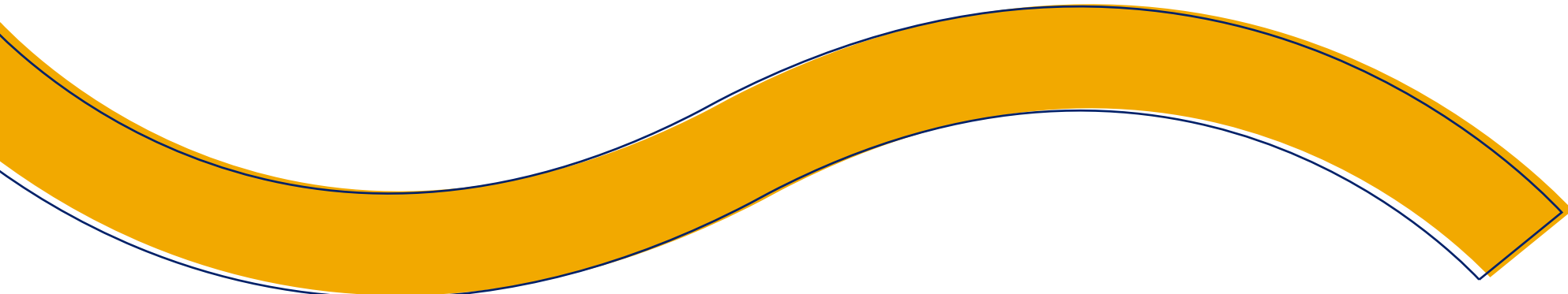




## LET'S MOVE DANCE TOOLKIT



Dance-and-movement-based activities  
for supporting health, physical fitness,  
and well-being.



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## A Note from the SAAAC Autism Centre

Welcome to the SAAAC Autism Centre's Let's Move Dance toolkit! We are thrilled to have you here and excited to share our passion for dance with you. Our Centre is dedicated to supporting low-resource communities in accessing culturally responsive autism services and resources- dance, and the arts in general- have been part of our core program offerings since 2008.

Our Let's Move Dance program, launched in 2022, has been a huge success thanks to our incredible team of experts, including Occupational Therapist Jamie Laframboise, Dance Instructor Jallaja Pararajasingham, and Executive Director Geetha Moorthy. Together, they have created a specialized dance curriculum that is both fun and effective in building movement skills for children and youth on the autism spectrum.

We are grateful to our program supporters, the MLSE Foundation and the Kiwanis Club of Toronto, for their generous contributions that have allowed us to provide access to quality arts and recreational programming to families who truly need it.

We sincerely hope that you enjoy this dance toolkit and find it valuable on your own journey. Let's get moving and have some fun!



# About the Let's Move Dance Toolkit



[Learn more about the Let's Move Dance Program](#)

This toolkit is a sample of six activities from the Let's Move Dance Program at the SAAAC Autism Centre.

Dance-and-movement-based activities are great for supporting health, physical fitness, and well-being.

Music and movement cause the release of the “happy chemicals” (serotonin and dopamine) in the brain. Serotonin plays a role in promoting feelings of happiness and emotional stability. Higher levels of dopamine can lead to enhanced motivation and concentration. This is why when you move and dance regularly, you may experience feelings of happiness, calmness, focus, achievement, and motivation.

Dance-and-movement-based activities also promote the development of cognitive (mental), motor, social-emotional skills, and sensory processing skills, all of which are important for building confidence and well-being and for following routines and completing our everyday tasks.

In this toolkit, you will find six activity descriptions and a corresponding attachment that contains the information and resources you need to get the whole family moving and grooving to dance-and-movement based activities at home.

We hope you enjoy!



## ACTIVITIES





# Activity 1: Airplane Arms

## Objective

To play, participants should stand in an open space with their arms extended. Without touching one another, everyone should “fly” around the space as the music plays. The idea is to mimic flying an airplane and move around the space freely. When the music stops, participants must choose an available “island” (hula-hoop) to “land” their plane on. The hula-hoops are the islands that the participants must land on, and no two people can land on the same island. Once everyone has landed on an island, start the music again and continue “flying.” The game continues with the same pattern - flying around when the music is playing, and landing on a hula-hoop when the music stops. Repeat these steps until the game is finished.

## Benefits / targeted skills

This activity targets various social-emotional, motor, and cognitive skills.

### Social-emotional skills:

- Participants will pay attention to others to maintain a reasonable amount of personal space.
- Participants will practice making decisions that consider the actions of others. For instance, when playing the “planes” game, they will choose their landing spot based on the movements of other participants in the room.

### Motor skills:

- This activity requires participants to engage in skills related to body schema, body awareness, and spatial awareness.
- Participants will follow instructions on how to position specific body parts and will develop a sense of their body's boundaries and movements in relation to people and objects around them. To exemplify, they will move their arms up and down while being careful not to touch anyone or any furniture, simulating the movement of an "airplane" without colliding with anything.

### Cognitive skills:

- This activity requires participants to engage their attention, memory, and decision-making skills.
- Participants will focus on those around them, remember the rules of the game, and make decisions about their movements and where to land based on the game rules.

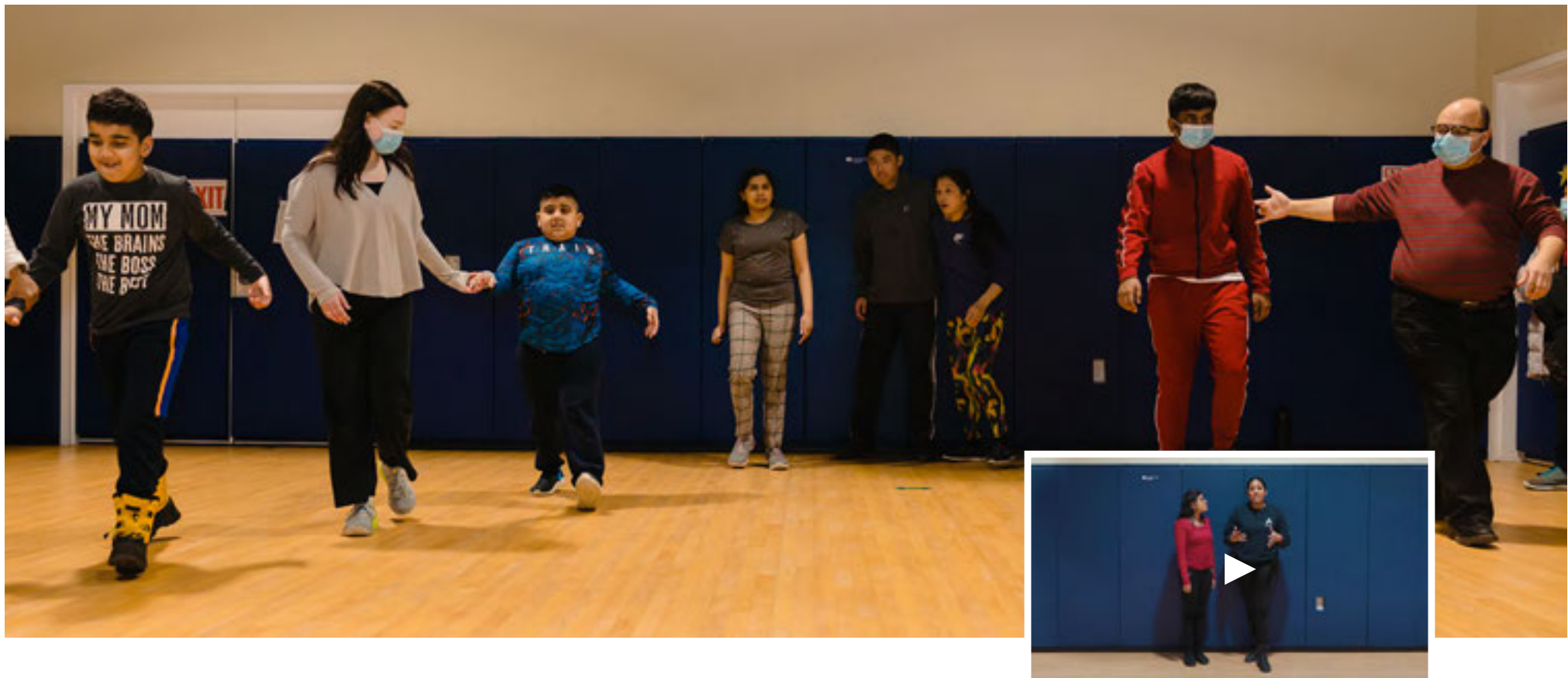
## Materials

- An open space, free of obstacles.
- A hula hoop for each player.
- A device and a music platform, such as YouTube or Spotify to play music.
- Visual Supports: the attached **Airplane Arms Airplane Hospital visual** can be hung on the wall as a spot for participants to "heal" and rejoin the game after they have touched another airplane.

