

# Gratitude Balloon Toss - Levels A & B

# PLAY

To support students to experience gratitude and connection through a gentle balloon game. Students practise shared attention, cooperation, and positive feelings in a low-pressure, playful way. Linked to the Saturn theme from The Playful Astronauts, the activity reinforces that grateful moments help us feel connected and supported, just like Saturn's rings connecting everything together.



## Learning Intentions

Students aim to experience positive feelings during shared play with others.

Students aim to participate in a simple turn-taking movement activity.

Students aim to respond to or show appreciation using actions, visuals, gesture, or AAC.



## Success Criteria

I can take part by tapping, watching, or helping with the balloon.

I can respond to a gratitude idea using pictures, actions, or AAC.

I can stay with the group for part or all of the activity.

I can participate safely in shared play.



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**Duration:** 8 - 12 minutes

## Objective

To support students to experience gratitude and connection through a gentle balloon game. Students practise shared attention, cooperation, and positive feelings in a low-pressure, playful way. Linked to the Saturn theme from *The Playful Astronauts*, the activity reinforces that grateful moments help us feel connected and supported, just like Saturn's rings connecting everything together.

## Players

Whole class or small groups  
Suitable for 3 - 16 students  
Played seated or standing in a circle

## What You Need

One large, lightweight balloon (or beach ball for slower movement)  
Optional: visual gratitude prompt cards (family, friends, pets, toys, nature) (found in PDF resource)  
Optional: calm background music  
AAC devices, switches, or communication boards as required

## Setup

Arrange students in a clear circle where everyone can see the balloon.  
Students may sit on the floor, chairs, or remain in wheelchairs.

Introduce the activity using simple, calm language:

"We are going to play with the balloon."

"We will be gentle with it."

"We will play together."

Briefly connect to the Saturn theme in accessible terms:

"Saturn reminds us that gratitude connects us."

Show a small number of gratitude picture cards and name them.

Confirm AAC devices are switched on and open to basic thank you, like, or people symbols.



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## Gameplay

### Step 1: Adult Modelling

The teacher begins the game.

Hold the balloon and model a gentle tap up in the air.

Say or show one gratitude idea either before or after you tap it in the air, for example:

"I love my family."

Point to a picture or activate AAC while speaking.

Gently tap or give the balloon to the next student.

### Step 2: Shared Balloon Play

Students take turns interacting with the balloon.

Students may participate by:

- Tapping the balloon up in the air
- Rolling the balloon to a peer or passing it to a peer
- Watching the balloon move through the air
- Indicating where the balloon should go for an adult to tap it

Before or after touching the balloon, students may respond by:

- Pointing to a gratitude picture
- Activating AAC
- Smiling, nodding, or making a sound

Adults narrate positively:

"You are playing."

"You are being gentle."

"Thank you."

Continue slowly around the circle.

Pause or reset if the balloon drops.

### Step 3: Visual Gratitude Option (Alternative Version)

Give each student one gratitude picture card.

Students place the card in front of them.

Play the balloon game without verbal sharing.

When the balloon completes a round of the circle or drops to the ground, students hold up or point to their picture card.

Adults help name or acknowledge the choice.

Repeat with a new card if appropriate.

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## Debrief / Reflection

Keep reflection brief and concrete.

Ask one question at a time with wait time:

"Did you like to tap the balloon?"

Accept responses through eye gaze, gestures, AAC, facial expression, or movement.

Reinforce the message:

"Playing together feels good."

## Winning the Game

There are no winners or losers.

Success is shown through participation, shared play, and positive engagement.

## Sensory-Specific Learner Variation

Purpose: To support regulation, comfort, and predictability during movement play.

Adjustments may include:

Using a larger or slower-moving balloon.

Playing seated for stability.

Removing music if sound is overwhelming.

Allowing students to observe before joining.

Offering short play rounds with breaks.

## AAC-Specific Supports

Prepare AAC in Advance

Ensure access to symbols such as: thank you, like, family, friend, play, finished.

Use single-message switches if appropriate.

Model AAC Consistently

Adults activate AAC symbols when modelling gratitude or turns.



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## Accessibility and Inclusion Notes

Ensure the circle allows space for wheelchairs and mobility aids.  
Accept tapping, rolling, directing, or watching as valid participation.  
Offer alternative roles such as holding the balloon or choosing the next person.  
Maintain slow pacing and clear routines.  
Celebrate all attempts equally.

## Teacher Notes

“Gratitude Balloon Toss – Levels A & B” supports early gratitude awareness, joint attention, cooperation, and positive social connection. The activity is not about naming gratitude correctly, but about experiencing shared joy and positive feelings together. Linked to the Saturn theme, it reinforces that appreciation grows when it is shared and that even small moments of togetherness help students feel connected and valued.





# GRATITUDE PROMPT CARDS

PRINT AND CUT OUT THE CARDS. GATHER STUDENTS IN A SEATED CIRCLE WITH THE BALLOON. STUDENTS GENTLY TAP THE BALLOON, THEN POINT TO A GRATITUDE CARD OR SHOW APPRECIATION IN THEIR OWN WAY. ADULTS MODEL GENTLE PLAY AND NAME THE GRATITUDE CHOICE, KEEPING THE PACE SLOW AND SUPPORTIVE.



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