

2022-2023 Edition

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IMS

MONTESSORI IN THE HOME

PRE-ELEMENTARY PROGRAMMES

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"Help me do it by myself"

- Maria Montessori, M.D.

SUPPORTING MONTESSORI AT HOME

Dr. Maria Montessori believed that education begins at birth and that the first few years of life are the most important, both physically and mentally. Here are some general suggestions and guidelines which we follow at school, which you can also try at home:

CHILDREN AGE 0-6 MONTHS OLD

Newborn babies are dependent on adults' love and care. They begin life ready to emerge as an individual, with a unique personality and temperament. Newborns spend a lot of time eating and sleeping, but they are constantly learning about the world around them. They learn quickly to recognize adults' faces and voices. Throughout the first six months, they discover their fingers and toes and try to grasp. They hold their heads up and look around. They rock from side to side and then roll over. They communicate through different cries and sounds. These are major accomplishments for very young babies. Playing with babies is essential to establishing and strengthening a loving relationship and needs lots of encouragement from adults to gain confidence. During these months babies "coo", don't be surprised to find yourself cooing in response. Enjoy these wonderful, early conversations. Babies hear everything adults say and sing. Consistent communication during these early months lays a foundation for their future use of language.

Suggested Activities:

Singing nursery rhymes • Peek-a-boo games • Mirror dancing • Aeroplane • Dancing • Blowing bubbles • Watching the Ball • Mobiles • Grasping toys • Black and white picture books

CHILDREN AGE 6-12 MONTHS OLD

Your baby from 6 to 12 months is friendly, smiles at you. He pulls your ears and nose. He explores everything within reach. He learns to sit & crawl. He pulls himself up on his own two feet and cruises around, holding on for support. He learns better control of his hands and learns to hold his spoons, bottles and cups. Some can even feed themselves, using their fingers or a spoon (please do encourage). During these months, your baby's babbling increases. When you talk to your baby, he understands much of what you say and begins to talk with you in his way. They begin to understand more of what is happening around them. They love to repeat, they love games in which things disappear and reappear.

Suggested Activities:

Making a pillow mountain for crawling • Playing with a Hula Hoop • Blowing bubbles • Playing with a Beach Ball • Singing nursery rhymes • Reading books • Crawling or climbing steps • Emptying containers • Hide and seek games

CHILDREN AGE 12-24 MONTHS OLD

When your baby is 12- 24 months. They love to play, laugh, sing and run and are eager to be part of the action. They begin to walk, climb and run. As the year progresses, they gain more control over their bodies. Toddlers know and understand more than they can say, and they point to whatever they are not able to name. Gradually, language becomes important to them. Their vocabulary grows and they love to be able to speak using one word first and then short sentences.

Suggested Activities:

A trip to the Botanical Garden or Hong Kong Park • Playdough • Colouring with thick crayons • Finger paints • Glueing • Cleaning toys • Sand play • Singing songs

CHILDREN AGE 2-3 YEARS OLD

Two-year olds are playful, affectionate, funny, and curious, are great observers and also are full of questions. They love to help and love to imitate the adults around them. They love to play with other children and are beginning to form friendships.

Dr. Maria Montessori called the developmental stage of the very young child the "unconscious Absorbent Mind". What this means to the adult is that the toddler is a little sponge, picking up all of the information from the surrounding environment, which makes modelling of appropriate expected behaviours extremely important. At the same time, the child is not yet fully aware of themselves as distinguished from others or the environment, and may not be fully conscious of permanence. How you support your child at home needs to be based on this awareness. For instance, a Toddler cannot be expected to finish a complex task and may get distracted and leave that activity in favour of the new one that has caught the child's eye: the original task is no longer perceived to be "theirs." Parents and caregivers can help guide the child by setting up shorter one-step or two-step activities which can be completed independently and within a short time. If your child does get distracted, try finishing up by asking him/her to "help me clear this up before we try that." This awareness of self usually develops in the child as they approach the age of three.

The child is beginning to gain more control of his/her body, knows and understands more than they can say. Language and communication are becoming important to them, and their vocabulary grows from words to sentences. They love to be able to communicate what they want and need and can get very frustrated when words fail them. This may result in reverting to physical gesturing or crying. Sometimes it can be so frustrating the child will throw a tantrum. This can also be a very difficult time for them; they can be trying, stubborn, strong-willed and very uncooperative. Reason and logic have no place in a two-year-old's thinking. So some moments can be difficult and exhausting.

During this year there are a lot of changes for a two-year-old: they sleep with greater independence, they stop using nappies/diapers, they learn to play more independently, and attempt to try new things on their own. "I can do it myself," they say over and over again.

