

Static Electricity for Kids

Introduce your child to the amazing, almost magical phenomenon of static electricity! Using just a handful of household items, he'll learn how to create static electricity in minutes.

What You Need:

- Plastic garbage bag
- Scissors
- Ruler
- Newspaper

What You Do:

1. Have your child tear a sheet of newspaper into long strips. He doesn't have to worry about sticking to any specific measurements. Some strips can be long and narrow while others can be fat and short.
2. Let him crumple each strip into fist-sized wads of paper. If some of his strips are too small, encourage him to combine them.
3. Show him how to continue crumpling the paper until the rough paper begins to soften. Softer paper won't accidentally tear any of the plastic garbage bags.
4. Now it's time to actually measure! Help your child measure and cut out two strips from the plastic garbage bag that are each nine inches long and two inches wide.
5. Have him hold one strip of plastic garbage bag in each hand.
6. Tell him to slowly bring his hands together until the two dangling strips are almost touching.
7. What happens? Have your child describe the interaction to you in his own words.
8. Now let him turn one of the strips around so that its opposite side is facing the other strip.
9. Again, have him move the two strips together. Does anything change?
10. For the final step, help your child gently rub each plastic garbage strip with a crumpled wad of paper. Do this for at least thirty seconds.
11. Immediately after both of you finish rubbing, have your child dangle the strips next to each other. What happens now?



The results of this experiment, like any other science experiment, vary depending on the factors present: the type of plastic bag used, how close your child held the strips together, the softness of the newspaper ball, etc. However, thanks to what we know about static electricity, you and your child should have seen the strips pulling together and pushing apart. Explain to your kid that this sort of attracting and repelling is a result of extra charge on objects that needs to be released. Now that he's had a hands-on lesson, help him research static electricity on the computer or at his local library!