## Instructions

1. **Prepare the space.** Make sure there are no large obstacles in the playing area. Ask the participants to place their hula hoops on the floor to create islands for landing. Hang the "Airplane Hospital" visual in a visible spot.
2. **Explain the activity.** Tell the participants that they will pretend to be airplanes and fly around the room when the music is playing. When the music stops, they need to land their airplane on an island without crashing into other planes. They must keep a safe distance from others.
3. **Airplane Hospital:** Show the "Airplane Hospital" and explain that if they touch another airplane, they must go to the hospital to heal before they can fly again.
4. **Begin the game:** Ask each participant to stand in a hula hoop or island where they are not touching anyone else. Make sure they are not touching anything else with their arms spread wide. Play the music and encourage them to fly around the room, being careful not to touch any other airplanes.
5. **Start & Stop:** Pause the music occasionally and demonstrate how to land on an island that is not already taken. Remind them to keep a safe distance from other planes.

Once the participants are familiar with the game, you can call out "airplane arms" during other functional tasks such as dance to keep them from becoming too crowded with one another.



Video

## Activity 2: Wall to Wall

### Objective

In this activity, participants will engage in rhythmic movements while controlling the speed and quality of their body motions. The movement will involve traversing the room back and forth, all while moving to music.

This activity offers participants the opportunity to practice a few key skills, including:

- Stopping and starting movements
- Controlling the speed of movements
- Using both arms and legs together to create different actions or patterns

### Benefits / targeted skills

This activity targets various cognitive (mental) skills and motor skills.

#### Cognitive skills:

- This activity requires participants to engage their attention and memory skills.
- Participants will need to focus on the song that is playing and to remember which movements are paired with which song.

#### Motor skills:

- Participants will plan and coordinate their body movements. Depending on the action they are playing with, they may be working on:

- Stopping and starting their movements.
- Controlling the speed of their movements.
- Mastering movement patterns such as walking, running, hopping, marching, crawling, lunging, twisting, reaching, bending side to side, clapping, shaking their hands, sliding, side stepping, skipping, tip-toeing, heel walk, raising and lowering arms, crab walk, duck walk, bear walk.

## Materials

- An open space, free of obstacles.
- A device and a music platform, such as YouTube or Spotify to play music.
- Visual supports: The attached [Wall to Wall Picture Cards](#) can be held up by a leader to help the participant remember what movement they are practicing. If you add your own movements, you can print pictures online.

## Instructions

1. **Set up the space:** Choose a space with two walls across from each other and ensure there are no obstacles in the path. If participants have difficulty walking straight, create a path using colored tape from one wall to the other.
2. **Explain the activity:** Let participants know that you will be moving back and forth across the room while music plays. Demonstrate freezing, moving slow and fast, or doing different actions.
3. **Decide on your action:** We recommend starting with starting and stopping and then progressing to controlling speed and practicing actions. Select the appropriate picture card and song. For stopping, starting, and actions, play any song the participants like. For controlling speed, use the List of Recommended Wall to Wall Songs that alternates between fast and slow tempos.

4. **Play!:** Line the participants along the wall and remind them which aspect of movement you will be practicing. Play the music and model the decided upon aspect of movement back and forth across the room. For freezing, pause the music occasionally, call out “freeze!” and model standing still. For speed, move quickly during fast parts of the song and slowly during slow parts.

Practice each aspect or action for 30 seconds to a minute, or until all participants have made a good effort. Then, pick a new one and switch.

For participants needing additional support to follow along, try the following instruction:

- Have the leader hold up the appropriate picture cards at either side of the room.
- Call out the name of the action. For example, repeat “slow, like a turtle!” very slowly.



Video

## Activity 3: Clapping/Stomping/ Stick Rhythms

### Objective

During this activity, participants will practice copying rhythms demonstrated by a leader. Rhythms might involve clapping, stomping, using drumsticks or a combination of these actions.

### Benefits / targeted skills

This activity targets various cognitive (mental) skills, social-emotional skills, and motor skills.

#### Cognitive skills:

- This activity requires participants to engage their listening, attention, and memory skills.

- Participants will need to follow instructions to focus on the demonstration, hold the rhythm in mind, and then copy the rhythm.

#### Social-emotional skills:

- Participants will be required to work as a team, pay attention to their peers, listen and respond, and take turns.

#### Motor skills:

- Participants will use their arms and legs together in a coordinated fashion to recreate the demonstrated rhythm. This will require them to conceptualize, order, and time their movements according to the demonstration.

## Materials

- An open space, free of obstacles.
- Chairs for each participant. Completing the activity seated on a chair can make it easier, but it can also be completed standing or seated on the floor.
- Two rhythm sticks or wooden dowels for each participant.
- Visual supports: The attached **Rhythm Activity Visual Sequence** template and picture cards can be used to help participants remember the rhythm. Use the “on beat” visual sequence for beginners, and the “off beat” visual sequence for advanced participants. There is an empty box for counts 1 to 8. Place pictures to remind participants whether they clap, stomp, tap, or pause for each count.

## Instructions

1. **Prepare the space:** For two participants, have them stand or sit across from each other. For three or more participants, gather everyone in a circle. Use chairs if sitting or mark the floor with colored tape if standing or sitting on the floor.
2. **Explain the activity:** Instruct participants to listen carefully while you clap, stomp, or tap, so they can copy exactly what you do. Demonstrate the actions and allow them to practice each one.
3. **Decide on your rhythm:** Start with one action, such as clapping, and do it on the beat. This means you only clap on counts. When the participants become comfortable copying simple rhythms, alternate between two actions, such as clapping and stomping, and include actions on off beats. This means you can complete an action between counts. Use picture cards to visually represent your rhythm on the visual sequence.
4. **Play!:** Call out “5, 6, 7, 8!” to count participants in. Demonstrate your rhythm using your clapping, stomping, or tapping actions for one to two counts of 8 and invite participants to join in.

For participants needing additional support to follow along, try the following:

- Call out each action in your rhythm instead of counting. For example, say “clap, pause, stomp, pause, clap, pause, stomp, pause!”.
- Model the actions. Continue demonstrating the rhythm while they copy you.



Video

## Activity 4: Emoji Dance

### Objective

During this activity, participants will practice expressing simple emotions including happiness and sadness using body language, facial expressions, and movements to music.

If you notice your participants start to take on the emotion they are practicing, give them a break. This is meant to be a fun activity and they should not look distressed.

### Benefits / targeted skills

This activity targets social-emotional skills.

- Participants will be required to use their facial expressions, body language, and movements to express their emotions or energy level in a way that is meaningful to them.
- Participants will also observe what different emotions and energy levels might look like in others.

## Materials

- An open space, free of obstacles.
- A device and a music platform, such as YouTube or Spotify.
- Songs. The attached [Emoji Dance Songs](#) has recommendations for songs to use for different emotions.
- Visual supports: the attached [Emoji Dance Picture Cards](#) represent different emotions and can be used to remind participants which emotion they are practicing.

## Instructions

1. **Prepare the space:** Choose a large area and clear it of obstacles.
2. **Explain the activity:** Tell participants that they are going to practice expressing their feelings using facial expressions, movements, and the way they hold their bodies.
3. **Decide on your emotion and song:** You and the participants should select the emotion you'd like to start with. Select the appropriate picture card and song.
4. **Play!:** Play the music and demonstrate using exaggerated facial expressions, body language, and movements to express the emotion you are practicing and encourage participants to do the same.

You can use movement prompts such as big, small, fast, slow, smooth, and jerky as appropriate.

For happy, your movements might be fast, crisp, and rhythmic. You might stand tall and upright. You may incorporate jumping, clapping, spinning, waving your arms, smiling, and squinting.

For sad, your movements might be slow and “flowy”. One action might “roll” into the next. You might hunch forward, appearing tired. You may incorporate lunging, bending, reaching, and squatting into your dancing. You may furrow your eyebrows, look down, and frown.

