

# Up, Up And Away!

## Getting Set for Parachute Play



**Playing is Learning!**

The kids are holding onto the parachute using the overhand grip (palms down, fingers grasping the edge) eagerly waiting for instructions—from YOU—the leader of the parachute activities! I always like to tell the children to think of me as the quarterback of a football team, like Joe Montana or Steve Young, calling out the commands for the next play. I reinforce that there is only one quarterback on the team, thus only one leader directing the activities. Children who have had previous experiences with the parachute will have favorite games that they want to play. Perhaps they are already shaking the parachute, jumping up and down or running under the parachute—full of energy, enthusiasm and nonstop giggles and wiggles. Insure them that there will be a time for them to lead their game but first the group needs to establish rules for playing safely and cooperatively with the parachute. Solicit ideas and suggestions from the children themselves. They will more likely have a sense of ownership and even “buy into” accepting and reinforcing the rules if they have had a part in creating them. I’m sure your discussions will take the following direction:

1. Institute the freeze rule, which means that at the teacher’s command, *“Freeze!”* the children cease all activity to listen to directions.
2. Hold the edge of the parachute with both hands at all times unless instructed to do otherwise.
3. Raise and lower the parachute on command (e.g. *“Touch your toes, ready, lift up; now back to your waist and belly button!”*).
4. Emphasize good listening.
5. Instruct children to stay away from the center hole or aperture of the parachute. Inform the group that this hole or opening allows air to escape. This enables the parachute to descend slowly and keep the proper shape without bobbing.
6. Stress working together cooperatively. Just as it takes each and every player on the football team to execute a play or score a touchdown, so too does it take each and every participant holding the parachute to lift it up and make the dome shape or “umbrella.”

Let’s put these rules to the test now as you the teacher says, *“Shake!”* The children respond instantly by shaking the parachute up and down. Direct the children to not move their feet. *“Keep your body still and let your arms move up and down,”* is a good reminder. On your next command say, *“Freeze!”* The children, of course, automatically stop shaking the parachute. Try varying the speed of the shaking. *“Shake the parachute as fast as you can!” “Shake the parachute as slowly as you can.”* Ask the children to shake the parachute using different arm movements. *“Make big, tall ocean waves with the parachute. Your arms will have to go very high and then very low. Now try little ocean waves—making very tiny hand movements to make little waves.”* Alternate big and little movements and fast and slow speeds for several turns. Always remember to say, *“Freeze!”* between movements and a change of speed. Children will be encouraged to listen carefully or you might trick them! Using the rainbow parachute, let the children holding onto just one color shake the parachute while the others rest. Try having children holding onto just two colors shake the parachute at one time. *“How does the parachute move if you move your arms from side to side?”*

### **Sharron Krull**

Teacher • Trainer • Author •  
Play Guru • Consultant

2871 Lakeview Drive  
Santa Cruz, CA 95062

Office: (831) 713-5323  
Mobile: (925) 980-8353  
Fax: (831) 713-5324

[Sharron@SharronKrull.com](mailto:Sharron@SharronKrull.com)

[www.SharronKrull.com](http://www.SharronKrull.com)



Let the children explore and experiment with the different ways of moving and shaking the parachute –either standing up or sitting down. SHAKING THE PARACHUTE is a great warm up exercise. Plan to conduct these activities at the beginning of each parachute lesson. They serve to review and remind.



**Playing is Learning!**

Are we having fun yet? You bet! You got READY when you found or bought a parachute! Your class is all SET – doing movin' and shakin' warm ups! And now the children are eager to GO...and play more games and activities with the parachute! Watch for my next featured article on UP, UP AND AWAY – Getting Read for Parachute Play.

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