Two-year-olds are busy. They enjoy sorting, sequencing and learning shapes and colours. Imitation of adults or older children is a major part of their everyday play. They like to dress up and role play. Some two-year-olds are more physically active than others. Some will stay with an activity for quite a while, but others will need to move on to do something new more frequently. Be patient and attentive to your child's needs. Two-year-olds are just beginning to follow directions.

Suggested Activities:

Obstacle course • Jogging, skipping, hopping, etc. • Riding a tricycle • Mime games • Simple food preparation (peeling bananas, oranges, etc) • Dancing • Treasure box • Playdough • Beading jewellery • Cutting out things • Making a mobile • Painting, glueing, and drawing with crayons • Dressing themselves • Feeding themselves • Putting away toys, books, clothes, etc. • Rhythmic clapping • Setting the table:

CHILDREN AGE 3-4 YEARS OLD

Three-year-olds love to engage in conversations and tell you in great detail about everything. They can be excellent reporters at this stage. They are starting to be able to enjoy some types of collaborative activities. They have a sense of time and they are beginning to understand cause and effect. They are developing longer attention spans. They enjoy new adventures and new places; as long as they know that they will return to the comfort and security of home. Three-year-olds are capable artists, chefs, scientists, and actors.

Suggested Activities:

I spy and sound games • Cutting out different shapes • Making a collage using different fabrics • Sculptures • Making picture frames and greeting cards • Origami • Sewing cards • Painting using different tools • Meal preparation

(peeling boiled eggs, plucking grapes, washing fruits and vegetables) • Dusting and wiping • Watering plants • Caring for pets • Choosing what to wear (from a limited number of items) • Dressing themselves

INDEPENDENCE:

- From an early age, children want to be independent but we are too eager to do things for them. If you take the time to teach the child to do things for himself, the rewards will be great for both of you. The words you should hear with joy are **“LET ME DO IT MYSELF”**. It is important to give the children a chance to be self-reliant and to do it with patience and understanding. If some morning the child should show particular interest in buttoning his sweater, this is your perfect opportunity to take the time to show him how it is done.
- Independence is the ability to do things for ourselves and think for ourselves. Your child becomes independent through her activity. What should you let your child do? By being included in simple daily activities, she begins to understand routines, her role in the family, and her abilities. When you offer choices at the right times and only lend a hand when she needs help, you are saying to her, "I know you can do this by yourself." She gains skills, confidence, and an 'I can do it' attitude, which she will take with her throughout her life.
- Independence in Dressing - offer clothes that allow for independence: shirts that easily pull over her head, bottoms with an elastic waist, Velcro-style fastenings, and snap fastenings that she can do for herself. Make a few choices of your child's clothes accessible by hanging a low bar at child height for clothes on hangers. Provide a child-sized basket or basket for dirty clothes. Provide a low mirror and a child-sized brush and comb for combing hair.
- Independence in Toileting - your child should have access to a small toilet chair, which is different from using a stool to climb up and sit on the family toilet. (A stool to the toilet works very well once she is toilet-trained and climbing one or two stairs independently.) She needs to feel secure when manoeuvring onto and sitting on the toilet, not at all concerned that she might fall in. Show the child what to do in the toilet, - pull down pants, sit on the toilet, wiping bottom, flushing the toilet, pulling up pants and trousers and washing and drying hands. This procedure is very important. Please don't do it for the child. Provide a stool for access to the sink for hand-washing and tooth-brushing.
- Independence in Eating - if possible empty a low kitchen cabinet for your child's small drinking glasses, a small jug (pitcher), bowls, plates, spoons, and forks, each with their place or container in that cupboard. When choosing dishes, find child-sized versions. Children quickly learn to hold dishes with care. Children are more likely to eat something if they have helped prepare the food. Don't feed the child, show them how to hold a spoon, fork, knife etc. it should make no difference if they make a mess, it is easy to clean up a mess.... it is harder to teach a child to feed themselves later. Make the food look interesting and remember when packing lunches make them interesting and offer child-size portions. Small children can peel a mandarin orange or a banana if you start them off.
- Independence in Sleeping - A low bed from the beginning gives your child the freedom to move around. It allows her to wake up and crawl off the bed in the morning. Toys placed on a low shelf will often catch her attention upon waking. Create a routine that helps your child understand that it is bedtime. The routine may differ in every family.

