



tinkergarten®

AT HOME

WEEK OF MAY 17

This Week's Focus: Empathy (Learn about Emotions)



For the next two weeks of Tinkergarten at Home, we will focus on [empathy](#). Empathy is, quite possibly, our greatest superpower.

We need empathy to build strong relationships, to care for others and for our community, and to learn how to work with one another. Kids start to build a foundation in empathy even as babies—the more practice we give them, the stronger their roots of empathy. Good news? Play can provide kids with experiences that help them naturally build a strong foundation in empathy.

As author and empathy expert, Roman Krznaric, describes it, empathy is “the art of stepping into the shoes of another person & seeing the world through their eyes.”

The design behind this week

There are several facets to empathy. This week, we hone in on the most fundamental of them. Known as “affective empathy,” it is the ability to **identify and understand emotions**. Learning to read other people’s faces is a skill that helps all kids identify and sense emotions in others and themselves—the cornerstone of empathy.



What humans do with our 43 facial muscles when we feel one of the six basic emotions (anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness and surprise) is pretty much the same across the world and is evident even to infants.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Main activity	p. 2
Mirror play for babies	p. 3
Mirror play for toddlers	p. 4
Musical feelings for preschoolers	p. 5
Emotion potions for school-age kids	p. 6
Read-aloud for all ages	p. 7





Main Activity: Making Faces

GET SET FOR PLAY

Materials:



- **Something sticky/pliable:** Mud, play dough, [forest putty](#) (aka homemade play dough)
- **Nature treasures:** Acorns, pinecones, pebbles, petals, etc.
- **Other small elements:** Pasta, dried beans, marbles, buttons, etc.

Set-up:

- Situate yourselves near a surface for the face making (a tree, the ground, a stoop)

STEPS TO GET PLAY STARTED

- Before you start, ask kids, *"How are you feeling today?"*
- *"Do you know how you can often tell how someone is feeling? Looking at their face! Use your faces to show how each of you are feeling today."*
- *"I was thinking we could make new faces out of stuff! The faces can show the feelings we are feeling, or they can be a creature we make and then show whatever they're feeling."*



- Show kids the mud/playdough that you will use for the face, and send them off to find facial feature treasures (or dump out objects you've got on hand).
- Roll dough into a ball, then plop it (with gusto!) on whatever surface you're using. Show kids how to gently press it into the shape they want.
- Once they are in the groove with the play, step back and let kids create on their own.

SUPPORT AND EXTEND PLAY

- If your child struggles or gets frustrated, acknowledge that feeling, and remind them that they can reshape, reform or even start fresh.
- When kids seem to be "finished" ask them to introduce you to their new friend.
- If you're able, play alongside your child!



Independent Extensions

There are many ways to increase awareness of emotions and how they're expressed. Following are some of our favorite simple and creative ways, organized by age group.

Mirror Play for Babies

Babies are drawn to faces from the moment they are born. Mirrors can be terrific tools for helping babies to study their own faces and the faces of their trusted adults. As babies explore their reflection in a mirror, they learn to identify the different parts of the face and the ways that each part moves to create facial expressions.

GET SET FOR PLAY

Materials:

- Shatterproof mirror

Set-up:

- Position the mirror in baby's play area so baby can see their reflection. Place a few of baby's favorite play objects near the mirror to invite baby to move and engage with their reflection during play.

INVITE PLAY

- Lie next to baby and look at your reflections together. Point to and label each part of your face and baby's face. Make different facial expressions and label the emotions to which are connected.

SUPPORT AND EXTEND PLAY

- Tickle or massage baby's foot or belly and see if baby notices their own laugh or smile in the mirror.
- Sing songs or silly rhymes in front of the mirror and exaggerate your facial expressions.





Reflection Play for Toddlers

As kids reach toddlerhood, they begin to realize that the reflection they see in the mirror is their own and that their facial expressions match the emotions they feel inside. This emerging self-awareness offers a great opportunity for toddlers to explore their facial expressions through play.

