

tinkergarten®

AT HOME



WEEK OF APRIL 20

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

This Week's Focus: **Connecting**

The Design Behind this Week

Last week, we introduced the concept that there are important patterns that kids repeat in their play. Being able to [spot these patterns](#) gives us insight into how to make play more engaging, meaningful, and self-sustaining for kids. We kicked off with the transforming pattern — the breaking, blending and mixing of materials to make something new. And you've all made some AMAZING concoctions! [Check them out!](#)

This week our play will focus on the **connecting pattern**.

This week's focus: Connecting

Not sure what we mean by “connecting?” Connecting is simply the linking or fusing together of two objects. It may start out as a fascination for tape or stickers (for some of us, this never goes away). Or, you may see your child get lost in linking toy trains,

clicking LEGO together or quietly

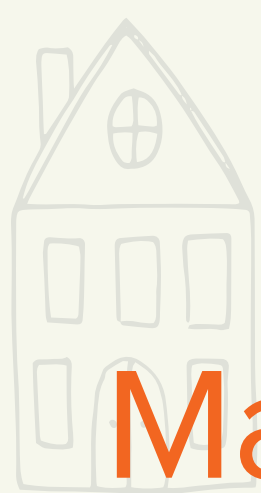
playing open-shut with velcro on sneakers. As children grow, they often get their connecting in while they are creating, as they make collage, use duct tape to connect objects to build things, or even learn more sophisticated ways of connecting like knitting or weaving.

No matter how it plays out, there is something deeply satisfying about connecting. Even better, the physical act of linking objects early on actually helps kids learn to make connections between ideas in their mind down the road.

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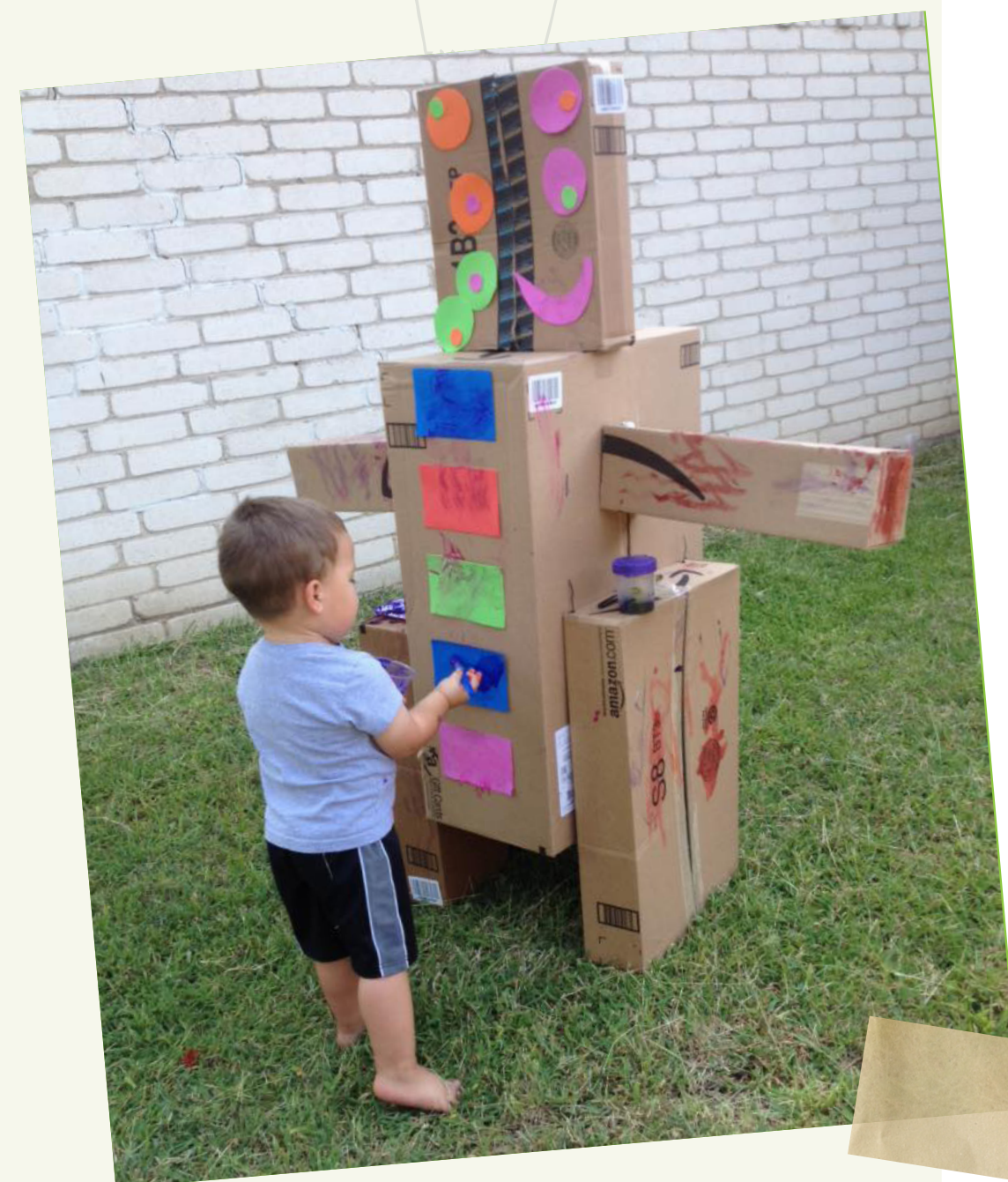