For scared, your movements might be “jerky” and uncoordinated. They might be sporadic instead of rhythmic. You might try to appear small as if you are trying to hide, by raising your shoulders to your ear and keeping your arms close to your body. You may incorporate tippy toeing and darting your gaze around the room. You may close your eyes, your ears, or open your mouth wide.

For angry, your movements might be large, fast and strong. You might stand upright and tall. You may incorporate actions such as stomping, pointing, and throwing arms outward into your dancing. You may furrow your eyebrows, frown, and make fists.



## Activity 5: This Dance, That Dance

### Objective

During this activity, each dance move is paired with a song. Participants will learn the pairings and then alternate between two dance moves depending on which song is playing.

### Benefits / targeted skills:

This activity targets various cognitive (mental) and motor skills.

#### Cognitive skills:

- This activity requires participants to engage their attention, memory, and task switching skills.
- Participants will need to focus on the song that's playing, remember which dance move goes with which song, notice when the song changes, and switch to the other dance move.

### Motor skills:

- This activity requires participants to plan and coordinate their movements. This involves conceptualizing, ordering, and timing their movements to achieve the dance moves.

## Materials

- An open space, free of obstacles.
- A device and a music platform, such as YouTube or Spotify to play music.
- Visual supports: the attached **“This Dance, That Dance”** visual support can be used to remind participants which dance moves go with which song.
- A marker and wipes if you are laminating your visual support. A pencil and eraser if you are not laminating your visual support.

## Instructions

1. **Set up the space:** Choose an area and clear it of obstacles to ensure safe movement. If using the visual support, place it in a visible location such as on a chair, table, or wall to be used later.
2. **Explain the activity:** Tell the participants that they will learn dances to two songs. Explain that each dance will be different and will only go with one of the songs. Ask them to listen to the songs and do the dance that they remember goes with the song that is playing. Remind them that the song will change throughout, so they will have to listen and switch back and forth between dances.
3. **Decide on your songs and dance moves:** With the participants, select two songs and come up with two dances that are clearly different from each other. Dances can be a simple action such as marching, twisting, or clapping, or a sequence of actions based on the preferences of your participants.

Use the “This Dance, That Dance” visual support to represent the songs in the top two boxes using words or simple drawings. Below each song, represent the appropriate action using words or simple drawings. Practice each dance and song pair for several minutes until the participants know the dance and remember which dance goes with which song.

4. **Play!:** Play the first song and start moving. Model doing the dance that corresponds to the song and encourage participants to do the same. Periodically switch the song and dance.

Provide support to help participants remember and make the switch, such as asking which dance they should be doing, pointing to the correct song and dance on the visual support, verbally stating which song is playing and which dance to do, or leading the switch by modeling and being the first to switch after the song changes.



## Activity 6: Dance Circle Memory Game

### Objective

In this activity, participants will work together to build a dance step by step. Participants will take turns adding one action to a sequence of actions. After each new action is added, everyone will review the sequence of actions up until that point. It's a fun and interactive way to create a dance together as a group!

### Benefits / targeted skills

This activity targets various social-emotional, cognitive (mental), and motor skills.

#### Social-emotional skills:

- Participants will be required to focus on others, listen, wait and take turns, and work together as a team.

### Cognitive skills:

- This activity requires participants to use many cognitive skills including attention, memory, generating ideas, sequencing or ordering, and problem solving.
- Participants will focus on others, remember, and recall the dance sequence in a specific order. They will come up with ideas for dance moves to add to the sequence.

If they can't remember part of the dance sequence, they will have to problem solve, remembering to look at the written list or to their teammates for hints.

### Motor skills:

- This activity requires participants to conceptualize, plan, and carry out various movements. This involves coming up with ways to move their bodies, ordering, and timing their movements.

## Materials

- An open space, free of obstacles.
- Coloured tape to mark places.
- Paper and pencil or marker.

## Instructions

1. **Set up the space:** Clear an obstacle-free space. Depending on the number of participants, place tape marks on the floor in a circle as place markers. Tape the paper somewhere visible, such as between participants on the wall.
2. **Explain the activity:** Tell participants that you are going to work together to come up with a dance one move at a time.

Explain that each person will take turns offering one idea for a dance move. After each dance move is added, the group will be asked to recall all the dance moves added up until that point by going through them together.

3. **Play!:** Ask the first participant to choose a dance move. After they do, ask the group to copy their dance move. Then, ask the next participant in the circle to choose a different dance move. Now, the group must copy both of the dance moves one after the other.

Continue in this manner until everyone has had a turn to add a dance move. Toward the end, participants should be doing multiple dance moves one after the other. Once you have practiced the completed dance, play a song and practice following the dance to music.

If your participants need support to come up with ideas for dance moves, try the following:

- Offering movement prompts. For example, you can ask them to dance like a monkey, dance like a star, dance like a bird, stomp like a soldier, wiggle like a worm, twist like a tree in the wind, or something as simple as move their arms.
- Offering choices. Show them pictures of 2-3 movements using an online search engine (e.g., Google) or demonstrate 2-3 movements and ask them to choose one.

If your participants need support to remember the dance moves, try the following:

- Make a numbered list. Track the dance moves in words or simple pictures on the paper taped to the wall. Point to each dance move as you complete it.
- Modelling. Be the first to initiate each dance move in the sequence.



# Acknowledgments

A special thank you to the individuals who have dedicated their time and efforts towards the development of the Let's Move Dance program at the SAAAC Autism Centre, and whose collaboration has been instrumental in the creation of this toolkit.



**Jamie Laframboise**  
*OT Reg. (Ont.)*

Jamie Laframboise is an Occupational Therapist registered and in good standing with the College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario. She has a Master of Science in Occupational Therapy from the University of Toronto. She has 3 years of experience supporting individuals to create and participate in meaningful daily routines. Jamie works with individuals on the autism spectrum to enhance sensory processing, motor, and cognitive skills, and on achieving a calm and regulated state. She is dedicated to utilizing her expertise and skills to improve the quality of life for those on the autism spectrum.



**Jallaja Pararajasingham**  
*Lead Dance Instructor*

Jallaja Pararajasingham is an accomplished choreographer and dance instructor with a career spanning over a decade. She has performed and choreographed various productions, stage performances, and dance dramas across North America and India. As the founder of Let's Jalsa, she has provided choreography services to nearly 200 clients for special events. Jallaja is also Manager of Goodness Gift, a social enterprise committed to providing employment and job training opportunities for individuals with exceptionalities.

**Geetha Moorthy***Advisor and Instructor*

From classical arts, and business/entrepreneurship, to community development, Geetha Moorthy's professional journey has been unique as it has been fulfilling. Before beginning the SAAAC Autism Centre in 2008, Geetha held senior roles in controllership and operations. Her training and love for classical Indian dance pushed her to establish the Nartanalaya Centre for South Asian Dances in 1985, training hundreds of students across the Greater Toronto Area, which helped her forged deep ties with her community.

**Amir Akbari***Advisor*

Amir Akbari is a Visual Artist, Educator, and Community Advocate known for his passion for mural art and collaborative community projects. With over 50 public murals to his name, he has also taught art to hundreds of young people in the city, including developing adapted programs for individuals with exceptionalities. As Director of Arts for the SAAAC Autism Centre, Amir's work emphasizes the power of self-expression in the development and growth of young people and their communities.

## Toolkit Creation

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**Frame Me Productions**

Photography

**Christien Gilson**

Toolkit Design

**Project Coordination**

Kingston Yogendran

## Program Supporters

We are deeply grateful to the MLSE Foundation and Kiwanis Club for their support in the development of the Let's Move Dance Program at the SAAAC Autism Centre. Thanks to their generosity, our Centre has been able to provide students with high-quality recreational programming that promotes movement skills and creative expression. Their contributions have made a significant impact on our students' physical abilities, self-confidence, and social connections.





