a drag racer. Each racer grabs hold of their section of the parachute and on the word they must start rolling it up. The first racer to reach the middle is the winner!

Fun Under the Parachute: Grasp the edge of the parachute with an overhand grip and inflate. Beanbags, skipping ropes, balls, etc have been placed under the parachute. Participants are numbered. Leader calls out a number and those participants run under the parachute and perform before the parachute deflates.

Fruit Salad: The Leader goes round the circle giving each player the name of a fruit in sequence, e.g. banana, mango, strawberry, apple.... banana, mango, strawberry, apple.... banana, etc..... The players waft the parachute up and down together, nice and slowly, and the Leader calls out the name of one of the fruits, at which point all the players with that name run under the parachute to another place. The Leader then calls out another fruit, and so on. Every so often, she calls out "Fruit Salad!" which means that EVERYONE runs!

Flying Saucer: Grasp the edge of the parachute with an overhand grip and inflate. Take one step forward once the parachute is inflated. When the command "let go" is given, everyone releases the parachute. The parachute should remain suspended in the air for a few seconds before it floats to the ground like a flying saucer.

Flying Parachute: Get all the players around one side of the parachute and gather up an edge to grab hold of. Everyone starts running in one direction to make a flying parachute.

Flying Rugby: You need a soft rugby ball. Divide the group into 2 teams down a central line. Throw the ball into the centre and by wafting the parachute up and down, each team must try and score goals on the other side when the ball lands on the floor behind the other team.

Group Balance: Ask all the players to roll up a piece of the parachute and get them to take a tight grip. Get everyone to slowly lean backwards all at the same time. If everyone works together they should be able to lean backwards quite far without losing their balance. For an extra challenge ask them to turn their backs to the parachute and grip it from behind and then to lean forward!

Housekeeping: Start by dividing the players up into two teams. One team should stand a little way off from the parachute. This is the tidy team. The rest of the players are around the parachute and are the messy team. You will also need a number of foam balls (a few more than the number in the tidy team). The idea is for the messy team to keep the balls off the parachute while the tidy team try to keep them on.

Interlocking Gears: A game of co-ordination. For this you will need two parachutes. Have them side by side almost touching with two groups - one on each parachute. Have each group start walking in a circle

but in opposite directions (so one is walking clockwise and the other is walking anti-clockwise). Where players reach the point where the two parachutes meet, they take hold of the other parachute, let go of the one they were holding, and join the other circle. Like this they are walking in a giant figure of eight. After a while get the players to walk in the other direction.

Jelly: Everyone starts under the parachute except a couple of nominated players who remain outside. These "cooks" have to call out commands to make different shapes under the parachute. For example: Everyone lies down with their left leg in the air. Or, everyone jumps up and down. Have the cooks change places at any point.

Jellyfish Jaunt: Everyone holds the parachute around the edge then simply goes for a run. It will look like a weird monster running around the place!

Mexican Wave: One player raises their arms, holding onto the parachute. This action is repeated around the circle to create a wave.

Miming: Number the players by threes around the parachute, so that you have an equal number of ones, twos and threes evenly spread out. Mushroom the parachute, then call out a number and also a description of who you would like them to act as. For example, if you call out: "Number ones are ballerinas", all of the number ones have to cross under the parachute, acting like ballerinas on the way.

Missile Launch: Have four or five players go under the parachute each with a ball. The other players make a mushroom. The players under the parachute must now attempt to throw their ball out through the hole in the middle of the parachute. See how many they can get through in one mushroom.

Merry Go Round: Players stand sideways so that the parachute is held with only one hand and walk, hop, jump or skip around holding the parachute. It looks like a merry-go-round.

Mushroom: This is not so much a game, more an essential starting point for parachute play. Get everyone to spread out the parachute and hold the edge, spaced out more or less evenly so they're standing in a circle. Pull the parachute taut and lower it to the ground (or knee level). On the magic word (e.g. Mushroom!) everyone pulls the parachute upwards (don't let go). It will fill with air and rise up like a giant mushroom - or igloo. To get it as high as possible everyone must take a couple of paces towards the centre as the parachute rises. It's good to practice this so that the group can learn to work effectively as a team and get the parachute really high. It won't work without co-operation.

