



*We play,  
we express ourselves,  
we accompany each other.*

A HANDBOOK FOR PLAYING AND GETTING ALONG TOGETHER



*"We play,  
we express ourselves,  
we accompany each other."*

A Handbook for Playing and Getting Along Together.  
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## *Forward:*

JASS Mesoamerica would like to offer our allies and women in general, mainly rural women, this simple guide for undertaking activities with families and children.

At a time when the COVID-19 pandemic is forcing us to stay at home, and given our concern about our health and wellbeing, we need more than ever to take time for ourselves and to be with our children, since play, enjoyment, and having fun are fundamental to our lived experience. Our integral wellbeing is a right that needs to be exercised. We should remember that stress and worries can affect us physically, emotionally, and in terms of our mental health.

In this handbook, we offer a series of activities and games that are the result of experiences of educators, our own practice in rural communities, settings where self-care is practiced, and consulting a number of books on the subject. We show how to motivate girls and boys to find play and joy in the world of stories, in connecting with their bodies, in poems and songs, but also how we too can have these joyful experiences, in collective spaces of women and in diverse organizations with no distinctions made regarding age.

We hope you can put this handbook to good use and appropriate its outlook by strengthening your resilience and that of others, sharing knowledge, empathizing with and listening to one another, and flowing with Mother Earth.



- To undertake the activities described here, we should look for a quiet space without people going by or loud noises that might distract us. It can be inside or outside our house, for example, if we have a backyard, or inside a room if there are few participants or we are alone.
- It is important not to force anyone to take part in these activities if they do not want to, especially children. We might, for example, show youngsters beforehand what the game or activity is like, so as to encourage them to join in.
- We also recommend asking other adults to participate and show initiative in order to make the games more entertaining. It is important to share the responsibility of accompanying and observing participants as a family while they undertake the activity.
- Remember to consider the space involved before enjoying the activities, thinking about the needs of all participants and making necessary arrangements, especially if there are older people or small children.
- Keep this handbook close by and refer to it as often as necessary.
- If you need more activities, look for teachers' books about classroom or outdoor activities, or if you have access to the internet, do a search for children's or families' activity pages, or use the resources (videos, audios, and documents) that JASS has uploaded to different online platforms.



## *Relaxation, breathing, and reflection activities*

*This first group of activities is designed for us women, to create a caring space that helps us to feel good and more willing and happier to share with our children. Yet, importantly, the activities that follow can be adapted to be done with children of any age so that, from the time they are youngsters, they become aware and proud of their bodies and feel entitled to take care of themselves.*

# Air feeds my body

## Inspiration:

- To renew practices for self-care, emotional and mental balance.
- Improve health and energy in our body through breathing.



**Duration:**  
10 – 15 minutes



## Materials:

- Sillas o banquitos.
- Petates o un cuadro de tela para sentarnos.

This is a basic relaxation exercise that can be practiced anywhere and at any time, alone, with a group, or with the family.



- We sit or stand, our hands placed below our navel, slowly letting air in through our nose until we feel our stomach getting bigger. We breathe out through our nose. Repeat 3 or 4 times.
- We check our body posture and close our eyes. We concentrate on an image, word, or idea that gives us a feeling of serenity, peace, tranquility. (For example, the countryside, the sea, a lake, a river, the sky, a beautiful memory, a place or sensation that we like the most.) We practice this for 5 to 10 minutes.
- Standing or sitting, we squeeze the muscles of our hands while letting air in through our nose. We release our hands at the same time that we let air out through our mouth. We do the same exercise with our:  
Face muscles.  
Feet muscles.  
Perform each routine 4 to 5 times.



- Standing up, we stretch our arms down our sides as far as we can. While stretching, breathe in through our nose. As we breathe out through our mouth, we also relax our arms. We do this same exercise stretching our arms out to the sides and upwards. *3 to 4 times.*



- Lying on the floor, on the grass, on a floor mat, or piece of cloth, we stretch our arms and hands, while also stretching our legs and feet. We breathe deeply, breathing in through our nose. When we release our arms, hands, legs, and feet, we also breathe out through our mouth. *We repeat the exercise 3 to 4 times.*

- Sitting on a chair or stool, we fold our body toward our knees, letting our head and arms hang down. *We remain in this position for 1 or 2 minutes, breathing in deeply through our nose and breathing out through our mouth.*



# Releasing tension

## Inspiration:

- These exercises help us manage worries and tensions that are bothering us for different reasons.
- They strengthen our emotional and mental capacity and balance.