## VISUAL SUPPORTS



# Airplane Arms - Airplane Hospital Visual



# Airplane Hospital

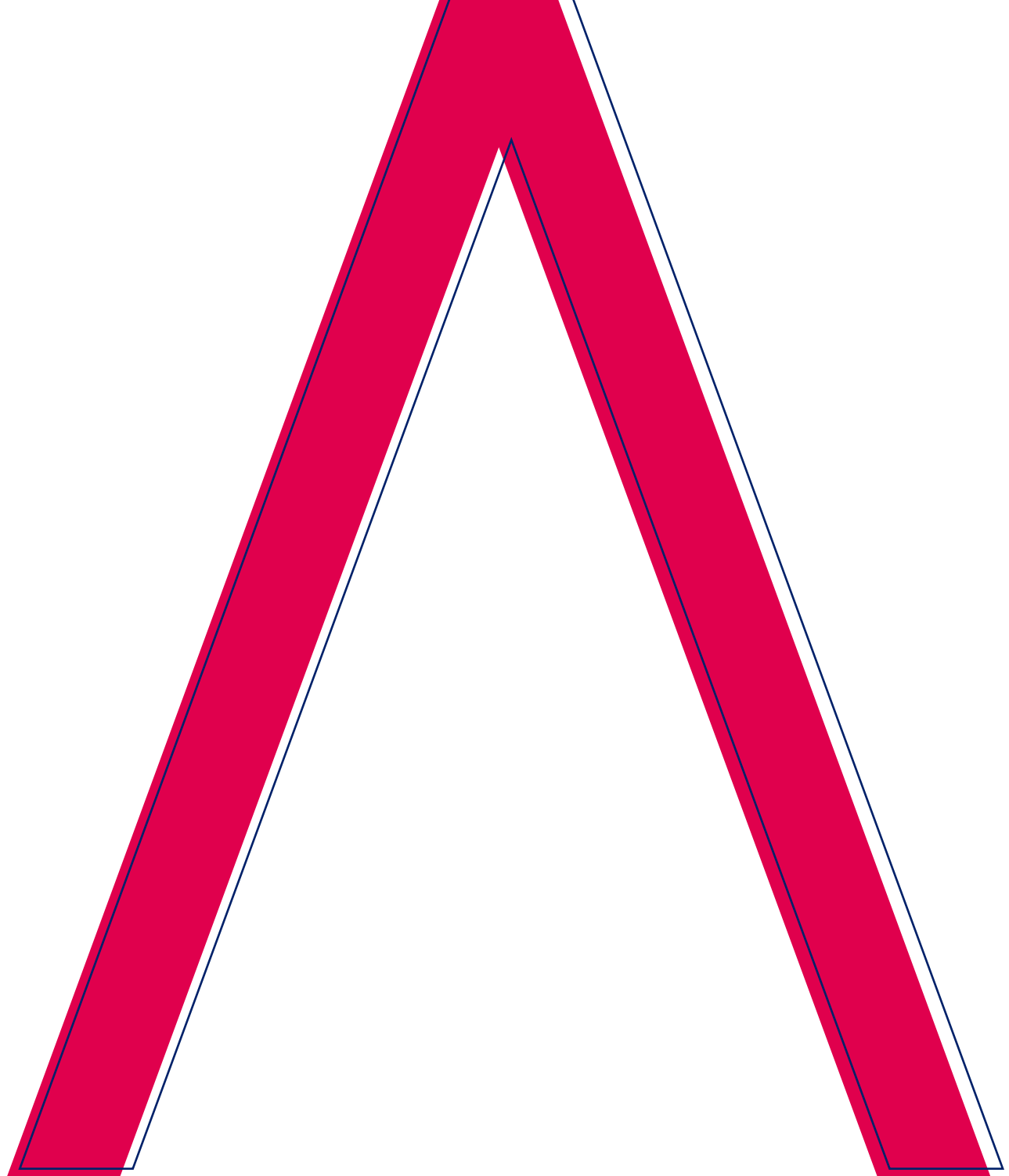


Touch to heal!

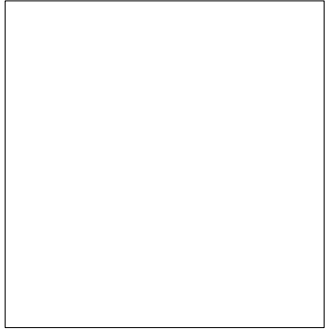
**INSTRUCTIONS:**

-Tape to the wall and allow participants to touch to return to the game after crashing with another plane.

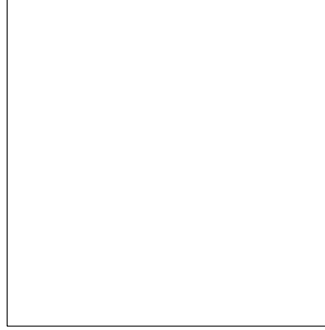
# Wall-to-Wall Visuals



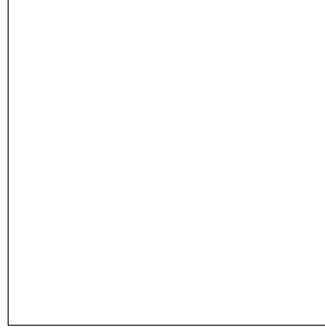
# Wall-to-Wall Visual Schedule



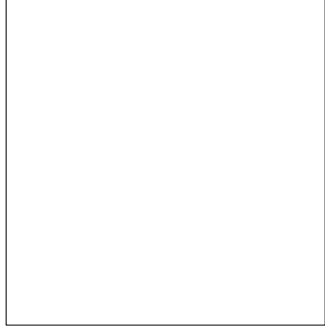
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3



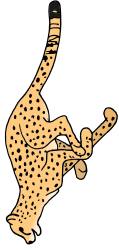
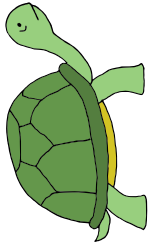

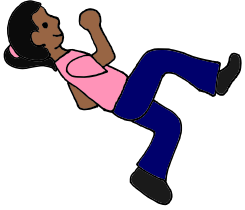
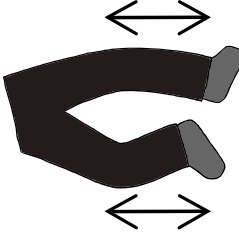
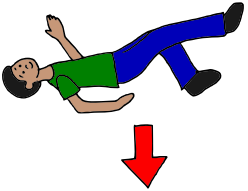



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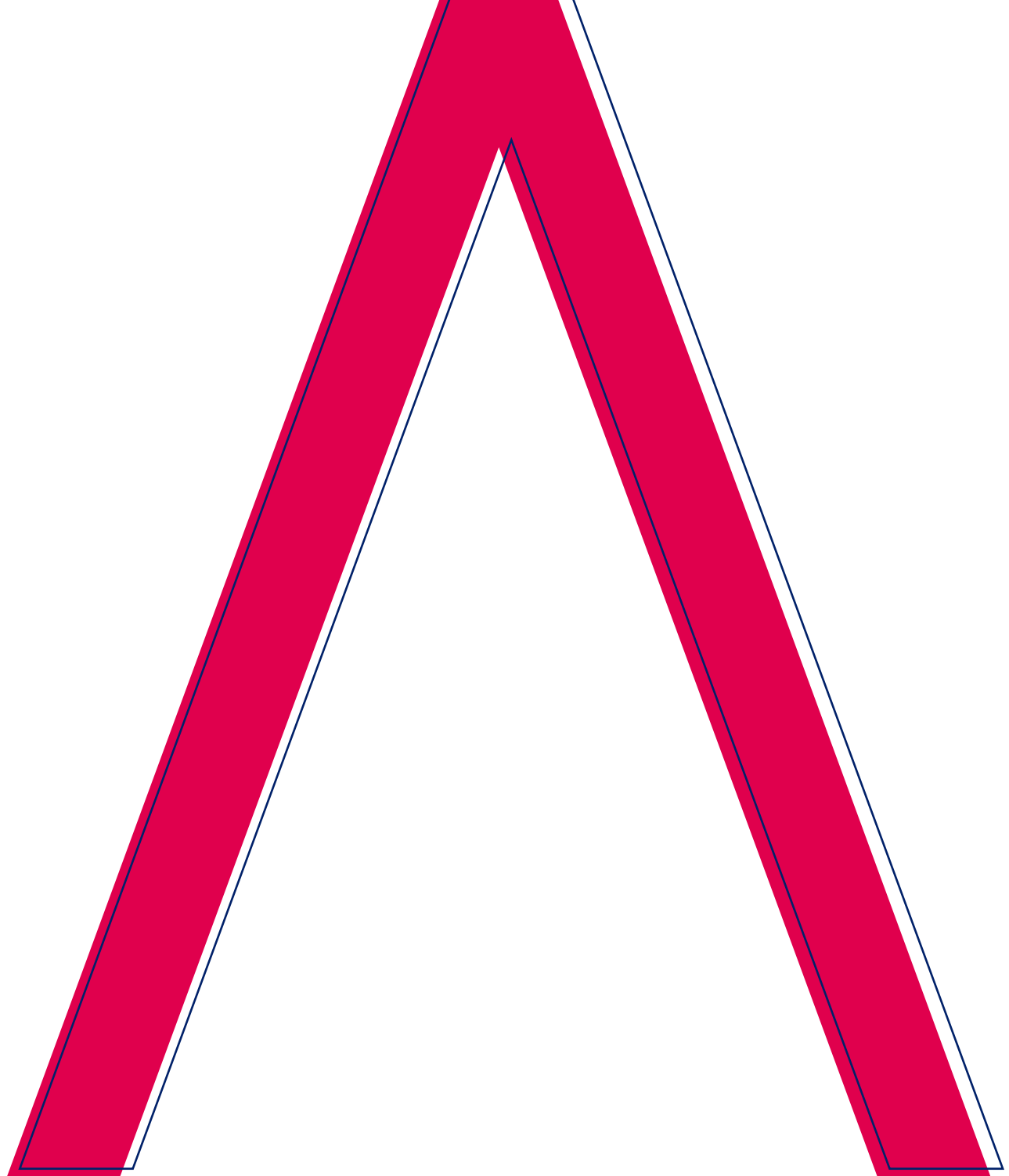
## INSTRUCTIONS:

- Cut out pictures from pages 2 to 4.
- Laminate and add Velcro to picture cards and schedule (optional).
- Add picture cards to the visual schedule with Velcro or tape, to help participants remember the actions you will be practicing.
- Remove each action to a "finished bin" when you complete it.

## Wall-to-Wall Picture Cards

 Stop	 Go	 Fast
 Slow	 Walking	 Run
 March	 Backwards	 Hop

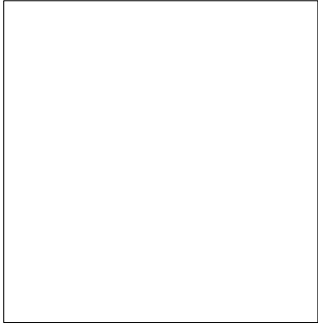
# Rhythm Activity Visuals



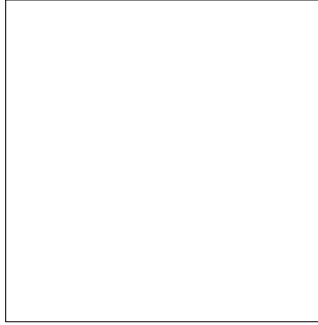
INSTRUCTIONS:

- Cut pictures from pages 4 to 10.
- Laminate and add Velcro to picture cards and schedule (optional).
- Choose the appropriate schedule (on beat or off beat) and add picture cards to visual schedule using Velcro or tape to help participants recall your rhythm.

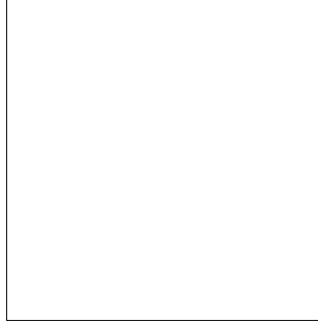
## Rhythm Activity Visual Schedule (on beat)



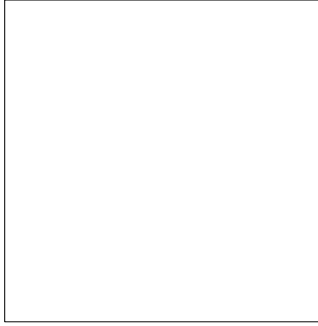
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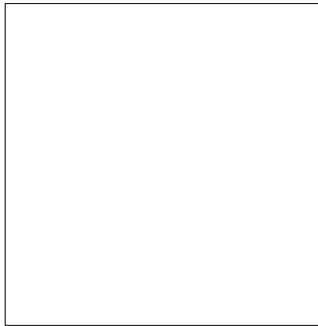
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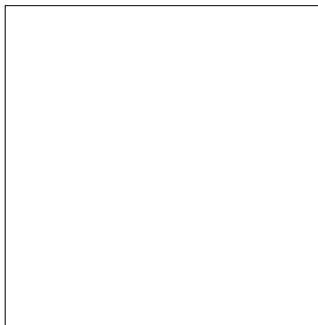
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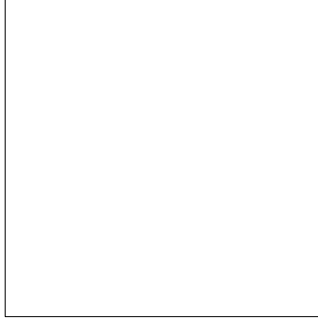
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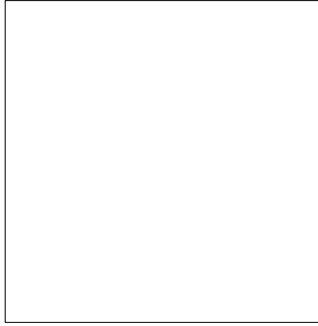
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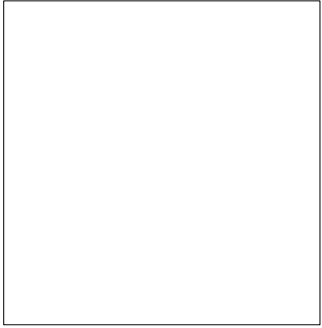


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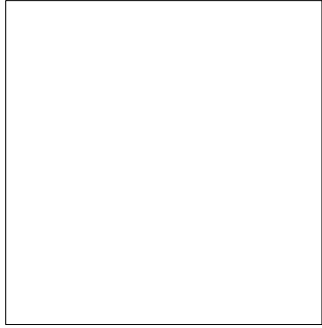


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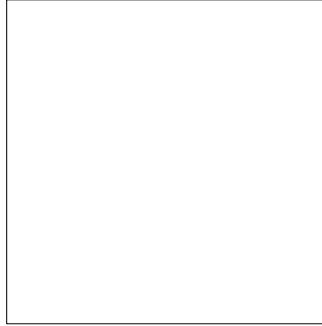
# Rhythm Activity Visual Schedule (off beat)



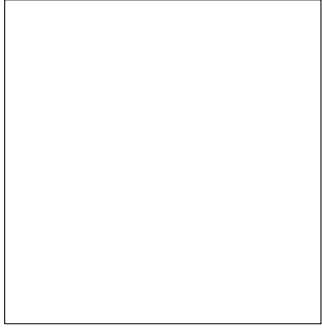
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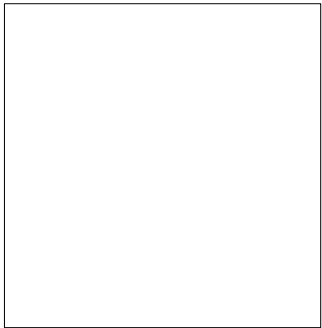
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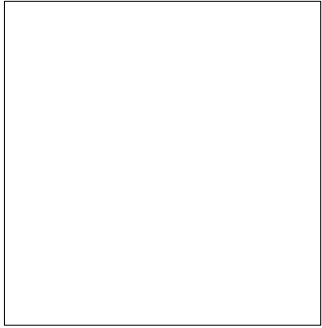
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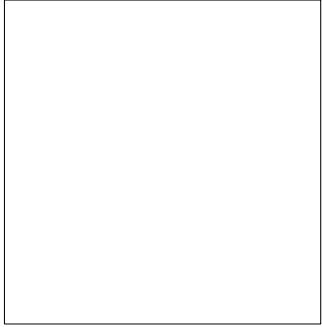
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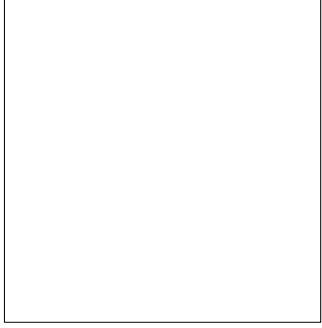
3