Variations on Mushroom: Once you've mastered the basic mushroom it's fun to experiment. See what happens if:

- Everyone mushrooms and then runs to the centre, still holding the parachute.
- Everyone mushrooms, and then lets go, especially outdoors on a windy day!
- **Floating Mushroom:** Everyone lets go at exactly the same time. If there isn't any wind, the parachute will retain its perfect mushroom shape and rise straight up in the air. Indoors it may go up to the ceiling. To get this right it's best for someone to shout "One.. Two.. Three.. Go!" or similar, immediately after the "Mushroom!" instruction. For everyone to let go at exactly the right instant will take practice and concentration. Groups of children who haven't played with a parachute before will probably be delighted and fascinated by the effect for quite a while before you move on to any other games. It's particularly spectacular when the sun is shining down through the parachute.
- **Swooping Cloud:** Have everyone start making a Floating Mushroom, but not everyone lets go at the same time. One half intentionally lets go after the other side. The parachute will make an interesting swooping cloud.

- **Ostrich:** Start off with a Floating Mushroom and take two steps in. While the mushroom descends have everyone get on their stomachs or knees and pull the parachute around their shoulders so that everyone's head is poking under the parachute. The view from the inside is a group of smiling heads with no bodies! This game can be reversed so everyone's head is on the outside.

Name Game: Sung to: "Row Row Row your Boat". As you sing the song, have the players raise the parachute above their heads. When a player is named have him/her run under the parachute. Then slowly lower the parachute to try and trap them. Continue until all players have had a turn.

"Up, up, up it goes

Down, down, down it comes

If your name is----- (put in a child's name)

Now's your turn to run"

Ocean: Pretend the parachute is the ocean. Players move the parachute in response to the 'weather report' they hear. (Encourages players to be creative). For example the Leader says, "I heard on the weather report this morning that there was a slight breeze over the Pacific. What would that look like?" The players respond by making small waves in the parachute. Other suggestions are - high winds, snow (we would have to pull it tight to make the ice), tornados etc. The possibilities are endless.

One Hand Run: Have the players 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 Songs: Sitting with legs under the parachute and holding the edge, players sing 'The animals went in 2 by 2', 'This old man' or any other counting or speeding up song..... moving the hands in time to the music. As the numbers get higher so does the shaking of the parachute.

Parachute Ride: One or two players sit on the parachute while a small group pull the parachute along! Make sure the pullers do not go over any harmful surfaces.

Popcorn: Start with everybody holding the parachute stretched out. Throw as many ping pong balls as you can find on to the parachute. Shake the parachute to make them rise like popcorn.

Parachute Circles: Pass the parachute round in a complete circle without anyone taking their hands off the parachute (they will have to work together for this one to work)

Parachute Golf: If you have a parachute with a hole in the middle you can play parachute golf. Have everyone hold the parachute and place a small ball on it. It takes a bit of skill and a lot of teamwork to make the ball fall down the middle.

Parachute Volleyball: For this game you will need two parachutes, both 4 metres or less in diameter. Divide the players into two teams, each having its own parachute. Place a ball (the bigger the better) in the middle of one parachute and let them play volleyball by passing the ball from one parachute to another.

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

Poison Snake: Place four to six pieces of knitting wool on the parachute. By shaking the parachute, try to make them hit the players on the other side. Keep track of who gets bitten. (With younger children you might want to do snake or worm kisses instead.)

Plughole: If your parachute has a hole in the centre, place 3 or 4 light small balls (tennis balls) on the surface and keep them moving around the parachute avoiding dropping them through the hole.

Pompoms: Put pompoms in the middle of the parachute and try to get them into the centre hole. You could have teams with different colours and count how many they get in.

Raceway: Start with everyone holding onto the parachute and walking around in a circle. For a more vigorous workout they can be jogging. The leader calls out different actions and explains who has to do what. For example you may ask all left-handers to pass two players in front. Think up some other instructions. Switch directions when the mood takes you!

Shoe Shuffle: Number around the circle 1 to 6 as before. All of one number removes a shoe and throws it under the parachute. On a count of 3 the parachute is lifted, mushroomed up on the third lift and all those missing a shoe go into the middle, retrieve their shoe and get back to their place.

