Balancing Act
All Ages

Sea lions are known for being able to balance things on their noses, using their whiskers. Challenge your child or family to see what they can balance using their fingers and their noses.

Try items like:

- Cotton balls
- Balloons
- Tennis balls
- Caps/hats
- Quarters/pennies
- Plastic cups
- Plastic Water bottles

Level Up Challenge: Make a guess about what items will be easier to balance. Start off with light items and work towards heavy ones. Time your kiddoes to see how long they can balance.

The Training Game
Ages: 7-16

Our Zookeepers are specialized in training using operant conditioning with positive reinforcement. This means when an animal shows a desired behavior or ability, they are rewarded with a treat. An undesired behavior is ignored until the animal provides the desired behavior when asked. This is helpful for providing veterinary care for our animals, as they can then participate in their own veterinary care.

But how does the training start? Our animals do not understand a new behavior cue right away. Instead, we must lead them toward the behavior we want through small behaviors that are close to the ones we want to train. If we want a lion to shift inside so we can clean the habitat, a reward may be given when they first approach their door. If they then wander off, that is okay. Then the reward would be given for putting a paw through the doorway on a later attempt. In these small steps, the lion can be trained to shift completely inside when asked. This does not mean they always will, but it does help.

For this game, you will take on the role of a trainer, just like the sea lion keepers you may have watched today. This game will also require a partner. Have each person make a list of simple behaviors.

Some samples are included below:

- Stand up or sit down.
- Walk through a door then walk back.
- Point to a specific item in the room.
- Pick up an item and move it.

Come up with as many behaviors as you would like. Once you have your lists, decide who will be the trainer first. The other partner will play the role of the animal.

The trainer cannot verbally tell the other what to do, since our animals do not understand our instructions at first. The animal player must try to figure out what the behavior is by trying different things, like sitting down, spinning in a circle, or moving about the room. If they get close to the desired behavior, the trainer may snap or clap, to signal that they are on the right track. The snap or clap signifies a reward is coming. We call this a bridge.

For example, if my trainer is trying to get me to sit down, they might snap if I walked near a chair. If I walked away and came back, another snap would be a clue that I am getting closer. How many behaviors can your partner figure out? This game can even be played with your friends using face time or other electronic means of video communication!