*Duration:*  
10 minutes



## *Materials:*

- Floor mat, sheets or pieces of cloth to sit on.



- We form a circle, standing or sitting on the floor, and, if we so choose, we close our eyes. We then think about what worries us; for example, pending tasks, unresolved issues, our children, etc.

- We breathe in very deeply, gently filling our body with air, from the bottom up for about 3 minutes, trying not to think about anything and calming our mind. We slowly open our eyes and breathe in deeply again. We stand or sit with our arms down at our sides.

*We breathe deeply.*

- Now we think about what worries us and what we want to bring to the surface. Being mindful of how we breathe in and out, we turn our head to the left side while inhaling forcefully and holding our breath. Holding our breath for a moment, we move our head to the right side and exhale through our mouth, while we imagine that what is worrying or bothering us is leaving our body.

*We do this about 6 times.*



- We invite you to share with us how you feel after the exercise. What happened when we tried to calm our mind? How many things are bothering us? Is it healthy? We are the people who are responsible for our family. Are we being responsible if we neglect our health?

# The Mirror

## Inspiration:

- To practice self-care, emotional and mental balance.
- Improve your view of yourself.



*Duration:*  
10 minutes



## Materials:

- A mirror
- Chairs or stools
- Floor mats or a piece of cloth to sit on



- We sit in circles and show everyone the mirror. We explain what each of us should do. When it is our turn, we observe our face in the mirror for a moment and ask ourselves the following questions:  
What do our eyes look like? Do I like the color of my skin? Do I like my nose?  
What other things can I see? What did I feel when I
- Once everyone has had a chance with the mirror, we invite one or more persons who would like to participate and share their experiences. We should write down what we consider important to highlight.  
At the end we can offer a small message of encouragement, for example:
- The importance of this type of exercise is that it helps us understand what kind of relationship we have with our image of ourselves.  
Is this image positive or do we need to improve?  
We should remember that we are all different; what's most important is the value and respect we give ourselves and others in order to maintain good health and get along with one another.

# Mi Cuerpo

## Inspiration:

- To get in touch with our own body.
- To acknowledge and value ourselves as we are.
  - To accept our body as part of our reality.
- To guide children in understanding and caring for their bodies.



*Duration:*  
10 minutes



## Materials:

- Horn or tape recorder
- Relaxed, calm, happy music that elicits beautiful sensations.



- We gather together and in silence listen to the sounds around us, starting with the sounds closest to us and little by little listening to the sounds that are farther away.
- We play quiet music and then increase the volume, not too much, just enough to accompany the exercise. We can be sitting or standing depending on how we feel best. We close our eyes and say to ourselves: "I am ..." and our name, adding "This body is mine". For example: I am Carmen and this body is mine.
- We begin to feel, with our hands, starting from our feet up to our head and down to our feet again. At the same time, we analyze and reflect on all the beautiful things that the Earth's energy has given us to form our bodies, our bones, our flesh, and our blood. We give thanks to our ancestors for giving us life and allowing us to be who we are.
- We lower the volume of the music and we slowly open our eyes, sharing:  
How do we feel?  
What did we discover about ourselves?

*We may write down what people said.*



# *Family activities*

# Storytelling or grandma's stories.

## Inspiration:

- Motivate grandparents to tell stories of their experiences and stories or anecdotes they have heard.
- To help strengthen the bond with grandparents and make sure that their stories are not forgotten.



*Duration:*  
20 - 30 minutes



## Materials:

- Chairs or stools
- Floor mats or a piece of cloth to sit on.



- We engage our grandmother, grandfather, mother, or an older person with whom we feel trust and security, and we ask them to tell us a story or a tale they have been told.

- Here is a story that Grandma Tita told us.

- *A story told by a grandmother whose name is Tita.* When Tita's family lived in the coastal foothills of Retalhuleu, her father, Carlos Gomes, told her that when he went to harvest coffee at the Margarita and San Elías farms, above Asintal Retalhuleu, on one occasion he heard a turkey singing way at the back of thick coffee bushes that grew there.