Main Activity: Let's Connect!

Keep it simple: Pick one object, add something that makes it connect-able, and play with what it's like to connect different materials to it.

Steps to take:

1. **Find an object** that you're fine with kids using for play (like a tree, a stick, a box, an egg carton, a container, or a play table).
2. Work with your kid(s) to **make the object connectable** (use tape, glue, contact paper, Velcro, mud, forest putty (aka play dough), yarn, string, magnets...or anything else that connects something to something else).
3. Model for kids how you might **stick an item** onto the (now connectable) object. Try leaves, grass, twigs, flower petals, scraps of paper, beads, beans, etc).
4. Here's are some ideas of **what the play could look like**:
 - Wrap a stick with double-sided (or inside-out!) tape to make it even "stick"ier. Kids can attach leaves, flower petals or other nature treasures to the stick.
 - Take a box and wrap some yarn or string around and around the box. Kids can weave branches, leaves, flowers or any indoor objects through the yarn.
 - Plunk down some forest [putty](#) (aka play dough). Kids can stick little toys or nature treasures in the play dough.
 - Put a few drops of glue in each compartment of an egg carton. See what colorful treasures (beans, beads, acorns, etc.) stick inside each of the 12 egg carton compartments.
5. Over time, kids can continue to add different materials to the same object. Kids can also try any of our independent extensions to keep connecting all week long.
6. Want even more ways to help kids with this type of play? Read [this post](#) about supporting kids during independent play. It's a quick read designed to help set you up for success with activities like these.



Independent Extensions

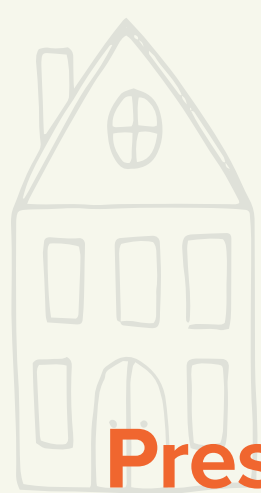
Below you'll find some other ways to inspire connecting, depending on the age and stage of your child.

Babies/Toddlers

- **Got tape?** Loosely stick pieces of painter's tape or masking tape on walls, boxes, windows, or the floor and babies can peel them off and put them back on again. For 'sticky feet sensation', lay some tape on the floor with the sticky side up and have them walk on it.
- **Got Post-it notes?** Post-it notes are great for toddlers to explore and can be easily stuck and unstuck. Place them at different places and heights (on walls, tables, the refrigerator) and encourage them reaching into different positions to get them. If you don't have Post-it notes, you can use stickers and small squares of paper instead.
- **Got mud?** The ultimate connector! Babies can connect it to their bodies and objects around them. They can also stick things into mud and take them out again. Experiment with the ratio of water:dirt and they can explore different consistencies of mud.
- **Got musicians?** Any combination of non-breakable kitchen items (wooden spoons and pans, pots or bowls), when connected with one another with a good bang, can make music! This activity is great for hand-eye coordination and gross motor skills as well.