&

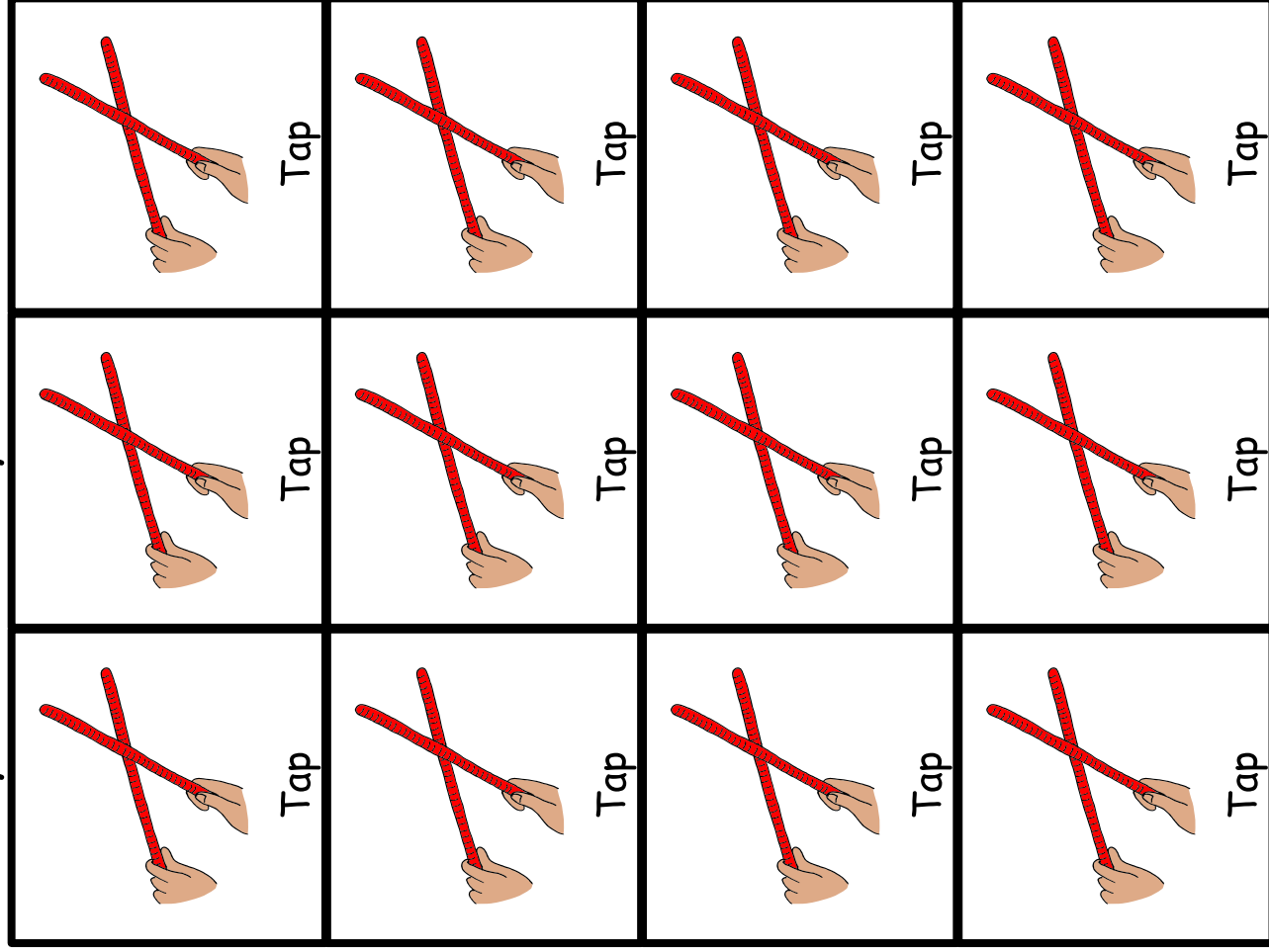


4

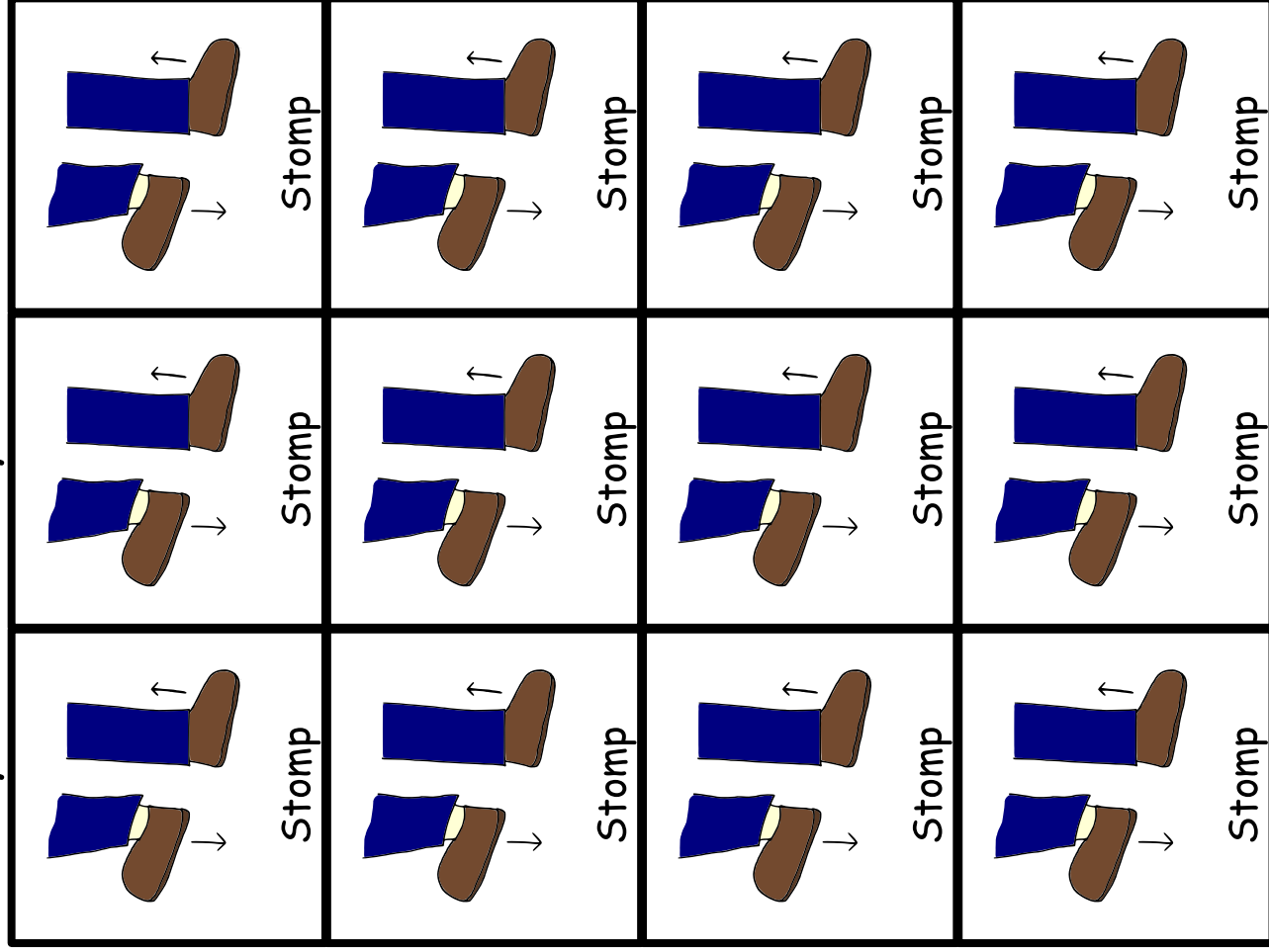


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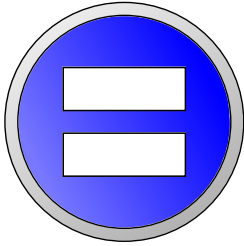
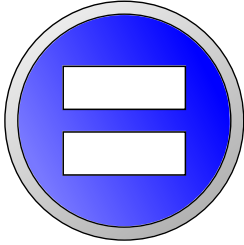
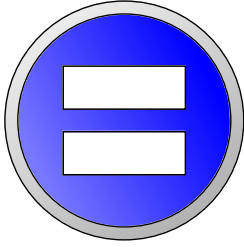
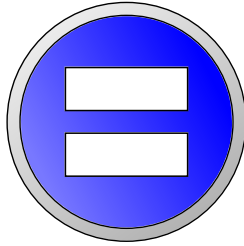
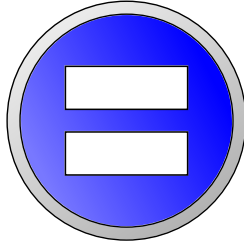
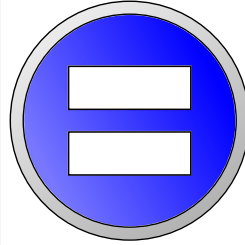
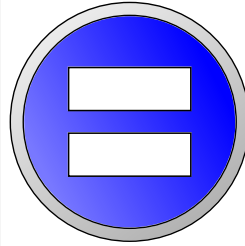
# Rhythm Activity Picture Cards



