

FOCUS WEEK: Tiny Friends

This week we will zoom in to observe and celebrate the tiny friends who live among us—bugs! Tiny friends is a Tinkergarten term we have used since our first season to refer to bugs, insects and small creatures that buzz, fly and creep around us. The term helps frame bugs, who are fascinating but sometimes have a bad reputation, in a positive light, and it helps to engender a connection and care for them. Discovering and looking closely at the busy world below your feet will give your family the opportunity to:

- Experience wonder, joy and curiosity
- Slow down and tune into the world around you and to one another
- Support attention and focus skills

THE MAGIC OF FOREST PUTTY

A tried and true hit among Tinkergarten explorers everywhere, forest putty (aka homemade playdough) is easy and fun to make. It makes a great addition to this week's activities, allowing kids to create tiny friends based on the creatures they observe. Find easy forest putty recipes [here](#).

MORE ABOUT FOCUS

When we say “focus”, we mean the ability to direct and shift our attention—a skill kids need to take in and process information, collaborate, reflect, evaluate and act on their goals. Activities that inspire kids to slow down, look closely, wonder and observe their surroundings with all their senses are terrific ways to support focus.

To find out more:

- [7 Ways to Help Your Kids Develop Focus](#)
- [What are Executive Functions and Why We Should All Want to Know?](#)



AALIYAH READS!

This week, join Aaliyah for a read aloud of *Some Bugs* by Angela DiTerlizzi.

Watch and listen [here](#)! You can also purchase this book for your home library [here](#).

Even though insects often have a bad reputation and can even be a little frightening to some kids, **tiny friends are absolutely captivating.** Their unique body structures, special ways of moving, and special noises make them absolutely amazing to behold. The chance to slow down and observe the “tiny friends” around them, not only gives kids an authentic chance to practice sustained focus, it also inspires empathy and care for nature!

If your preschooler falls in love with searching, welcome them to search for tiny friends every day for as long as they'd like! When it's time to transition to other activities, offer a jar, forest putty and other objects from nature to make a hangout for their tiny friends. Or, if they are really into center play, welcome them to create art inspired by tiny friends in the art center.

GET SET FOR PLAY

Materials

- Clear container
- Container lid or cheesecloth and a rubber band
- Nature treasures
- Art center materials
- Twine

Optional

- Hammer and nails (for poking holes in the lid)
- Materials to make “forest putty”: flour, salt, cream of tartar, oil, water
- Magnifying glass

Set up

- **If you have access to outdoor spaces:** Bring your preschooler (and the materials above) on an adventure to an outdoor space (i.e. park, grassy area, backyard).
- **If doing this activity inside:** Collect an insect in a clear container. If you cannot easily find an insect, collect small nature treasures in your jar (i.e. blades of grass, small rocks). Set up a space to investigate the contents of the jar.

Optional

- Optimal for tiny friends – Use a nail and a hammer to poke holes in your container's lid.
- Set up a small art center. [Here](#) is how.
- Make forest putty on your own or as a fun activity with your toddler. [Here](#) is an easy recipe.



STEPS TO GET PLAY STARTED

Search for Tiny Friends

- Welcome preschoolers to watch or even help you prepare a lid for your container that will allow any tiny friends who visit to breathe. Tiny friends need air to survive, just like we do!
- Model how to search for and handle tiny friends with gentle care and fascination. Help your preschooler gently scoop a tiny friend (i.e. ant, worm) into a container and secure the lid. Let them know this will keep the tiny friend safe.

Introduce the Hotel Project

- Now that they've had a chance to get to know the tiny friend a bit, wonder aloud what they might need to feel comfortable and stay alive.
- Invite kids to make a worm or bug "hotel" out of the container. *Wonder aloud, what kinds of things would this tiny friend want in their space? What makes them comfortable? What would be a nice treat?*
- They can use their nature treasures to help design the space. You can stay nearby, but once you see that they are engaged, it's great to leave them to their independent playing.
- Once the hotel is made, kids can observe their tiny friend(s) throughout the week. How do they or don't they interact with the new elements, and what else might they want to add?
- Make sure to sprinkle water and add dried leaves or whatever the tiny friend eats.
- After a few days, return the friend(s) to their natural habitat.



SUPPORT AND EXTEND PLAY**ART CENTER**

- Welcome your child to use their tiny friends they saw to make art! Maybe they can make a thank you card to their tiny friend for such a lovely visit. Or, just create.
- Be mindful to keep this invitation to create art inspired by tiny friends very open-ended with no need to represent or look just like tiny friends.
- Welcome your child to use [forest putty](#) and nature treasures to create their own tiny friends. *Would you like to make a bug like the ones we saw today?*
- Offer a ball of dough. *I wonder if we could use this to make the bug's body?*
- Talk about the bug body parts that you saw and how they moved. Offer a collection of nature treasures. *What could we use to make those parts of the bug?*

BEE THE TINY FRIENDS:

- Use sheets, pillowcases, paper plates or paper with string, rubber bands or tape to make yourself your own wings, extra legs or other features that you see on the tiny friends. Enjoy pretending to move, sound and be just like these tiny friends.



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.