GET SET FOR PLAY

Materials:

- **Reflective surface** (i.e. shatterproof and/or well secured mirror or window)
- **Objects to explore** (i.e. nature items, small toys or items from around the house)
- **Materials to “stick on” mirror** (i.e. washable paint, shaving cream, washable markers, stickers)

Set-up:

- Place a shatterproof mirror on the ground or on a tabletop

STEPS TO GET PLAY STARTED

- Arrange objects from nature or from around the house on top. Invite your toddler to explore the reflections of the objects and their own face as they play.

SUPPORT AND EXTEND PLAY

- Offer sticky materials (i.e. stickers, tape, post-it notes) and welcome your child to decorate the reflective surface.
- Invite your child to use their hands to explore washable paint or shaving cream on a mirror, window or other reflective surface. Model using a finger to make lines and swirls to get them started.
- Add paintbrushes to the sensory play or offer washable markers to invite your child to paint over and around the reflection of their face.
- When play is winding down, offer a wet washcloth so your toddler can enjoy the experience of wiping away the marks.





Musical Feelings for Preschoolers

Preschoolers are becoming more cognizant of their feelings, and are learning to more easily articulate them. They are also keenly interested in experimenting with the extremes of emotion across the feelings spectrum, often to great dramatic effect.

GET SET FOR PLAY

Materials:

- Something that plays music
- Paper, markers, crayons

Set-up:

- Choose some inspiring ‘feeling’ songs. If you're looking for a starting place for music, here are some great options:

Happy: “Les Toreadors” (Bizet)

Sad: “The Funeral March” (Chopin)

Angry: “Allegro con Brio” (Beethoven)

- Tee up your songs and place an art area with supplies near the music source.



STEPS TO GET PLAY STARTED

- Start playing a song and wonder aloud, *"How does this song make you feel?"*
- *"What do you think about making art while we listen? And we can just pay attention to how the music makes us feel and what our hands want to do while the music is playing."*

- Model the use of color, texture, size and shape of stroke, and abstract design as a means of expressing whatever emotion(s) come up.

SUPPORT AND EXTEND PLAY

- This is the type of activity that kids will likely want to return to, so if possible, leave the supplies out so they remain accessible.
- It's fun to frame what they created along with a caption that identifies the related emotion(s).
- If it's possible, this is a wonderful opportunity for parents to join in and create their own artwork.



Emotion Potions for School-Age Kids

In the early elementary grades, kids tend to be aware of the nuances of different emotions. They are also developing the ability to think abstractly. While the preschool years are devoted to concrete and literal thinking, this next stage is dedicated to playing with interpretation and metaphor.

GET SET FOR PLAY

Materials:

- A space that can handle a little mess
- 3-4 glass jars (or other clear containers)
- Paper/tape/markers for labels
- Water and color ingredients (e.g. food coloring; crushed up chalk; spices; etc.)
- Small objects to place inside jars (e.g. small sticks; flower petals; leaves; beads; buttons; rice)