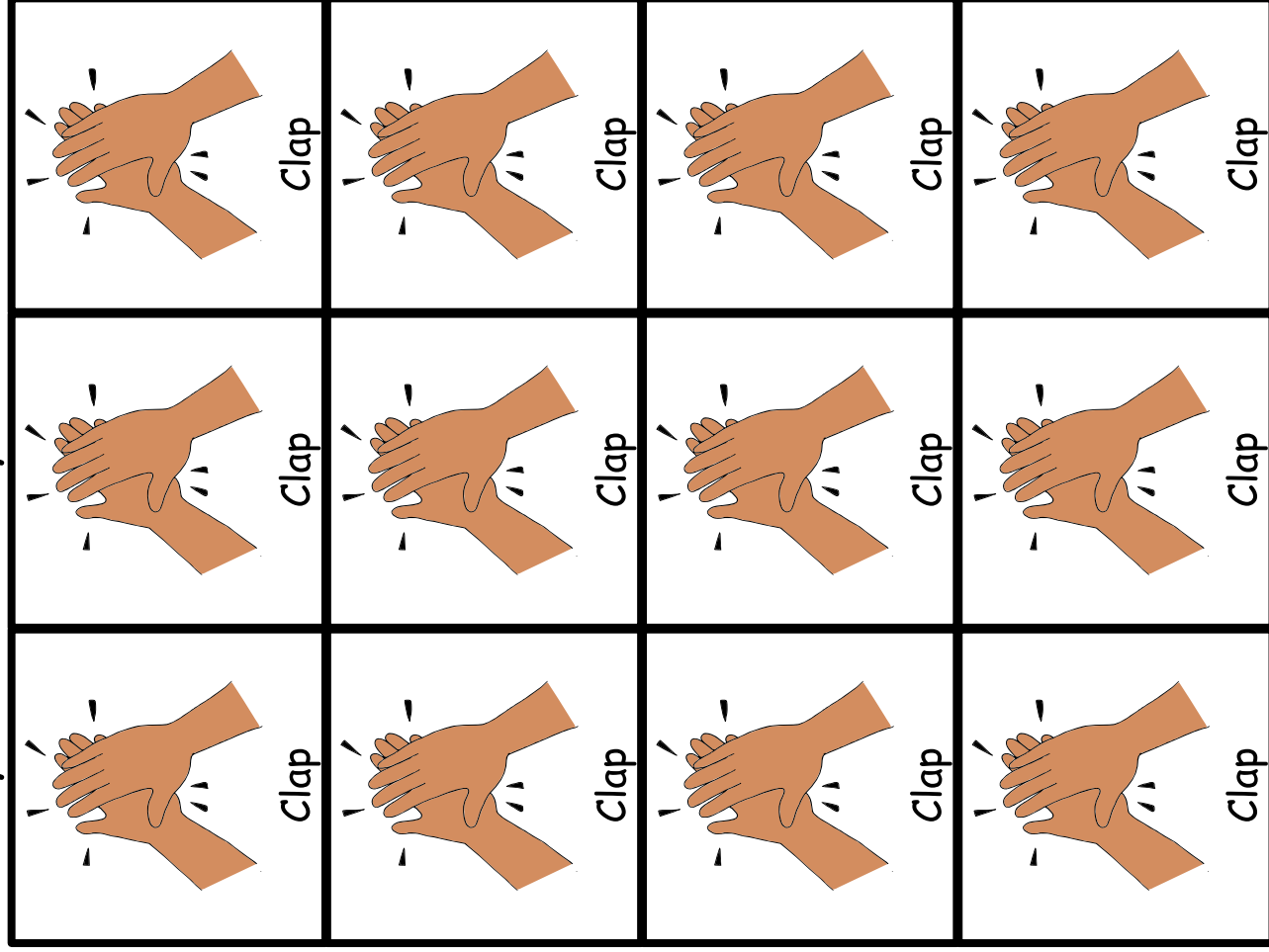
# Rhythm Activity Picture Cards



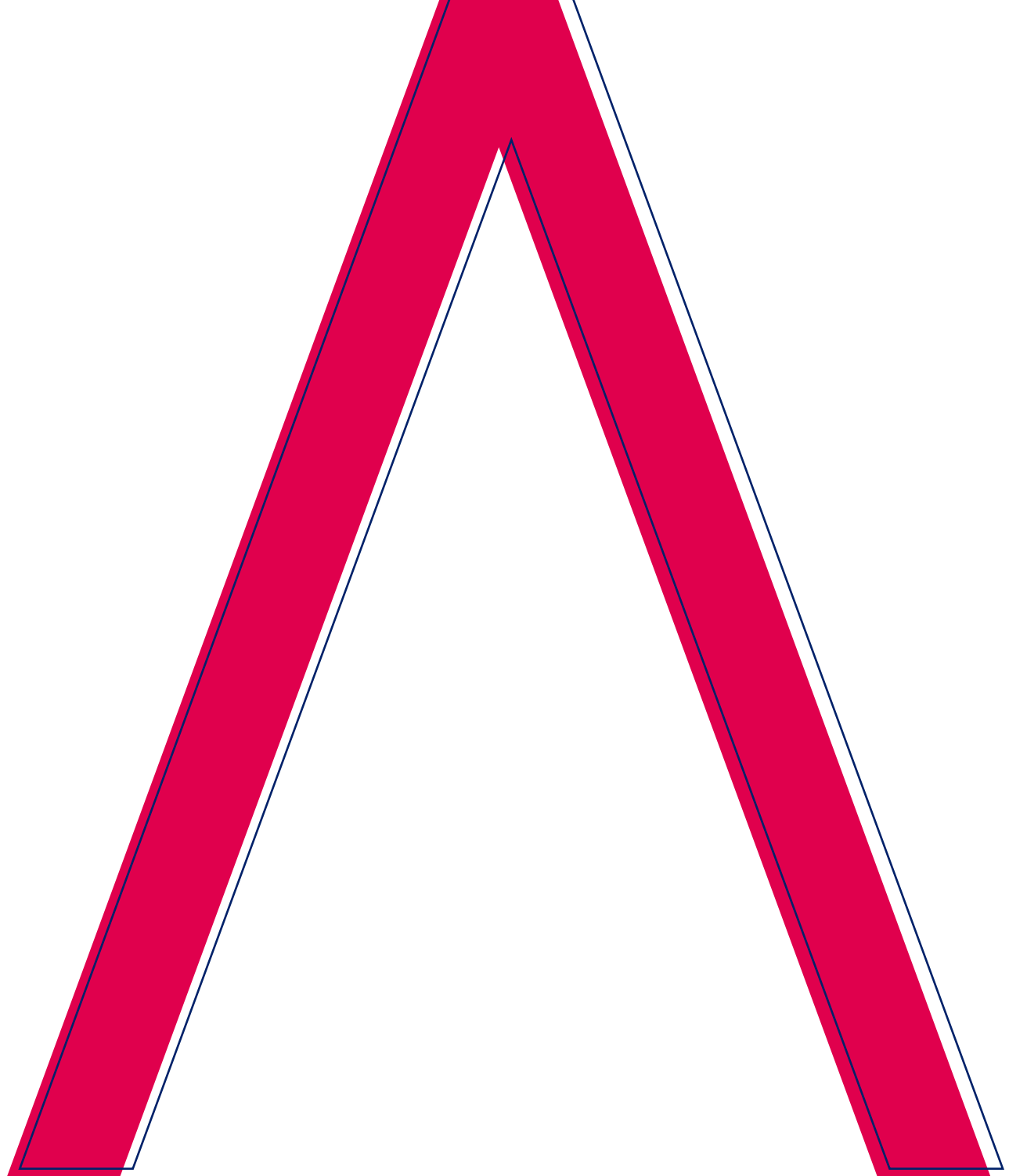
# Rhythm Activity Picture Cards

 Pause	 Pause	 Pause	
 Pause	 Pause	 Pause	
 Pause			

# Rhythm Activity Picture Cards



# Emoji Dance Activity Visuals



# Emoji Dance Picture Cards



Happy



Mad

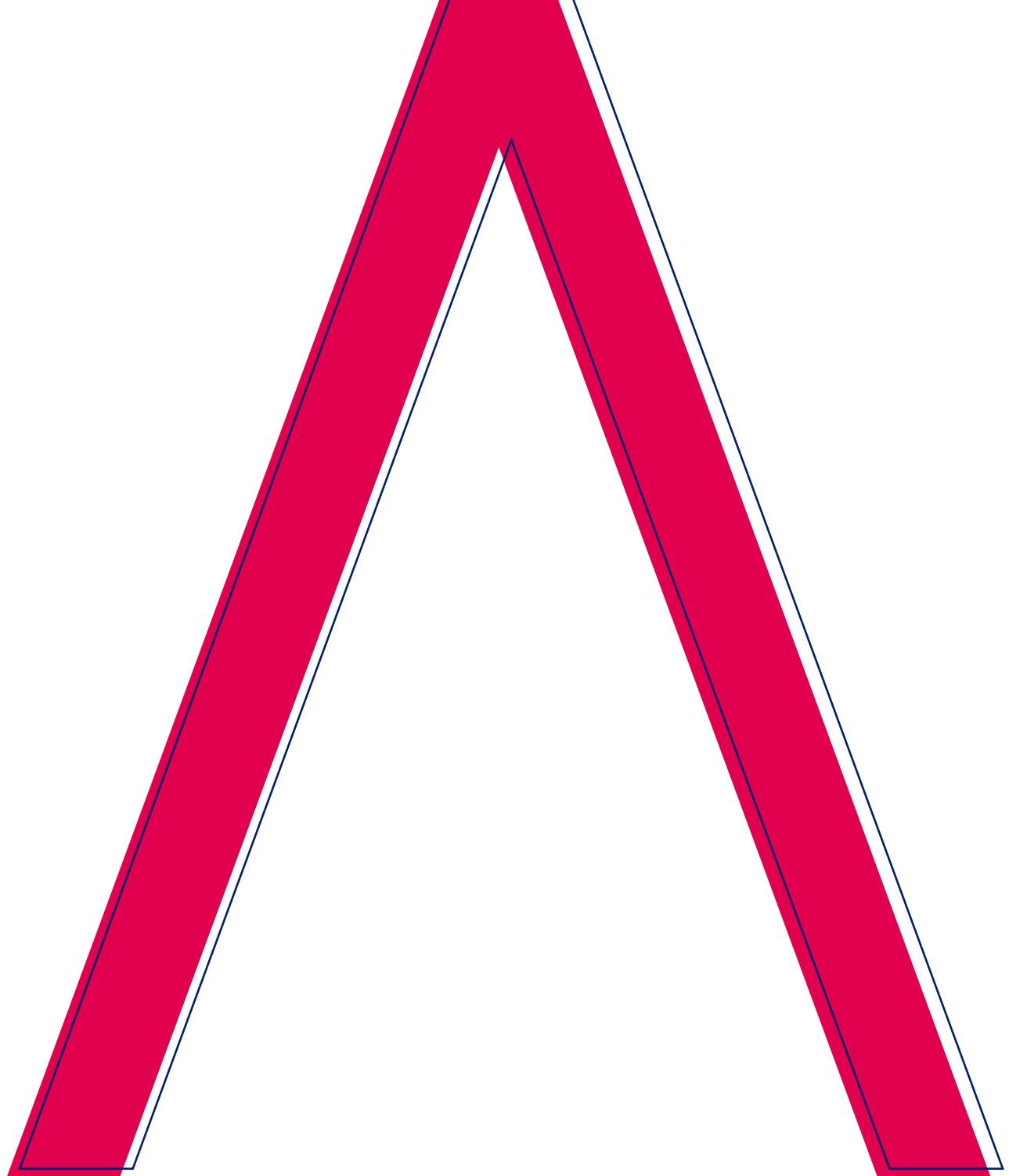


Scared



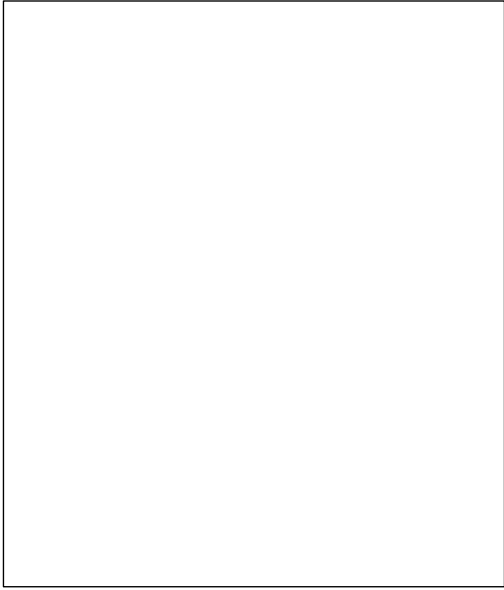
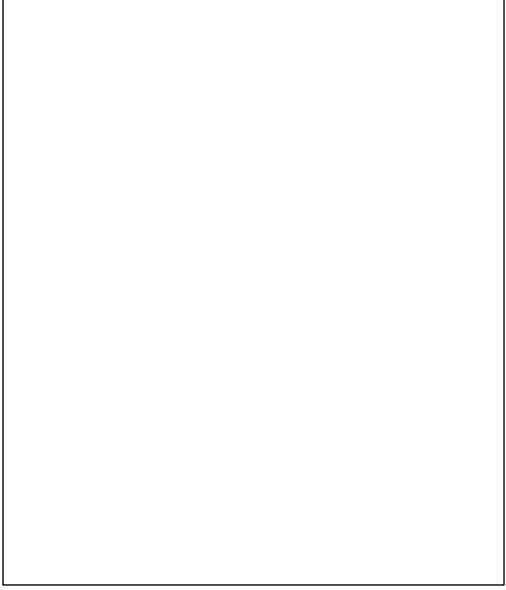
Sad