Safe from the Storm: A small ball is placed on the parachute, representing a canoe. Participants wave the parachute so it ripples. These are 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 centre of the parachute.)

Swamp: Players sit in a circle on the floor holding the parachute with the edge drawn up under their chins and their legs stretched out straight in front of them. As they sit, each player repeats the name of their favourite vegetable. The resulting "noise" sounds like a swamp at night. One player slips under the parachute to become the swamp monster. The monster gently pulls the ankles of another player who slips under the parachute to become part of the monster. The game ends when all of the players are under the parachute.

Shark: Everyone sits on the floor in a circle holding the parachute stretched out with his or her legs underneath it. The parachute is the sea and they are sitting on the beach, happily dipping their toes in the water. By shaking the edge of the parachute, realistic ripple or wave effects can be made. Once the waves are going well, someone is selected to be a shark and disappears under the parachute. They move around underneath and because of the waves it will be difficult to see where they are. The shark chooses a victim and grabs him or her by the feet. The victim can give an appropriate scream before disappearing under the parachute. This person now also becomes a shark and selects victims. In the end everyone is a shark. If someone does not want to be bitten, let them sit with their legs crossed under the parachute.

Treasure Hunt: Place several items under the parachute. For example: balls, rope, frisbee, can of drink - anything. Have all the players make a rhythmic heartbeat with the parachute. On the command, one or more players must dive under the parachute and grab a nominated item before the parachute comes down on them. If the parachute touches any player they must put the item back for the next round.

Turtle: Have the players get on their hands and knees under a large "turtle shell" and try to make the turtle move in one direction. As a co-operative game, players have to work together to get the turtle to move. Variation: Have the turtle go over a hill or bench or through an obstacle course without losing the shell.

Turn Over: This is a great challenge: turn over the parachute over with no one letting go of the edge!

There was a Man: Players walk around in a circle hanging onto the parachute:

"There was a man in our town
Who went for a WALK one day
But the wind blew so hard
He turned around
And WALKED the other way"

Different actions, such as run, hop, skip, etc. may replace walk.

Trust: This is an interesting parachute game that involves an element of trust. All but one player kneels around the edge of the parachute holding it with both hands; the remaining player stands on the parachute in the centre wearing a blindfold. Two players kneeling next to each other hold their section of the parachute to the floor, whilst everyone else shakes it up and down. The object is for the blindfolded player to find their way out in the fastest possible time. It is not as easy as it sounds and if you add sound effects to the flapping it is a good experience. If you have a large parachute put two players in the centre blindfolded, and the winner is the first out. If this is done make sure they walk with hands out in front as buffers.

When the parachute goes up: Sung to: "If you're happy and you know it"

"When the parachute goes up - Stomp your feet
When the parachute goes up - Stomp your feet
When the parachute is high - And floats up in the sky
When the parachute goes up - Stomp your feet "

... bend your knees...wiggle your bottom...lift one leg...shout hooray...shake your head etc. etc.

Washing Machine: Two players of similar size and weight sit back to back in the middle of the parachute (with shoes off) linking arms. The rest hold on round the edges and start walking round in a circle. The parachute will eventually get smaller and smaller. At a command the players holding the edges quickly move out, and the two in the middle are spun around quickly.

Waves Overhead. This is great to cool off after a vigorous play session! Hold the parachute stretched out and have about a third of the players lie on the ground under it (best with heads near the middle). The rest mushroom the parachute 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 parachute rise up and then come down on top of you is very strange.

Weather: We start with calm weather, sitting on the floor. Then its a gentle breeze... then rain and then move up to a thunder storm - with everyone standing up shaking as hard as they can to make thunder.

STORAGE

When you have finished the session, quickly grasp the parachute at the centre, twist it slightly into a rope, wind it round your arm and stow it in the bag. This can be done very quickly and very cleanly even on damp ground. Or ... (indoors), tell everyone that on 3 they are to let the parachute go and STAND STILL. Mushroom it to a count of three, let go when it is fullest so that it soars to the ceiling. You should be able to step into the middle, catch the centre and deftly stow it before anyone moves!