

Parachute Playmat

What's so special about parachute games?

The parachute is a useful way of involving a large group of children in an activity and because of its novelty even those who would normally opt out, tend to get involved. Between 20 and 50 children can be directly involved around the perimeter of a 3.5 m parachute. The majority of games are co-operative rather than competitive and so good for generating a group spirit and togetherness.

SAFETY

- Check ground underneath chute. Grass is by far the best surface, but needs to be dry, not slippery.
- A non-splinter floor if children are removing shoes.
- Space children and adults out around edge.
- Give everybody clear warnings about head bumping and looking where going.
- Be sure group can sustain the weight of anyone put on the top, no letting go, dropping or kicking.
- Leader needs to be in charge even when young people contributing games idea.
- A second adult helpful to field children, any balls and generally assist.

GAMES

A number of games which can be used with the play canopy are listed below. This is, by no means, an exhaustive list and almost any 'circle' game can be adapted. However, these work well...

Para-swap

Number the children around the circle, say one to six. Lift the chute and on the third go shout a number, these children then have to swap places under the canopy 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 canopy to fall rather than pulling it down hard.

Para-ball

Place a light-weight football on the chute surface and experiment with moving it. What happens when you shake the parachute, can you flip the ball off over people's head? Can you develop a wave technique that will cause the ball to move in a circle? Using a small ball (tennis ball) can you drop the ball through the hole in the middle, can you

stop the ball disappearing? These demand fairly sophisticated co-ordination skills, but in short spells can be fun.

Para-sight

After lofting the chute several times everyone steps inside, bringing the fabric taut behind their body, either to shoulder height or to ground level with each person sitting on the edge of the chute, thus creating a sort of tent with everybody under the canopy. Once practised this is a useful technique for getting everybody's attention, storytelling, instruction giving etc.

Para-circle

Simply an adaptation of any circle game, fishes in the sea, I sent a letter etc. using the chute to maintain the circle form. These sort of games consist of one or more people racing around the circle and back to their space, or any free space.

Para-ble

(It cannot get much worse!) Using the parachute as an aid to story-telling. You have the attention of all because they are holding, the Chute, commence the story using the parachute as an aid. 'One day Jesus and his friends went out in a boat on the sea of Galilee, little waves lapped at the shore (up minute ripples in the taut chute). They all climbed into the boat and set out into deeper water, the sea was like glass, not a wave anywhere. (chute held taut and motionless.). The disciples, used to boats, soon settled down, but then a gentle wind began to blow ruffling the smooth water (chute gently moves.). Slowly the waves got a bit bigger, just a little tiny bit around on a rough sea (suit actions to story). Jesus struggled to his feet, the boat was pitching up and down. He looked at the boisterous waves and told them to be still, he commanded the wind to stop, and suddenly all was calm (chute held taut). The disciples were amazed, they had been frightened of the storm, but now they felt frightened of Jesus as they realised just how powerful their friend was.'

You will find that the children soon get the idea of following the story and they will almost automatically stop the storm actions at the appropriate time. You can add details, like hauling on ropes or rowing with appropriate actions. You can illustrate Peter's faith by a person walking on the chute surface.

Jonah's story - listening to parachute instructions - listening to God; obeying instructions - Jonah didn't; a storm at sea, as above; man overboard, under chute; Jonah inside the fish, para-sight; out to Ninevah shade of the week etc.

It is possible to twist all sorts of stories to use the parachute, however a good idea soon pays if it is used continuously, and we need to be wary of using a parachute

rather than telling the story, so it is very much a case of first find your story and then see if it is appropriate.

Shoe Shuffle

Number around the circle 1 or 6 as before. All of one number remove a shoe and throw it under the canopy. On a count of 3 the canopy 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.

Round The Plughole

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

Bouncing Balls

The canopy is held taut at chest height with 2 or 3 foam footballs on the surface. 3 or 4 children underneath the canopy have to try to knock the balls off whilst those around the canopy try to keep them on.

Jaws (SHARK!!)

Everyone sits on the ground With their legs stretched out under the canopy and the canopy held at chest height. One person crawls around under the canopy and is the 'shark'. He quietly grabs the legs of anyone around the perimeter (with many blood-curdling screams) pulls them under the canopy. They, too, then become a shark. (This is quite a scary game and should be avoided for those of a nervous disposition).

Cat and Mouse

Stand holding the canopy at shoulder height making sure there is a space between each child around the perimeter. Place an empty can - the cheese - in the centre of the circle under the canopy. Choose one child to be the cat and one to be the mouse. The cat starts off under the canopy guarding the cheese - the mouse starts off outside the canopy and has to get to the cheese running in between the children holding the canopy. If you have already numbered the children 1 or 6 around the canopy then choose a cat of one number and a mouse of another. 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.

Football

This works best if the canopy is marked in segments or halves; i.e. 2,4 or 6 teams. Stand around the canopy holding the canopy in both hands at waist level. It can be rippled up and down whilst holding it. Roll a football under the canopy. The canopy must be held tight at all times and the ball kicked under the canopy, a goal being scored when it comes out on any side.

Lucky Seven

This is an adaptation of a country dance but works well with the canopy. Number off round the canopy A, B, A, B etc. Use a lively 'jig' tune which repeats AA BB AA BB etc. When the music starts: A Hold The parachute with both hands, circle 8 paces clockwise B Holding the parachute with both hands, circle 8 paces anti-clockwise B A's turn to face clockwise; B's turn to face anti-clockwise. A's let go of parachute and to the music go under the arms of the B facing them. They do this seven times until they arrive facing, the eighth 'B'. B Holding the parachute with both hands all go into the middle twice mushrooming it each time. When you are tired on a count of 3 lift the canopy as high as possible, mushroom it and bring it down behind you and sit down. In this way you can make a rather hot airless tent supported on the heads.

And to Finish....

When you have finished quickly grasp the canopy 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.