

# tinkergarten®

## AT HOME



### WEEK OF APRIL 13

This Week's Topic: **Unlocking Independent Play**

This Week's Focus: **Transforming**

### The Design Behind this Week

By design [kids' minds are messy](#), and they **need to repeat actions and experiences over time in order to organize and strengthen their brains**—essentially, that is how early learning works. For us, armed with only an efficient adult mind, it can be easy to miss the incredible learning and development that happens when kids repeat and repeat and repeat the same, simple patterns as they play.

So, what are some of these patterns? One set of patterns are referred to by experts as [“behavioral schema”](#)—and you'll recognize them right away. For example, does your child spin in circles? That's a schema called “rotation.” Do they line things up in rows? Yup, that's known as “trajectory.” We call the pattern of packing, moving and dumping objects “transporting.” Without any teaching, regardless of culture, kids all over the world exhibit and repeat these patterns when they play. Read more about the full set of behavioral schema [here](#).

Once we can see these patterns, we can include them in the activities we set up for kids. Plus, because they are so engaging, kids will stick with these activities for long periods of time. Kids have fun. We get stretches of independent play (Ahhh). And, we can trust that that play is supporting a natural, brain-building process. Win-win for the team!

### This week's focus: Transforming

This week, we'll focus on a schema called **transforming**, or changing the state of something. Transforming often involves some level of destruction (a win for kids!) that then leads to creating something new.

Even though most of us can't stand it when broccoli, apple sauce and pasta get mashed together at dinner, knowing that your child's brain is actually flexing the transforming schema may make that mess a bit easier to take. And maybe you can establish non-mealtimes as an opportunity to mix and mash away! All of this week's activities support transforming—and we can't wait to see what kids concoct!

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# Main Activity – Potions!

Potion making is a beloved way to enjoy transforming at any age. Babies, big kids and all in-betweens are all able to engage in some way with the activity, and the materials couldn't be simpler:

## What you need:

- A 'potion pot' (a mason jar, a cup, a bowl)
- A bit of water
- Tools (sticks, spoons, etc. to use to mash, smash and stir)
- Whatever ingredients kids want. Some ideas:

### Outdoor ingredients:

- "Found on the ground" treasures like leaves, pine needles, acorns, grass, petals or dirt.
- Larger objects to pick, pull and pluck apart like flowers, pinecones or branches.

### Indoor ingredients:

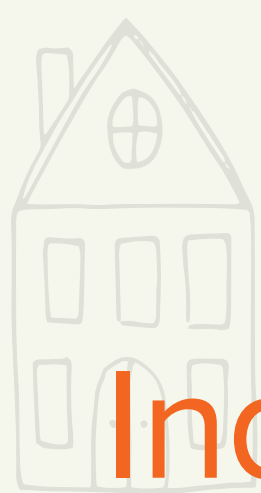
- Kitchen items like spices, baking goods, oils, small food items, food coloring
- Bathroom items like shaving cream, mouthwash or toothpaste

## Steps to take:

1. Present your child with their very own 'potion pot.' Wonder for a minute What is potion? What ingredients can turn this ordinary jar into a potion pot?! Potion = water plus any ingredients you want to add!
2. Fill the jar up halfway with water, and set your potion master free to find, add and mix the ingredients most intriguing to them.
3. Another secret to supporting play is to **introduce new materials or "ingredients" over time**. If you are outdoors, that should be pretty easy, because the ingredients are everywhere, and you just need to give kids time to find them. If you are indoors, it helps to make just a few ingredients available to start. Then, place new ingredients or new tools out without saying a word to spark new ideas as your child plays.







# Independent Extensions

Below you'll find some other ways to inspire transforming play, depending on the age and stage of your transformer. Remember, each child has a unique sensory system, so they may like to transform in different ways. And transforming can get messy, so we have [some tips for managing](#) the mess for you, too!

## All Ages—Mud Play!

Got dirt? Got water? Simply offer an open patch of earth or container of dirt and some water (even just a few cups worth). What happens when dirt and water meet to form mud is transforming at its best. Hand your child the water to dump, and then they're off to mixing and exploring. If kids are reluctant to touch mud, you can offer tools like sticks or spoons to support them. [Read more ideas](#) and reasons why mud play is marvelous for kids. And, if you need to stay indoors, you can always substitute flour or cornstarch in place of dirt.