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Preschoolers and Up

- **Got putty?** Use any kind of clay or playdough (including [forest putty](#) that you can make at home). Kids can stick things into the putty to enjoy connecting as they create ‘snowmen’, mountains, buildings, or whatever inspires them. Stick some nature treasures into the putty to add another dimension to the play.
- **Got mud and trees?** [Making ‘tree faces’](#) is a favorite connecting activity at Tinkergarten. Plop a ball of mud onto the side of a tree, then the mud serves as the connector while nature objects can become nose, eyes, etc. Kids develop empathy as they create characters with a range of feelings and personalities, too.
- **Got tape?** Wrap tape sticky side up or out around a wrist, a rain boot, a stick, a tree trunk, or even a toilet paper roll. Then enjoy sticking little objects with different colors and textures all over it to make bracelets, anklets, [nature crowns](#), wands, or to decorate for a celebration (like an [Earth Day](#) feast!).
- **Got scraps?** If you have newspaper or construction paper and/or wilted flowers or plants you can make a collage! Paint glue, then arrange the pieces the way you want them. You can brush over the picture again with a water/glue mixture to fix it in place.
- **Got magnets?** Go fish! Grab magnets off of the fridge and attach them to the end of a piece of string or twine. Then, attach the other end to a stick. Voila, Fishing pole! Sprinkle metal jar lids around on a blanket or sheet to form a pretend “pond.” Kids can enjoy hours of pretend fishing. Add an academic twist by drawing numbers or letters on the lids, so kids can practice recognizing the symbols as they draw in each catch.
- **Got LEGOs or Magnatiles?** Or anything other building material you can connect vertically or horizontally? Challenge kids to see if they can connect enough Magnatiles or magnets to fill up the front of the fridge. Or if they can link LEGOs together to get from point A to point B.





School-Age Kids

- **Got inventors?** All you need are a bunch of materials from around the house (toys, kitchen items, books, small pieces of furniture) and something to connect them (tape, string, long pieces of fabric). How could we connect these? What kind of machine, creature or invention could it become? How does it work and what does it do? (Shout out to a favorite book, *The Most Magnificent Thing*, by Ashley Spires, that features a girl and her dog and their quest to invent.)
- **Got weavers?** Challenge kids to weave a web that someone else in the house has to follow to get from point A to point B. The web can be made from yarn, string, or long pieces of fabric, and can be woven around and through things like bed frames, cribs, bike wheels, baby gates, stair railings, and more.
- **Got necklace makings?** Threading something like string, dental floss, or yarn through anything with a hole in it (pasta, cereal, beads, leaves with holes) is great connecting work. Older kids can turn these into gifts for family members, friends, or stuffed animals!
- **Got math?** Give kids a collection of small objects (or ask them to go find them on their own) and then give them some paper and either tape, glue or..even mud, and ask them to make patterns. Create the counting numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, 5...), build arrays (2x1, 2x2, 2x3) or, for challenge, the triangular #s (1,3,6,10, 15, 21). After they've built a few, you can try to guess the next number in the pattern, or vice versa.

Grandparents

We continue to celebrate the chance to include grandparents to help in our play. This week, have grandparents and kids both watch the read aloud (linked below) and then each can pick one of the spreads from the book to recreate or do their own version of themselves. Then set up a time to do a video share of everyone's creations!

Literacy Connections

This week we're excited to share a beautiful picture book with drawing and photographs all about connecting called *Mama Built a Little Nest* by Jennifer Ward. Watch Tinkergarten teammate, Melissa Ferrao, read the book aloud [here](#). You can also sing the *Come to Tinkergarten* song and feature animals that use their connecting skills to eat, make homes, and get from place to place.

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 early learning years with simple, fun and engaging outdoor play experiences that are designed for learning.