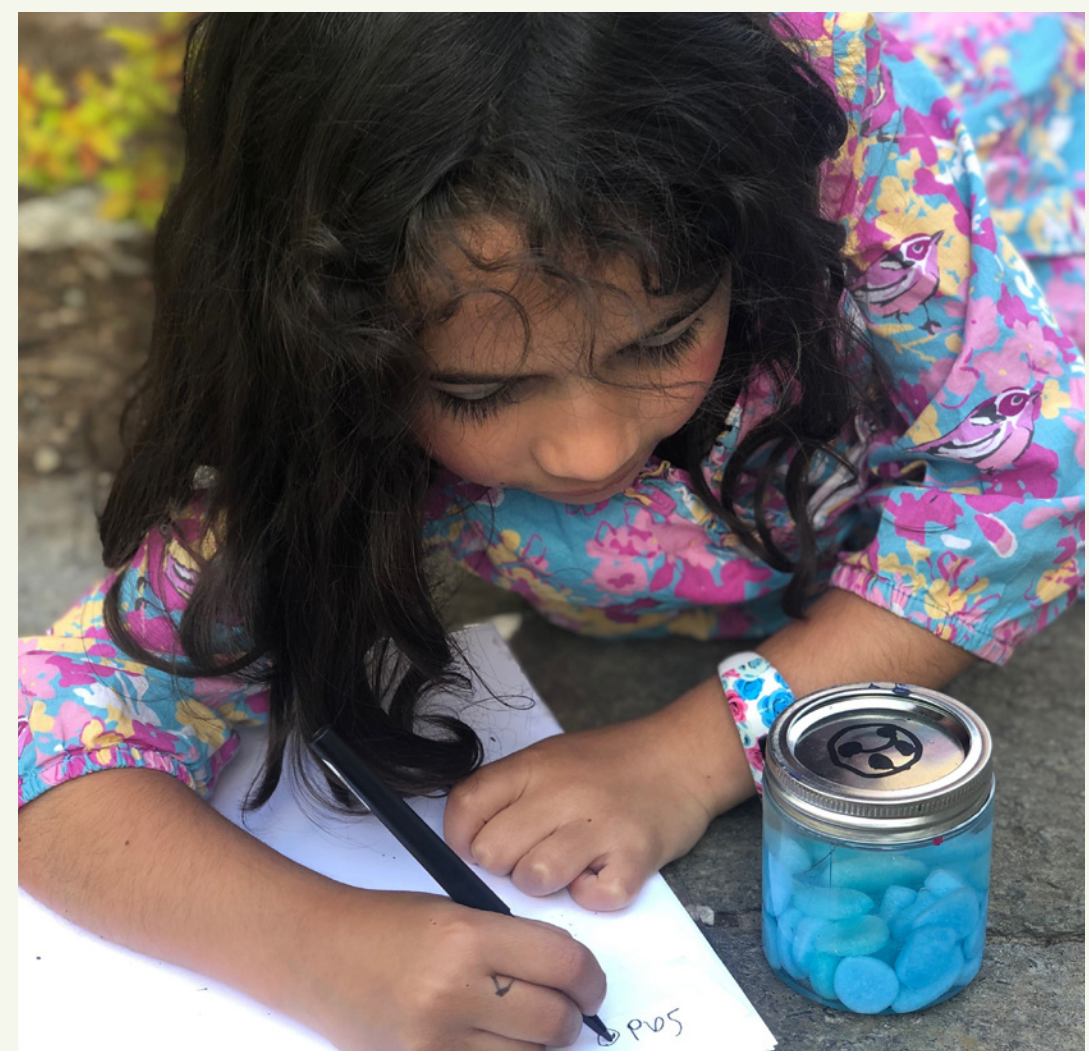
Set-up:

- Fill each jar halfway with water. Label each jar with an emotion. You can write the words together with your child and/or draw a picture to go with it.



STEPS TO GET PLAY STARTED

- Lay out the jars and wonder aloud, “*What do you think these are?*”
- Look at and discuss the labels together. Invite your child to think of these ‘feelings jars’ as a way to show what it looks like inside them when they feel these different things.



SUPPORT AND EXTEND PLAY

- Offer questions to support their experience: “*What is it like inside us when we feel these different feelings?*” Encourage children to try to put words/descriptions to the feelings.
- Ask questions like, “*What could happy look like? What color might it be?*” or “*What kinds of things might be rumbling around inside you when you’re angry?*”





Literacy Connections

This week, welcome Tinkergarten leader extraordinaire, Kerri Sheppard, for a read-aloud of *The Way I Feel* by Janan Cain. Watch and listen [here](#)!

Share Your Experiences!

Join us LIVE for songs, sharing and a demo of some of this week's activities on Tuesday, May 19th at 11:30 ET/8:30PT on the [Tinkergarten Facebook page](#). Share photos and stories of your experiences and time outside this week using #tinkergarten and #outdoorsall4 or in our free [#OutdoorsAll4 Facebook group](#), and we may just feature your photos in next week's email!

About Tinkergarten

Tinkergarten® is your guide to purposeful outdoor play—the kind of play that helps kids become healthy, capable and confident learners.



“THE GREATEST GIFT OF HUMAN BEINGS IS
THAT WE HAVE THE POWER OF EMPATHY.”
—MERYL STREEP