

Obstacle Course Part 1: Spatial Words



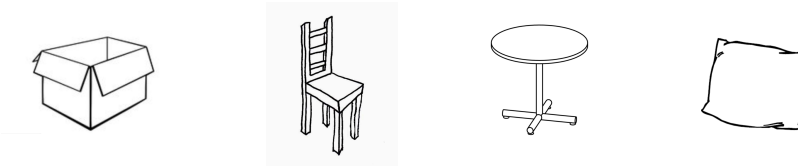
1-4 players

Ages 4+

10-15 minutes

Materials:

Any medium-to-large items (e.g., boxes, furniture)



One “mystery item” (e.g., toy, book)



Spatial word cards



GOALS of the game:

Children learn and practice spatial words; the obstacle course is set up

VOCABULARY words:

over
under
around
inside

QUESTION prompts:

Can you go over?
Can you go under?
Can you go around?
Can you go inside?

Setup:

1. Clear a space for the obstacle course on the floor, in the hallway, or outside
2. Arrange the medium-to-large items in an approximate path (e.g., left-to-right or top-to-bottom). *Optional:* use masking tape, washable marker, or sticks to mark the path through the obstacle course.
3. Hide the “mystery item” at the end of the obstacle course

Play:



Say, "I made an obstacle course! I hid a mystery item at the end of the obstacle course. You get to choose spatial words to help you walk through the obstacle course and find the mystery item. But first, let's practice our spatial words."

Choose one item (e.g., a pillow) from the course to use when practicing the spatial words.



Hold up the "over" card and say, "What do you think this card means? This card means that you jump **over** something! Can you show me how you jump **over** the pillow?" Wait for the child to demonstrate **over**.



Then, practice the remaining spatial words. Hold up each spatial card and wait for children to demonstrate its direction.

"Can you show me how you go **under** the pillow?"

"Can you show me how you go **around** the pillow?"

"Can you show me **inside** the pillow?"

Let children be creative in how they model each card (e.g., slithering **under** the pillow on the floor like a snake, poking the stuffing of the pillow to show **inside**, etc.). Once children have practiced each spatial word, move on to Obstacle Course Part 2: The Course!

What children are learning:

- Early spatial skills predict children's later success in science, engineering, technology, and math
- Spatial language helps us describe where things or people are in space: try using words like above, under, between, beside, around, up, and down when you describe the location of a person or object!
- Hearing, learning, and using spatial language helps children develop the spatial skills they need in elementary school

Obstacle Course Part 2: The Course



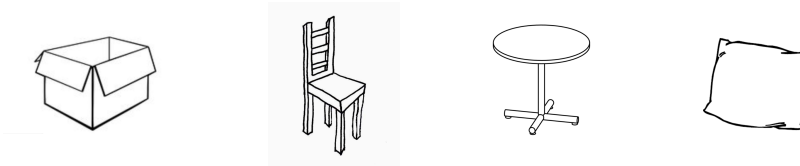
1-4 players

Ages 4+

10-15 minutes

Materials:

The obstacle course set up from Obstacle Course Part 1: Spatial Words



One “mystery item” (e.g., toy, book)



Spatial word cards



GOAL of the game:

Children use spatial language to walk through an obstacle course

VOCABULARY words:

over
under
around
inside

QUESTION prompts:

How did you know where to go?

Can you describe where you walked?

Setup:

1. Make sure the obstacle course from Obstacle Course Part 1 is set up, with the “mystery item” hidden at the end point.

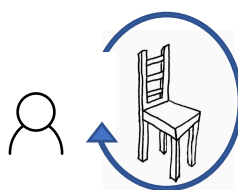
Play:



Say, “Now it’s time for you to go through the obstacle course! There is a mystery item at the end of the obstacle course for you to find. You get to choose how to walk through the obstacle course by choosing a spatial card at each step.”

Have the child approach the first item in the obstacle course. Hold out the four spatial cards and ask the child to choose one card. The child navigates the step according to the spatial word.

“You chose **around**! Can you show me how you go **around** the chair?”



Once the child completes the motion on the spatial card, have them go to the next step of the obstacle course. At each remaining step, have the child choose a new spatial word card and navigate the step according to the card.

At the final step, have the child retrieve the mystery item. Ask, “Where was the mystery item? Was it **inside**, **next to**, or **between**? Can you describe your path through the obstacle course using spatial words?” *Note: You can help children by asking questions like, “Did you jump **over** or **under** the pillow?”*

Once all children have had a turn in the obstacle course, move on to Obstacle Course Part 3: The Map!

What children are learning:

- Hearing, learning, and using spatial language helps children develop the spatial skills they need in elementary school
- When children say spatial words and act out spatial motions, they are practicing both their mathematics and their language skills
- Use more challenging spatial descriptions as children are ready. For example, use multiple spatial words in the same sentence: “Can you pick up the sock? It is under the table that is next to the window.”

Obstacle Course Part 3: The Map



1-6 players

Ages 4+

15-20 minutes

Materials:

Art Materials



Spatial word cards



GOAL of the game:

To turn a 3-D obstacle course into a 2-D map of the course on paper

VOCABULARY words:

map

QUESTION prompts:

How did you know where on your paper to draw that?

Can you describe your map?

Setup:

1. Make sure the obstacle course from [Obstacle Course Part 1](#) is still set up.

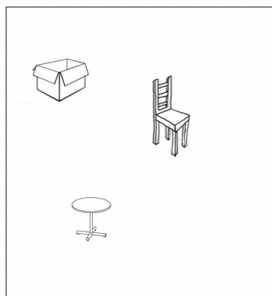
Note: If you were not able to make a large obstacle course, you can still do the mapping activity! Just create a mini-obstacle course on the floor or table using figurines, blocks, spoons, or other small objects.

Play:

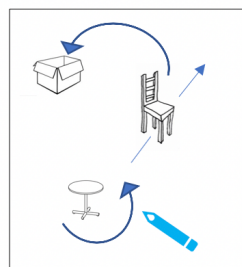
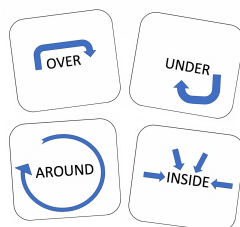


Have children look at the entire obstacle course from 1-2 feet away. Say, “You finished the obstacle course! Now, can you draw a map of the obstacle course on paper? Once you draw your map, we will use it to help us walk through the course one last time.”

Help children use art supplies to draw the obstacle course. Start by drawing all of the medium-to-large items (e.g., chairs).



Then, have children use the spatial word cards to describe their path through the course. Help them draw lines and arrows on their paper to show their path.



Finally, have children use their maps to walk through the obstacle course. At each step, prompt children to use spatial language to describe the step (e.g., “Now you’re at the chair. Where does your map say to go?”).

What children are learning:

- Mapmaking is an important skill for preschoolers to practice! Help children learn what maps are by pointing out the maps at bus stops, in stores, and in parks. As you walk around, show children how the objects and landmarks in front of them correspond to points on a map.
- When children create their own maps, they are representing their 3-D world in a 2-D picture. This helps them build spatial reasoning skills. Encourage them to keep practicing!