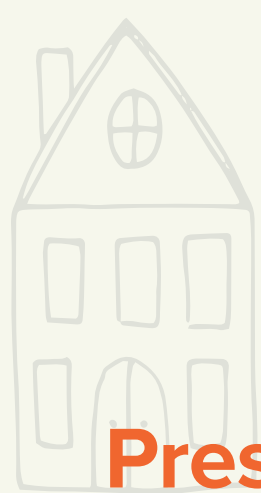
## Babies/Toddlers

- **Got paper?** Show your little one how you crumple, fold and tear paper. Then, invite them to join in. Or, place pieces of paper on the ground for your child to crawl over and crumple, enjoying the sounds and textures as they move. Need convincing (or just a good laugh)? Watch a [baby giggle her way](#) through joyful paper play.
- **Got herbs or flowers?** Join your child in plucking and picking apart an assortment of edible herbs or flowers. After you transform the items into smaller pieces, scoop some of them up and make them “rain” down on the ground. [Click here](#) for a list of edible flowers.
- **Got berries?** Invite your child to squish and smoosh blueberries, strawberries or raspberries on the ground or in a bowl with their hands. How does it look? Taste? Smell? Offer a spoon to incorporate some mixing into the sensory play. If you have a spare bit of cloth or piece of paper, introduce it as a way to finger paint with their smashed berries.



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## Preschoolers and Up

- **Got blocks?** As we said, destruction is a wonderfully fun and important piece of transformation. Build a tower out of blocks, boxes, stuffed animals...and then have fun bringing it down.
- **Got the joy to destroy?** Find a few items from the outside (pinecones, leaves, flowers) and/or inside (newspaper, boxes, Cheerios) that you are okay with losing, and go to town destroying them! Now you have all of these little parts. What can you make with them? (Got tape? Stick them together to make something new!)
- **Got mud?** Go deeper with mud play by experimenting: What happens when you add more water? How about more dirt? Or, introduce muffin or pie tins to inspire pretend baking play. Spring is the perfect time for mud pies, mud pizzas and all other mud goodies decorated with whatever treasures you can find in your yard (pebbles, acorns, flowers, etc.).
- **Got berries and spices?** Then you have a painting studio ready to go! Have kids smush berries, spices, or even some mushy fruits or veggies if you have them lying around, add water and muscle, and they've got a whole palette of natural paints to use.
- **Got a big pot?** [Stone soup](#) is being served! All you need is a big pot, some water, a bunch of 'ingredients' (stones, twigs, leaves, acorns), and a tool for mixing, and you have a tried and true activity that kids will ask to do again and again.
- **Got story ideas?** If you have a kid who likes to ground things in story while they play, introduce the idea of "magic potion." Ask them for their ideas about what the potion they made could do and who it could be for. Encourage more story building by asking questions about what other characters are involved, where the story is happening, and what happens next.







## School-Age Kids

- **Got paper and hands?** Challenge your child to transform one or more pieces of paper into a sculpture of their choosing using only their hands (no scissors or adhesives allowed). How many ways can they discover to fold, shape and even connect the pieces of paper? Take all of that paper and keep transforming by turning it into new paper! See our [Renewable Art DIY Activity](#) for directions.
- **Got experimenters?** Invite kids to set up a potion experiment (complete with control and variable groups) to see what happens if two potions are identical, with the exception of an added element in one, and see how that one element changes things. Set out vinegar and baking soda to give kids a chance to discover a particularly exciting transformation.
- **Got performers?** Kids can create several different potions, and name them for the effect they have on people ('sneezosmoothie' makes you not stop sneezing, 'singjuice' makes you sing everything you say, etc.) Then they can pretend they've eaten some of the potions and assume the characteristics of the potions. Those could become characters in a scene or short play or story.
- **Got bakers?** Invite the kids in your house to invent their own recipe or just enjoy following a favorite one using ingredients in your kitchen and bake a treat for the family. Or, invite kids to put on a cooking show or competition.

## Grandparents

We continue to celebrate the chance to include grandparents to help in our play. This week, encourage grandparents to whip up a potion of their own. Send photos or videos to one another or arrange to hop on video chat to share your potions and stories. Grandparents could also request specific potions to help with certain things they need and kids can create them.

## Literacy Connections

This week we're excited to share *The Perfect Square* as our book connection, a marvelous story of transformation and creativity. Watch Tinkergarten teammate, Cassie Smith reading the book aloud [here](#). You can also sing the [Come to Tinkergarten](#) song and use imagination and movement to "transform" into different creatures.

## Share Your Experiences!

Join us LIVE on Tuesday, April 14th on the [Tinkergarten Facebook page](#). Share photos and stories of your experiences and time outside this week using #tinkergarten and #outdoorsall4. Share in our free [#OutdoorsAll4 Facebook](#) group, and we may just feature your photos in next week's email!

## About Tinkergarten

Tinkergarten® is a breakthrough method of raising kids, helping families make the most of the critical window of childhood with simple, fun and engaging outdoor play experiences that are designed for learning.

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