

Activity: Creative Expression/Art **Goal:** Cognitive/Intellectual **Populations:** All but dementia & young children

TH Activity Plan – Tree Shaped Ornaments from Buttons

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Photo by N. Ellis, Kathies Button Crafts, NaptimeButtons, Sweet Silly Sara & KE's Buttons and Beads



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will make ornaments in the shape of trees using buttons & decorative beads.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Use reasoning skills to discern, sort & organize buttons by colors & sizes; compare & contrast button sizes

Physical: Practice fine motor & sensorimotor skills

Psychological/Emotional: Relate smallness to human characteristics, both positive & negative; discuss sizeism in society; relate & discuss uniqueness of human characteristics

Sensory: Focus on tactile & visual senses for completing tasks; stimulate auditory sense with decorative bells

Social: Gift tree ornaments to others; practice altruism

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather buttons. Set up work stations. Have a small Norfolk Island pine in container as a live plant example.
2. Facilitator begins session by introducing activity & showing a few samples.
3. Participants select materials, typically 8-10 large to small buttons, 3-5 decorative beads/bells or stars per ornament. Then begin by folding thin wire in half, threading the bell on so it sits at the bottom of the folded wire.
4. Add decorative beads by threading both wires through them. Then add buttons largest to smallest. If the button has 4 holes, thread one wire through one hole & the second wire through the opposite hole. If the button has 2 holes thread a wire through each hole.
5. At the top, thread both wires together through the decorative beads/star & then twist a few times. Create a loop. Twist the wire ends around the top of the top bead. Tuck wire ends cleanly away, cutting excess wire if necessary.

Materials

Flat buttons of varying sizes/colors

Decorative stars, beads, bells

12"- 16" of thin 18-gauge wire of any color (the higher the gauge the thinner the wire)

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Therapeutic goals for this TH activity can fall into any of the health domains as indicated in the box above. Cognitive skills will be required as the first step, sorting, color coding, matching and selecting buttons with appropriate diameter to create the descending triangular shape. This can be integrated into classroom settings as math skills. Therapeutic goals in the physical domain can include practicing fine motor and sensorimotor skills that may be applicable for children developing such skills, or adults who have experienced challenges or injury to hand functions. Adaptations for hand tasks can include hand on hand work with a volunteer, or use of large diameter buttons (typically more expensive but easier to manipulate).

Psychological goals can focus on self-esteem, self-worth, and self-identity. The theme of size and sizeism can cover many facets - weight, [eating disorders](#), body frame, disability, or psychological perceptions of size relative to importance. Asking participants to identify phrases where small is used—*small but mighty*, *does size matter*, *good things come in small packages*—can begin discussions about size, physical attributes vs mental skills, or personal feelings, perceptions and societal values. This can be particularly relevant to young people, people with certain physical disabilities or those with self-worth issues. Expanding this to include uniqueness can shift discussions to more positive elements where uniqueness can be interpreted as having broader dimensions and wider acceptance in society.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Buttons may pose a choking hazard for some populations, particularly for individuals or populations who may have tendencies to put items in mouths. Wire may be/feel sharp.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: While this can be used for a holiday activity, trees have a year-round appeal. Incorporating a live plant, like a Norfolk Island pine grown in a container can strengthen the horticultural link to the creative arts activity while also illustrating tree shapes, and provide for sensory stimulation touching the live needles.

Norfolk Island pines are available year-round online. At holiday time, they can be purchased at most landscape stores. To keep a Norfolk pine tree small, the top can be cut to desired height just above the whorl of branches. Shortening the side branches to retain symmetry is recommended but may result in a misshapen specimen. Browning of the plant's bottom branches can be due to underwatering, low humidity or lack of bright sunlight. Norfolk pines are slow growing tropical conifers (*Araucaria heterophylla*) and not a true pine. (Costa Farms, 2025).

Buttons can be sourced online and available by specific color or mixed packages as can decorative stars, balls or other ornamental items in a variety of sizes. Two other button-related ideas—recycle buttons from clothing, with participants doing this at home prior to session, possibly as an Earth Day effort. Collecting buttons from deceased loved one's clothing and making a tree of remembrance or ornament can provide fond memories. Some alternative ideas are illustrated below.



REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Abrams, Z. (2022). [The burden of weight stigma](#). American Psychological Association.
Costa Farms. (2025). Norfolk Island pine. [Costa Farms.com](#).
Healthline. (2025). [Youth in focus series Episode 1: The struggle](#). [Youtube].

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2025.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2024.