MOVEMENT:

- Movement brings your child in touch with his environment. He learns through his senses. By moving, touching, smelling, seeing, and listening, he begins to understand his world. When he can explore and interact with his surroundings he is learning. By preparing the environment, providing movement opportunities, and making time, you will help your baby grow in self-assurance. When you choose not to use equipment that confines or contains your child, he develops a sense of accomplishment because he achieves motor milestones by his own efforts. **"Help me move by myself"**
- A mat for movement offers your baby some tummy time to strengthen his upper body. Attach a mirror to the wall at child height next to the bed or movement mat. When he sees himself move, he will make more of an effort to stretch and strengthen his neck muscles. Hang mobiles over your baby's head but out of reach, for beauty and practice focusing and following objects.
- Choose clothing that allows for maximum movement, like short trousers with elastic waists, warm socks, and lightweight fabrics. Provide reasons to move. Captivating objects just out of reach are an enticement to stretch, slither, creep, and crawl. Avoid equipment that limits your baby's movement.
- Find a place where he can practice climbing if you don't have stairs. Teach him how to crawl down the steps. Find places that offer big spaces for movement: playgrounds, public gymnasiums or parks. Use the stroller sparingly. Take time to allow your toddler to walk, he is capable of walking great distances when you are not in a rush.

SELF-DISCIPLINE:

- Being a caretaker of a young child can be hard work. You want your child to be happy, healthy, and socially adjusted, not only at home but also with others. Helping your child learn what behaviour is expected and begin to control her impulses can be easier if you keep in mind her basic needs. She wants to understand the world around her, the routines and rhythms of daily life. As she grows, her need to move can be met by including her in daily activities that have a real purpose in her life and are challenging. In this way, she becomes increasingly independent. With these foundations in place, her growth towards self-discipline will happen naturally.
- Parents/caretakers create the conditions for self-discipline. Make your home a place with opportunities for your child to become involved in practical household chores and to be helpful in simple ways. Pay attention to what she likes to do and encourage her to do it while allowing space for her to make mistakes and learn from them.
- Keep routines and make sure that the adults agree on family rules, and enforce consistent expectations which provide a secure framework. Allow your young child to make some choices throughout her day such as picking which shirt she wants to wear or which book she wants you to read to her. When your child helps from the time she is young, she will start to develop self-discipline as she grows. She will feel needed and accepted as a contributing member of the family.
- Prepare the environment with furniture and equipment that are the right size. For example, when she wants to wash carrots or strawberries, she will sit at a table and chair her size and use small kitchen tools that fit her hands. Show her clear ways to do tasks such as dusting a shelf, sweeping, washing socks, wiping the table after a meal, folding up and putting away clothes, setting the table, and many more. Let her learn from her own mistakes. Remember that, as your child is learning, she will not work as you work, quickly and efficiently. That will come with time and continued practice.
- If she is learning how to use a mop there may be soap and water on the floor when she is finished. The process is far more important to her inner growth than having clean floors. Help her to clean up by sharing the task with her rather than stepping in and doing it for her. Use household items and toys for their intended purpose. If your

child throws her shape-sorting toy, say, "Be gentle with your toys." Young children sometimes throw on a whim, but it doesn't mean they are destructive. If she throws the toy again, redirect her: "Come outside and let's throw the ball."

- When appropriate, offer real choices. Choices should be simple, such as peanut butter or cheese on her sandwich or buying red or green apples. Too many choices are overwhelming; a handful of choices a day are enough at this age. Speak to her positively and sincerely. Your child will thrive with positive statements and does not need to be showered with empty praise. Instead of saying, "You're such a good helper", say, "Thank you for setting the table." Instead of ordering, "Get off the table", lift her off the table and say, "Feet on the floor." Do not feel the need to reward your child for doing what you want her to do. For children, the reward is in the work itself. Adults may consider 'work' something we must do, but for children, their work is their play.
- Keep consistent routines. Children need regular sleep times, regular meals, time with family members, and opportunities to expend energy and play outside. When her days are predictable she knows what to expect. Set limits that work for your family, and make sure that everyone applies them. When you always give in to your child's demands it is difficult for her to understand what is expected of her. Evaluate each situation before reacting. If your child has lost control, ask yourself if she is hungry, tired, frustrated, or overstimulated. Each situation calls for a different response. Realise that punishment doesn't work. Punishment has limited value, as it causes the child to focus on what not to do rather than what to do, and it often makes a small problem bigger. Young children can often remember the punishment, but may not connect the punishment to the behaviour that triggered it.