*At that time there were no houses nearby, so he wondered where that turkey came from, singing and dancing before his eyes behind the coffee bushes. Not giving it a further thought because he had work to do then, he continued on his way with his basket on his shoulders towards where coffee was being harvested.*

*As time went by, the place where the turkey sang and danced became a sacred place called Takalik Abaj, an archaeological site of the pre-Hispanic Mayan culture.*



# The affectionate Ball

## Inspiration:

- This exercise helps develop our self-esteem.
- It helps us to express our feelings.
- It generates good attitude and atmosphere.
- It teaches us to share with kindness and respect.



*Duration:*  
10 - 15 minutes



## Materials:

- A plastic or rubber ball or make one out of newspaper or bond paper.



- We ask all participants to stand in a circle and with the best frame of mind to transmit their energy charged with affection and positive feelings onto the ball that will touch everyone's hands.
- Each person will think of a kind, positive, inspirational message to send to someone in the group. Taking the initiative, we'll throw the ball to whomever we want while saying the message.



- At the end we'll share our feelings:  
How did we feel sending and receiving messages?  
Is it common for us to express affection or good wishes within our family, among friends, in our communities, with co-workers, and elsewhere?

# My Qualities

## *Inspiration:*

- To rediscover the good in me. The qualities I have that enrich me.
- To get closer as a family
- To develop a feeling of loving ourselves.



*Duration:*  
10 - 15 minutes



## *Materials:*

- Sheets of paper
- Markers, crayons, or pens
- Tape or tacks



- We ask two or more family members to participate.
- We each write down on a separate sheet of paper three positive qualities or attitudes that another family member has. Then we write down three of our own qualities or attitudes that we think are good. We collect what each participant has written and place the sheets of paper in a place in the house where we can all see them; it can be the dining room or a rest area we have in our house.

- Then everyone can share their thoughts:

Why was this exercise useful for me?

Was it difficult to look inside myself to write down some of my qualities?

Does it help me to move forward?

Am I sharing my abilities and qualities in my daily life?

- We might comment on different situations that we have experienced in a community or society where we have not been accompanied in the process of loving and valuing ourselves. We should also recall that it is always a good time to begin to love ourselves and see the good we have inside to share.



# My pet

## *Inspiration:*

- To teach children to value the different types of caring that moms, grandmothers, or other women in the family do at home.
- Share with our family the message of caring for and protecting Mother Earth, animals, and plants.
  - It helps children to keep busy and get along together;
  - it also gets the mind working and lets it rest from video games and phone apps.



## *Duration:*



## *Materials:*

- Sheet of bond paper or poster board.
- Markers, crayons, or pens
- Tape or tacks for hanging



■ It is always good to encourage children to share and care for farmyard animals, plants, and pets we have at home, and undertake activities that benefit everyone in the household.

■ Every day we distribute among our family members different activities; everybody has responsibilities on different days. We write down the chores on a piece of paper or poster board and hang it up somewhere in the house where everybody can see it.



■ Examples of the chores we can take responsibility for are watering plants early in the morning or late in the afternoon, feeding the dogs, cats, chickens, or other animals that we have. We can carry out chores that encourage getting along by dividing the work by groups; we should always include at least one adult in charge of each group.





## *Games for small children*

*Young children like challenges; their minds are open to new experiences. Certain games help them pay attention and exercise balance and coordination. They are fun, they can be organized quickly with things found around the house, and they help us to draw closer together with our children. Other games help children develop their thinking and logic. Encouraging them from a young age can make a big difference in how they learn and relate to others.*

*We need to remember that children need patience and care; adults are an example for them; let's show them unconditional support and affection.*

# Drawing a small airplane

## Inspiration:

- To practice balance, jumping, and playing.
- To maintain stability and to remain in a proper posture.
- To activate many abilities of children's bodies.
- We can use this game to teach children to count to 10



*Duration:*  
One morning.



## Materials:

Ribbon, colored tape or masking tape, plaster or paint and brushes.



