



tinkergarten®

AT HOME



WEEK OF MAY 24

This Week's Focus: Empathy (Caring for Others)

In week 2 of our focus on [empathy](#), we move from helping kids understand and identify emotions to learning to think about the perspective and feelings of someone else.

To help children practice these skills, we've designed this week's play around a "forest friend" (i.e. homemade stuffy) that kids help to create, and then continue to love, care for and play with.

Simply introducing a stuffed animal or baby naturally presents opportunities for kids to put empathy into practice. Once your child has made a forest friend, you can click below by age for easy empathy-boosting play ideas. Playing with forest friends that kids themselves have had a hand in making is deeply engaging for them at any age.



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How to Make A Forest Friend

Depending on your child(ren)'s age, your role may range from "here if you need me" to doing the work while your child "helps". At any age, kids will likely need some support from you to create a friend, but that small investment now will afford you tons of independent play later.



MATERIALS:

- Sock (1 per friend)
- Rubber bands (2 per friend) or twine
- Mason jar lid, roll of tape, toilet paper roll (to hold socks open)
- Rice, beans, other dried grains (or stuffing of your choice)
- Large container
- Scoop
- Adult scissors
- Markers

DIRECTIONS:

- Gather your materials and welcome children in by showing them an empty sock. *"Guess what I learned to do? We can turn a sock like this into a 'forest friend'! Would you like to do it too? Here, let's follow the steps together, each making our own."*
- Then, follow the steps below, side by side, letting kids do their steps their way, stepping in when they ask for help. Or, get your child's help to start, then complete the making part yourself.
- Set the sock up so it is easier to hold and fill. You can put a lid from a mason jar or a roll of tape in the top at the opening of the sock. (See pictures below.)
- Use a scoop to fill the sock about a third of the way with rice. This forms the base. [Do your scooping over a large bin so all of the rice that spills is contained.]
- Put a rubber band tightly around the sock at that point.
- Continue to fill the sock with rice to create a smaller section for the forest friend's head. Put another rubber band on to seal the top. Use scissors to either cut the remaining sock off, or make into ears if you want.
- Draw a face on the 'forest friend'. (Extra sweet when kids do the drawing!)

Tip:
Use a ring or tool to make it easy to add rice.





Babies: Introduce a Forest Friend

The seeds of empathy sprout in babies' relationships with their most trusted adults. Every time you respond to your baby's needs, you help them understand what those needs are which, in turn, will help them understand the needs of others as they grow. Play activities that give babies the chance to observe how adults care for them and for others are a terrific entry into early empathy.

GET SET FOR PLAY

Materials:

- Forest friend
- Cardboard box with holes cut out
- Blanket

STEPS TO GET PLAY STARTED

- Invite your baby to explore a container of rice while you make the forest friend. Narrate to your child as you take each step (i.e. *"I am filling my friend's body with rice"* or *"I am making a smile on my friend's face, because it feels happy."*)
- Place your completed 'forest friend' within baby's reach. Move it just a bit, or try to direct baby's attention to how soft it is. See what happens!

SUPPORT AND EXTEND PLAY

- Incorporate your forest friend into your child's daily routines. Bring them along for diaper changes, meal, bed and play times. Notice how your baby responds to the friend and to how you care for it.



- Play peek-a-boo with forest friend. Cut holes in a cardboard box and help the forest friend hop inside or cover your forest friend with a blanket and wonder aloud, *"Where did forest friend go?"* Invite your baby to discover forest friend. Then, offer your baby the forest friend and watch to see how he chooses to play.





Toddlers: Basic Care for Forest Friends

Toddlers are learning that they can have an impact on the people in their world and they begin to imitate adult behaviors—especially those that have to do with adults caring for them (e.g. cooking, feeding, changing, etc.). Simple pretend play is a terrific way for toddlers to act out the caregiving tasks they have watched their trusted adults take part in.

GET SET FOR PLAY

Materials:

- An assortment of items for feeding and sleeping that can be used in play (i.e. baby blanket, cardboard box, stuffed animal, bottle or sippy cup, spoon, bowl)

Set-up:

- Line a cardboard box with a blanket to make a bed for a forest friend.
- Set out a variety of items that are familiar to your toddler for feeding and sleeping.