COMMUNICATION:

- Very young children take in everything they hear. Your speech and the ways you use words to respond to your child provide the basis for him to create his own language. When you talk and listen to the child, you encourage his desire to speak. The quality of the child's language is influenced by the richness of the language in his environment and your responses to his efforts to speak. Through some simple and natural ways to interact with and respond to the child, you will see him become a person who can communicate with confidence. The foundation of the child's language is laid in the first years of life. As a parent, your support of this unique window of opportunity for language development will make a difference.
- Create a calm and quiet environment for your child and protect him from loud noises and electronic sounds. Minimise the sound of television and background noise to create a peaceful environment. Make the human voice the sound he hears most often. Have conversations with your child. When your child makes sounds, respond as if he were speaking. His sounds will turn into babbling, his first efforts at communicating. Talk to him throughout the day and encourage caretakers and visitors to do the same. Read stories and poetry, and sing. Children have larger vocabularies and develop into better readers when they are frequently read to.
- Read from the beginning of their lives. They love to hear the same book over and over. Look for reality-based books with simple drawings of everyday objects, actions, and events. Sing your favourite songs. Speak clearly and directly. Do not use 'baby talk' or make up a special language of 'bitty wordies'. Your baby will be confused by childish, nonsense words. He needs to hear the correct words used by adults in conversation.
- When you speak to your child, be clear and logical. He is learning many words. He associates objects with words and therefore must hear the name of the object that he is looking at or grabbing. Respond to his attempts to communicate. Use correct vocabulary, not only general words but also particular words, like 'garlic press' and 'shower curtain'. Name items related to all the rooms of the house: kitchen, bathroom, bedroom words, etc.

- Don't repeat mispronunciations or make them a family joke. If your child says 'pasgetti', respond with the correct word: "We're having spaghetti for dinner." By repeating the phrase with the correct word or by continuing the communication, you help him to gradually absorb the correct word and usage. Take turns telling stories. Tell stories from life, not only from books. Take time to listen. Have the patience to listen, even if you don't understand what he is saying. Do not interrupt or suggest words, but allow time for him to finish. Your interest encourages him to continue to communicate.
- Limit Ipads, Television, Iphones etc...

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT:

- Give your child as much positive feedback as possible – when they are doing something right. A child responds to feedback, so if you want them to do something, give them lots of positive attention when they do. A child who is constantly criticised soon loses interest in attempting new things. When a young child constantly handles and touches everything in sight, he is not being naughty, they are curious and this is an important way that they learn. Remember a young child learns much from imitating adults and other children. In this way, they learn both good and bad habits.
- Greeting the child, eye contact when speaking to the child, speaking at the child's eye level. Practice turn-taking while playing games.
- Help the child to initiate a conversation. E.g. May I play with you? Can we share the blocks? Would you like to have a turn? Encourage and practice cleaning up after play. Let the child tidy up his toys. Make it a game.
- Role-play peaceful solutions to conflicts that could arise. Examples: talking it over, sharing, taking turns. Make sure your child has contact with other children his/her age.

While the child is in your care we should try to help the child to be independent with a strong sense of self who will be able to improvise and use his/her creativity in working and learning as a healthy, thinking individual. These traits will remain with him/her throughout his/her life. **What more could you ask for?**

- Give your child as much time as he/she needs to discover, as well as to complete a task.
- Be a keen observer - Take the time to stand back and observe your child as s/he grows and changes. Note what they can do today that they couldn't yesterday!
- Dr. Montessori urges adults not to be the child's servant: let your child do the work. We know you can do it, let the child do it. Give your child real opportunities to choose work that can contribute to the home.
- Post a sign in your kitchen to remind you and caregivers to "Help me to do it myself!"
- Allow your child to do the tasks that interest him/her.
- Smile and make positive eye contact with your child often as you explore the world together.
- Speak slowly, clearly and quietly with your child.
- Celebrate the toddler's love of 'big' words by using the full proper names for things.
- If you have more than one language in your home, the mother should use her native language and father should use his. Children at this age associate the language with the speaker, so try not to mix languages with a child, especially in one sentence.
- Read, read, read in your native language! Enjoy a reading ritual with your child from birth.

- Remember that language is not only talking. Touch and facial expressions are also important ways of communicating with children.
- Stay aware that in the Montessori approach, setting up the activity and putting it away is as important as the activity itself. You can model this pattern at home.
- For the optimum quality time with your toddler, try switching off your mobile for a time.

We highly recommend reading Understanding the Human Being by Dr. Silvana Montanaro, The Joyful Child: Birth to Three, which contains wonderful narrative written by Susan Stephenson, who is an AMI trained 0-3 teacher, and Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius by Dr. Angeline Stoll Lillard.