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Keep Preschoolers Cool about School

By Jane Lake

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The first day of school is a momentous occasion for parent and child. Excitement, tinged with uncertainty, fills the weeks before September. Anxious mothers coax awkward five-year-old fingers to tie shoelaces (or give up and buy sneakers with Velcro), while proud fathers urge their children to write their own names or recite the alphabet.

It used to be that children entering the school system were expected to have mastered certain skills before arriving, but times have changed, according to Marilyn Philbrick, a primary education co-coordinator for a large, progressive school board. "We recognize that children develop at different rates, and there are no skills as such that we insist a child learn before entering kindergarten. What we like to see is a child who has confidence and a positive attitude."

Still, starting school marks a child's first step into the world outside the family. There are changes and challenges to face. It's a rare parent or child who can "let go" without some pain. To ease the transition from home or nursery school to kindergarten, practice these strategies during summer:

- Talk about school. First-day jitters are common, but being frightened may be more manageable if you encourage your child to express his or her feelings.

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- Read about school or help your child to "play school" with you or with friends.
- Reinforce basic safety rules. Your child should be able to say his or her name and address clearly. Try helping your child memorize your home phone number, too; it may be easier if you sing it together to the tune of Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.
- Encourage friendships with neighborhood children who are also starting kindergarten. Knowing even one child who will be sharing that first day can make a big difference.
- Tell your child to choose something from home to take to

school. A favorite small toy or family photo can help ease homesickness.

- Take advantage of introductory days when you and your child can meet the teacher and have an advance look at the kindergarten classroom.
- Maintain a cheerful attitude towards school; chances are your child will then feel cheerful about it, too.

A kindergarten program should provide a warm, caring and fun-loving environment sensitive to individual differences, where each child has an opportunity to advance at his or her own rate. As children progress, they learn new things and meet new people. Your encouragement can help them feel good about themselves and their accomplishments; in years to come, this new-found independence will bring its own rewards, not only in school, but in the rest of the big wide world, as well.

Jane Lake is a successful freelance writer and editor of the top-ranked craft site, <http://www.allfreecrafts.com>, where you will find photos and full instructions for hundreds of craft projects. She also edits and produces <http://www.allfreeprintables.com>, which features printable recipe cards, chore coupons, school lists, check lists and paper toys.

Making Science Less Abstract for Preschoolers

By Nicole Brekelbaum

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A simple experiment that can help preschoolers discover and enjoy the wonders of science.

Most childcare businesses supervise children for more than three hours a day, five days a week. Such long hours in care can have a serious impact on a child's growth and development. Businesses that offer educational curriculums help children grow academically and help prepare them for school. Science plays an important role in the learning process and should also be included as part of the curriculum. Science encourages preschoolers to ask questions, make predictions, and find answers to some fascinating questions. Here is an interesting experiment that can help teach science to preschoolers. We came across ideas for this experiment on PBS Kids Website (www.pbskids.org). We tried it ourselves, at Young Achievers Inc., and it was an extreme success.

First, we had circle time with the kids and recited some classic nursery rhymes. One of the nursery rhymes was the age-old rhyme, Little Miss Muffet. After singing in our circle we asked the kids some questions about Little Miss Muffet. We discovered that they knew what Little Miss Muffet sat on, what she ate, and what frightened her. We then posed a thought-provoking question to the preschoolers. "Can the curds be separated from Miss Muffet's curds and whey?" The children responded with interesting answers. Their answers became our scientific hypotheses. We documented all responses in large text on our chalkboard so that the children can see and value their predictions. We then headed to the kitchen "laboratory" to see whose prediction was true.

We had the kids sit at the table and measure the milk and vinegar portions for the experiment. They counted how many cups of milk were needed and how many tablespoons of vinegar to add. It was now time to blast the mixture into the microwave for two minutes. We recommend that an adult perform this part of the experiment to avoid placing children in harms way. After two minutes, the mixture was ready to be taken out of the microwave. We allowed it to cool for several minutes and then the children compared two samples of the mixture before and after it was placed in the microwave. They observed that the mixture was lumpier after being heated in the microwave. The children then strained the mixture by using kitchen towels. What remained was a white, rubbery substance – the curds. They were excited. They saw first-hand what Miss Muffet ate. Then they discovered through experimentation that curds can be separated from Miss Muffet's curds and whey.

The children dyed the curds different colors using food coloring and made their own rubbery type of play dough. They loved touching the curds and feeling its texture. Some children even shaped the curds into cool looking dinosaurs and flowers with our help. At the end of the day the children were enlightened and had a great appreciation for science. They were all proud to show their parents what they had done. They were truly young scientists!

If you would like to try this with children at your childcare business we recommend the experiment for children ages 3 and up. The following materials are needed:

3 cups of Skim Milk

2 tablespoons of white vinegar

Microwave-safe bowl for mixing and heating

Kitchen towels for straining

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youth located in Pflugerville, Texas. She has been providing childcare in her home since her career switch from working engineer to childcare director and mom.



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