- We use a ribbon to make different lines that form our little plane; we can also use a ribbon as a guide.
- We put the plaster or paint to one side. We write the numbers 1 to 10 in order.
- We show participants how to play by jumping in order on one foot on top of it without stepping outside the lines. Remember that if we use paint we need to wait until it dries before starting to play.

# Fishing for rubber bands

## *Inspiration:*

- To develop care and attention.
- To stimulate gross and fine motor skills.



*Duration:*  
10 - 15 minutes



## *Materials:*

- A water container with a wide mouth. A bucket, for example.
- 50 rubber bands (or whatever we have on hand).
- Skewer sticks (can be twigs or popsicle sticks or small kitchen popsicle sticks).



- Fill the container with water and then drop the rubber bands inside.
- We distribute the sticks, giving 2 to each girl or boy.
- We stand around our bucket and take out the rubber bands one by one, without touching the other children's sticks.
- At the end we count how many rubber bands each girl or boy took out.

# We read a poem

## *Inspiration:*

- To practice reading.
- To learn new words,
- Practice rhythm and coordination



*Duration:*  
5 minutes or more.



*Materials:*  
Poems from books, magazines,  
or those found on the internet.



- We read the different poems we collected at home slowly and with intonation. We can make it more entertaining by making gestures with our hands, head, or other parts of the body to imitate animals, places, objects or situations and people who appear in the poems.
- After reading several poems a few times, we review with the children the new words they've learned.

■ Here are some examples of poems for children written by Humberto Ak'abal, a well-known Maya K'iche' poet.



### **K'urupup**

*K'urupup,  
K'urupup,  
K'urupup...*

*It is the little singing bird  
of the night.  
Its feathers gray and black.*

*When the sun goes down  
the K'urupup begins to sing.*

*K'urupup,  
K'urupup,  
K'urupup...*

*As soon as the moon appears  
the little bird is silent.*



### **Fireflies**

*Fireflies  
are stars that came down from the sky,  
and the stars are fireflies  
that could not come down.*

*They turn off and turn on their embers  
to last them through the night.*



### **Jaguar**

*Other times I am a jaguar,  
I run over ravines,  
I jump over rocks,  
I climb mountains.*

*I look beyond the sky,  
beyond the water,  
beyond the earth.*

*I talk with the sun,  
I play with the moon,  
I pluck stars  
and glue them to my body.*

*While I wag my tail,  
I lie on the grass  
with my tongue out.*

# Riddles

## *Inspiration:*

- Develops imagination
- Poses challenges according to children's abilities
- Stimulates reading skills and logical and creative development.



*Duration:*  
5 minutes and up.



*Materials:*  
Riddles found in books, magazines,  
or on the Internet.



- This activity can be done in a number of places, in the dining room, in the bedroom, outside the house, etc.
- We ask children to sit in front of us and we read the riddles we have found slowly and several times. Here are some examples:



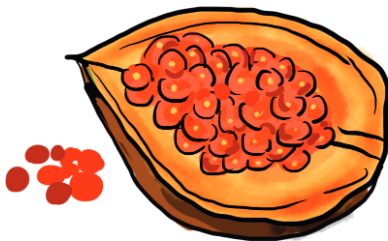
*I'll only tell you once:  
It has knots, but no rope,  
Its leaves are not of paper,  
It stands, but yet has no legs.  
I bet you know what it is.*

*A tree*



*Its front is white,  
Its back is black.*

*A comal!*



*When on the vine it has a bristly exterior,  
It is red on the inside  
When used, it makes a sauce.*

*Achote?*

<sup>1</sup> A comal is a smooth, flat griddle typically used in Mexico, Central America, and parts of South America to cook cocoa or roast any type of food. When a comal is prepared, white lime is added to the front, and when it is used with a wood fire, the back of the comal turns black

<sup>2</sup> Achote is called annatto in English. When on the vine the exterior of this fruit has a hairy appearance. Its interior contains a natural yellowish-red pigment. It is native to tropical America and its seeds are widely used in food and cosmetics. .



*We hope you liked this handbook. By remembering other activities and games that you are acquainted with, you can add to the handbook and share with others.*

*In the shared memory of rural communities there are many stories and traditional games that can be recalled and shared. This will help us to deepen our roots and nourish our body and spirit as we continue walking together towards a fulfilling life.*



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