



# Kindergarten Contrasts

Boys and girls face childhood's challenges in separate but equal ways

By Kelli Wheeler

This time last year, my oldest child finally realized he wasn't being thrown to the wolves by being forced to start kindergarten. He had not been at all happy about leaving the safety and comfort of preschool and was not buying my pitch that kindergarten would be a fun and enjoyable.

I was so relieved after his first day of kindergarten. When I asked him how his day went, he replied in typical boy (and future male teenager) fashion, "Fine."

I knew then that I should've gone into dentistry, because getting any kind of detail about his days in school was going to be like pulling teeth. As we walked home, I continued to gently prod him for any signs of emotional damage or hints of joy about embarking on this new frontier. But alas, the only thing he seemed to get even slightly excited about was what was served for snack.

This is not to say that he didn't enjoy kindergarten. He actually really liked it. But after being married to his father 10 ten years, I now know how to interpret Aloof Male. It is not necessarily what is said, but what is observed. For example, first I noticed my son became eager to go to school and do homework. Second, he did not cling to me or show any sign of resistance at drop-off. And third, I overheard him tell his little sister, "Kindergarten's pretty fun, Whitney. We have a guinea pig."

This year is my youngest child's turn to begin her elementary adventures with kindergarten. So after nearly having to shoot my son with a tranquilizer gun to get him through the front door of kindergarten, I started probing early for signs of apprehension in my daughter.

---

## It is an example of boys and girls being wired differently.

---

I was certain she was going to be fine with it since she dove into prekindergarten like ants on a picnic. Bless her little heart, she is a carbon copy of me, and she is the definition of teacher's pet with her love of school and pleasing the teacher.

So imagine my surprise when I asked her in August if she was excited about starting kindergarten and she said no. When I asked her if she was nervous, she said yes. And without getting out my dentistry kit, she revealed why.

The divergent roads of life traveled by boys and girls flickered before me as my 5-year-old daughter, in typical girl and (future female teenager) fashion, took a deep breath and with flamboyant animation complete with hand gestures and eye rolls explained, "I'm nervous I won't make any friends. I didn't have any friends when I first started in Mrs. D's class and it took me a long time to make friends in Mrs. D's class, but then everybody ended up being my friends.

And what if people are mean to me or don't like me? If Alex isn't in my class, or David or Ben, then I won't have any friends. But if they are all in my class then we can all be friends and then it will be OK because then I will have friends."

After listening with veiled amusement to my far-from-friendship-challenged daughter, I counseled, "Honey, I don't think you will have any problem making friends. You just look for a friendly face on the first day of school, sit next to them and say, 'Hi, I'm Whitney. What's your name?'" She seemed satisfied with this solution to her angst, and I was happy not to have to reload the tranquilizer gun.

The point is that both my children were afraid to start kindergarten for fear of leaving what was familiar and comfortable. But my son was nervous from emotional immaturity and my daughter from social fears. There are plenty of research and studies out there also substantiating these differences in male and female experiences with education.

It is just another example I've noticed of boys and girls being wired differently. Both children had valid reasons from flip sides of the coin to be apprehensive about kindergarten, and I wanted to make sure as a parent I validated their fears, but then gently pushed them on their way and out of the nest. It's interesting that no matter how hard we work to create similar and equal experiences and opportunities, they will always be interpreted uniquely based on each child's inherent perspectives.

But enough with the psychobabble: My babies are leaving the nest! I am officially a stay-at-home mom with no kids at home! I'm going to cry . . . no, wait, I'm going to go grab the paper and eat a bowl of raw brownie mix in blissful peace and quiet.

And my daughter, for those of you who need closure, bounced out of her first day of school with a gaggle of giggling girlfriends in tow.

*Kelli Wheeler lives in Arden Oaks and is a mother of two. She can be reached at [kellimwheeler@aol.com](mailto:kellimwheeler@aol.com).* ●