STEPS TO GET PLAY STARTED

- Model noticing and responding to forest friend's needs. *"This friend is sleepy. Forest friend, it's time for bed. Should we put our little friend to sleep?"*
- Invite your toddler to lead the caregiving play. *"This forest friend is hungry. Would you like to feed it a bottle?"* Then, step back and see where your child takes the play.

SUPPORT AND EXTEND PLAY

- If your toddler enjoys caregiving play, add new items to support that. Would your toddler like to wear their forest friend? Stroll with their forest friend? Make a highchair to feed their friend?
- Your child could also incorporate their forest friend into other favorite play activities. Forest friends can take rides in dump trucks or wagons, sit atop sand castles and hide out in forts. (Beware—they just don't fare too well in water.)





Preschoolers: Play Time for Forest Friends

Making a ‘forest friend’ with their own hands instills both pride and independence in preschoolers. Playing with and taking care of their friend is also empowering. This week welcome kids to play the role of teacher and wonder what activities their forest friend might enjoy—empathy in practice! This can also be a lovely way to remember what they love about learning at home or in a school that they miss.

GET SET FOR PLAY

Materials:

- Items from outside and inside that can be used for setting up a “school” or “recess/play time” for a forest friend.

STEPS TO GET PLAY STARTED

- Ask your child, *“And who is this friend? Do they have a name?”*
- *“How does (name) like to play? Do you think you can be a teacher for your forest friend? Or do you think your forest friend would like to join you for outside play today?”*

You could create...

A classroom for your forest friend (and maybe a few stuffies).

A read aloud area or a place to sing to/with your forest friend.

A play space that is just right for them.

A spot to have snack time.

A dress up area so you & your forest friend could play dress up, just like at school (or at home).



- Offer the materials you’ve gathered to see if anything sparks an idea or welcome kids to gather materials from outdoors or inside themselves.
- Let them know that you’ll be nearby if they need you for anything.

SUPPORT AND EXTEND PLAY

- If kids are deep into their play, it’s great to let their attention stay there. If they seem a bit lost or look up to engage you, ask them to tell you about their friend. When they start to talk, information may emerge that can spark new ideas.
- If it’s okay with you, challenge kids to go find (or fashion) objects that they'd like to use in their play but don’t have.
- If the “teaching/school” prompt doesn’t catch fire, welcome preschoolers to bring their forest friend along on whatever adventures do!



School-age Kids: Engineer for Forest Friends

School-age kids may or may not be at a stage where they're interested in taking care of babies or playing with dolls. If doll play is still an interest, they may enjoy the preschool prompts. Alternately, you can harness their more advanced thinking skills by offering an engineering challenge rooted in empathy.

GET SET FOR PLAY

Materials:

- Make whatever loose parts you have around available to kids. Some examples:
 - Twine or rope
 - Tape, sticks, pieces of wood, rocks
 - Recycled household items (bottles, paper, boxes, paper towel rolls)
 - Small items from the house that could be (temporarily) repurposed, items from a junk drawer if you have them

STEPS TO GET PLAY STARTED

- Ask them to introduce you to their new friend.
- *“Do you want a challenge?! How can you build something that helps your friend get from place to place and still feel safe?”*
- Brainstorm what getting from place to place might mean (e.g. around the block, across the yard, lowered from a window to the ground). *“You can use any of these materials, or things that you can find outside or around the house (just check first on things I might need to okay).”*
- Let kids get started with planning and building, remaining available to support as needed.

SUPPORT AND EXTEND PLAY

- Kids may also want to build something that can serve other needs a forest friend may have such as: a way to rock the friend to sleep; hiding out with their friend; helping them play with other animals.
- Because these kids are older, they may not need (or want) you around while they're playing. However, they will still get frustrated if/when they hit a snag in their plan. It's great to act as a sounding board for them without leading them to an answer or solving the problem yourself. Kids learn to problem solve and trust themselves as they experiment, fail, and experiment again. [[Read more](#) about helping kids learn from failure.]





Literacy Connections

We have a very special read-aloud guest this week! Nine-year-old Aaliyah of Western Mass shares [The Rabbit Listened by Cori Doerrfeld](#). Aaliyah started a streaming bedtime storytime show, ‘Dreamland with Aaliyah’, to offer kids some reading while they’re not physically in school. “I think it is really important now that we catch up on reading so that when we come back we’re ready.” You can read more about Aaliyah and her amazing effort [here](#).

Share Your Experiences!

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