# This Dance, That Dance Activity Visuals

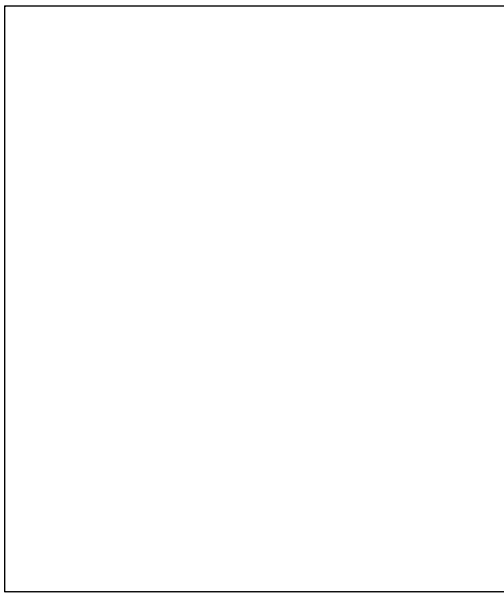
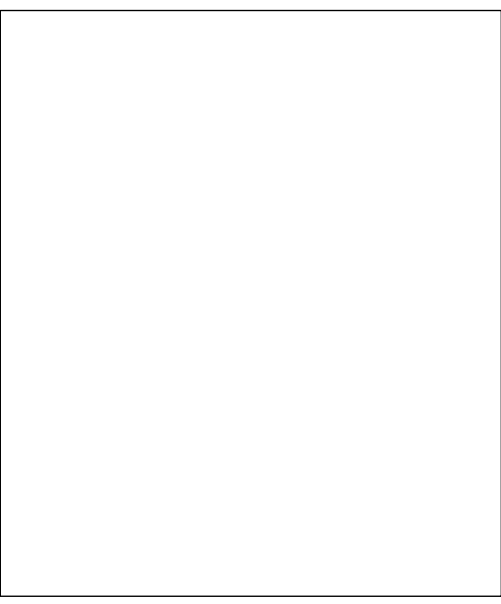


# This Dance, That Dance Visual Support

1



2



## INSTRUCTIONS:

- Write or draw pictures that clearly represent each song in the top boxes.
- Write or draw pictures that clearly represent each action or dance move in the bottom boxes to help participants remember which action goes with which song.



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