

Don't stay inside, get outside!

Spring is here and that means warmer days and more daylight to get outside to play, explore and socialize. Children and teens (and everyone!) benefit from fresh air, sunshine and activities that get them moving! Here is a short list of outside activities that require little to zero equipment—just enthusiasm and a willingness to move!

1. **Red Light Green Light:** This old-time fav activity gets kids moving, and provides practice for self-control and self-monitoring. Players must respond to verbal cues (the phrases “red light” and “green light”) and “stop” or “go” on command. This game can provide a great boost for those struggling with executive functions. These very same commands can sometimes be adopted by parents in situations where a child may need to stop certain behaviors.
2. **Simon Says:** This classic game requires players to listen and follow instructions – something critical to progress in speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and behavioral therapy. You can be the one that plays Simon, or when possible, children can take turns leading the game. Simon Says is a fun way to encourage both speaking and correctly interpreting demands.
3. **Statue Maker:** For this game, you'll need at least two players to be statues and one player to be the guesser. You can act as the statue maker. To begin, statues should decide what character or emotion they'll be acting out. Creating a list ahead of time makes it easier for kids to choose, and also helps prompt the guesser. Spin the statues around slowly twice and when you let go, they must freeze into position. Bring the guesser to each statue where they press a “button” to have the statues act out their role. The guesser must then guess what they are. There are many different versions, and the rules can be adapted. Overall, this game is great for speech and language therapy – with nonverbal language, role play, facial expressions, impulse control and inferencing being addressed.
4. **Spud:** Gather a small group of at least three players along with a soft ball, and get ready to work on categorization and short term memory. The game begins with the person who is “it” stating a category. You can adapt this by providing a list or having players pick out of a container. Each player then names an object from the category. The “it” player throws the ball into the air and yells out the name of one of the mentioned category items. The person whose item was called runs to get the ball while the other players run away. When the player retrieving the ball yells “spud” the other players must freeze. The person with the ball takes three big steps towards any other player while naming three more items from the initial category. The player with the ball throws the ball at the player. If the other player gets hit, they get the letter S. If the player catches the ball, the thrower gets the letter. Play continues until someone spells SPUD.
5. **Duck, Duck, Gray Duck:** A little different from the game “Duck, Duck, Goose”, “Duck, Duck, Grey Duck” incorporates attributes and works on active listening, attention and using descriptors, so behavioral therapists can help children struggling with ADHD symptoms and speech-language pathologists can assist children experiencing expressive language delays. Players sit in a circle and one person is “it.” The player who is “it” walks around the circle lightly patting other players while naming an attribute (ex. curly haired duck, duck who went to Disney World last week, etc.) When the “it” player says “grey duck,” the person who was tapped chases him or her around the circle. If he or she tags the other player, the “it” player continues to be “it.” If the runner reaches the open spot and sits down, the new player is “it.” The game provides good opportunity to ensure kids are being gentle while tapping heads and is a great way to help them state friend facts.
6. **Toss and Talk Ball:** For this game, you can purchase one of the many pre-printed versions of these balls, or create your own using a large play ball and Sharpie marker. There are versions with simple conversation starters, such as “what’s your favorite food,” and others that focus on self-esteem with phrases like “I can make a difference by...” Players toss or pass to each other and respond to the prompt that’s under their thumb. Only the person with the ball may speak while others listen, promoting interpersonal skills like turn taking, eye contact, listening, responding and more.