

Friends & Feelings

How can kids develop empathy through play?

Inspiring Empathy
Ages 2 to 8

Kit Contents

Although the contents of your kit can be used in nearly limitless ways, this guide is designed to share some of our favorite ways to use the objects included to spark empathy-boosting play.

Contents List

- *Twig* by Aura Parker
- *The Big Umbrella* by Amy June Bates
- 15 "tree cookies" (tree slices)
- Folkmanis "Woodland Friends" puppet set (fox, squirrel, beaver, and bear)
- 2 pairs of cotton socks (for making forest friends)



Added Materials Needed for Play Ideas:

Forest Babies:

- Rice or beans
- Markers
- Rubber bands

Nature Faces:

- Nature treasures (pebbles, leaves, acorns, flowers, etc)
- Tree cookies

Invite Empathy Boosting Play

To follow are several ways to give kids an invitation to play in ways that help them to develop and deepen empathy.

Make Nature Faces

Set out the tree cookies and nature treasures (e.g. pebbles, acorns, leaves) or other small objects (e.g. buttons, LEGO, etc.). Arrange objects on the tree cookies to create faces.

- Before you get started, frame the activity with some empathy learning by asking, "Do you know how you can often tell how someone is feeling?" Take ideas. Talk about how looking at someone's face helps us see how they feel inside.
- Chat about what your faces look like and what it may mean about how you feel today.
- Then, segue into suggesting that your child use the materials to 'make faces' out of stuff. The faces can show the feelings we are feeling, or that we can imagine feeling.

LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW KIDS DEVELOP EMPATHY:

Empathy is our human superpower! And, the more we learn about the brain, the more we see that we are born with the capacity to learn empathy. So, it's never too early to support empathy development in our children. How best to do that? Through play in the most inspiring play setting of all—outdoors!

Read more about the different types of empathy, how children learn each and how you can support all three.

FOREST PUTTY

Forest putty is a favorite building and sensory-boosting play tool. What is it? Play dough with a little magic and very few rules!

Find easy recipes for forest putty [here](#), or use ready made dough. Just let kids take it outside or bring nature treasures in and build!



Ingredients: Flour; Salt; Oil and Cream of Tartar (optional)

Faces on the Trees

One of our all time favorite activities involves making faces on the side of a tree using mud or forest putty. Roll mud or putty into a ball, then plop the ball onto a the side of a tree or other surface. Press nature treasures in to form the features. Watch a quick how to video to see how you can turn this simple, sweet activity into an empathy boost.



Make and Care for Forest Friends



One way to help young children consider the needs of others and practice compassionate empathy is to care for dolls or toys—especially dolls they make with their own hands. That is why we love to help children make "forest friends" to care for. Here's how to help your child make their very own forest friend:

1. Show your child an empty sock. “Guess what I learned we can do? We can turn a sock like this into a ‘forest friend’! Would you like to do it too?” Then, follow the steps below, side by side, letting kids do their steps their way and stepping in when they ask for help.
2. 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.
3. Use a scoop to fill the sock about a third of the way with rice. Tie that section off with a rubber band to form the base.
4. 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 or hair.
5. Draw a face on the ‘forest friend,’ then enjoy playing with and caring for it.

[Tip: Do your scooping over a large bin so all of the rice that spills is contained!]



Puppet Play

Through the ages, people have used puppets to connect with children and give children safe, easy ways to explore and better understand emotions. Use your four forest puppets to inspire pretend play and model different ways friends or family members interact and impact one another's feelings. Below are some ideas of different characteristics you can give to your four woodland friends. Have fun!

Beaver is quite a busy friend who loves to build, engineer and solve problems. Beavers live in tight social groups, and enjoy being playful.

Squirrel has a great deal of energy, always rushing here and there, chittering and chattering as he gathers stores for winter.

Fox is clever and has remarkable senses, so tends to notice how others are feeling. Like other foxes, he likes to be on his own.

Bear is warm and caring, but quite shy. He also gets sleepy in the late fall, so may snore and even take a snooze as you play.

Share! Share photos of your Friends and Feelings Kit play with the Tinkergarten Community of families in our free [Outdoors All 4 Facebook Group](#) or by tagging [@tinkergarten](#) on [Instagram](#). We love to celebrate joyful, empathy-boosting play!

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