

## SUPPORTING THE FOUNDATION CHILD IN THE IMS MONTESSORI ENVIRONMENT AND AT HOME

*"Help me do it by myself"*

It is our goal to establish a warm, loving and supportive community in which your child can grow and thrive.

### Learning More about Montessori:

- **Montessori in the Home Seminar:** We organise seminars for all parents and caregivers to help you better support the children's development, and to understand how to create the Montessori environment at home.
- **Montessori in the Home Handout:** We have attached a few suggestions for bringing the Montessori environment and philosophy to your home at the end of this package for your reference.
- **Montessori Evenings:** We encourage you to attend any informational sessions offered – while the topics may be about the Casa dei Bambini Programme or the Elementary Years Programme, Foundation parents are more than welcome to come and learn more about the Montessori philosophy, and/or about IMS. These events are marked on the Foundation Group Calendar.
- **Books and Videos:** there are many wonderful resources readily available in the IMS libraries for checkout by parents, or available on Kindle. YouTube has a plethora of videos about every aspect of Montessori. We will be sharing a variety of resources with you over the coming weeks.

### KEY AREAS OF ATTENTION FOR THE VERY YOUNG CHILD

**Separation Anxiety:** If this is your child's first "unaccompanied" experience, it can be frightening. Different children will react in different ways, and feelings of anxiety are normal and natural. Some children will cry the first day, and stop quickly. Others will happily start the Group and then later begin to show signs of anxiety when the excitement of "school" wears off. The expression of these feelings is often hardest on the parents! You can help in the process of settling in by expressing confidence and excitement about your child entering the Foundation environment – this may be a difficult transition for you too!

Be sure to talk to your child about the experience in a positive manner. Create a simple goodbye ritual, which is accompanied by a big, confident smile from you. If you are worried,

your child will pick up on your anxiety. If you are at ease, your child is more likely to be so too.

We encourage you to go to the library and find books about starting school for the first time, designed for the very young child. Reading about being sad, and working through these very real emotions will help your child learn to understand and appropriately respond to emotions.

As separation issues arise, be sure to contact your child's teacher for support and ideas – we're here to help make this new step as enjoyable as possible for your child. The more we understand about what your child is feeling, the better we can help.

The first few days of our Foundation Groups are designed to help the new children become accustomed to their new environment. Caregivers are asked to remain flexible, and work with the teachers who will help the child through this transition. We ask Caregivers to accompany the child into the environment, and leave the child in the care of the teacher as quickly as possible to reduce any separation anxiety. Later, as your child adjusts to their new environment, children can then start to say goodbye to caregivers at the dropping off point, and the child can begin to take off his/her shoes independently, with the teachers supporting as necessary.

It is important to understand that even for returning children, the environment will offer new challenges, and may not be comfortable or familiar after the holiday – for a young child, a week-long break is a long time, and a child may feel separation anxiety all over again.

**Normalisation:** As your children begin settling into the Foundation environment, the teachers will be working closely together to help each child settle, and then begin to “normalise”. Normalisation is a Montessori term which defines the process every child goes through in learning to function independently within the Montessori environment, and includes 1) love of work 2) Concentration 3) Self-discipline and 4) Sociability. Typically, a child in the Foundation exhibits the first two characteristics of Normalisation within 2-6 months, and as a toddler is not really able to fully grasp the concept of self apart from others, s/he can only be expected to begin to exhibit some of the beginning stages of self-discipline and sociability. The Casa dei Bambini focuses on assisting the child to normalise fully when the child moves into the conscious Absorbent Mind phase of development. Much of your communication with teachers over the coming weeks and months will be discussing how we can work together to support your child at home and at school to settle, and then extend the process of normalisation.

**Toilet-training:** children are not expected to be toilet trained when they enter the Foundation Group. Over time, after the children are more settled, they are given an opportunity to visit the toilet each day as a group to encourage their desire to try for themselves. We will give you more information and suggestions regarding toileting and approaches to support this effort at home as this becomes relevant for your child. The children will be accompanied by a teacher or IMS housekeeper. Children are required to be toilet trained prior to being given a Casa dei Bambini place offer.

**Learning Control of Movement:** Control of movement is one of the key areas of development for the very young child, and this includes learning both fine and gross muscle control. Mastering new skills is tiring and sometimes frustrating!

**Learning to Communicate using Words:** the child's communication is now emerging from physical communication (such as gesturing) and simple verbal communication of need (such as crying) to more sophisticated speech using words and simple sentences. Children at this age associate the language spoken with the speaker. It is very important to speak to your child in one language consistently, and not mix different languages in one sentence, as this makes the classification of the word into the correct language more difficult. While this is the time to learn languages for the typical child, exposure to multiple languages, especially in the family setting, may result in a delay in verbal expression for a child against standard benchmarks for sentence length at a certain age. In Hong Kong, often the child is exposed to multiple languages at home, and at IMS we have a Dual-Language environment.

## SUPPORTING MONTESSORI AT HOME

**Montessori at Home:** Many parents ask us how they can make their home "more Montessori". We have some resources published on the website regarding this question. We also give Parent/Caregiver Seminars regarding Montessori in the Home each year.

Since you are your child's first and most important teacher, you might be wondering about the kinds of activities you could be doing at home to help your child get off to a great start in the Montessori environment. This information has been prepared as a source of suggestions and ideas, which we will be working on at Foundation Group as well. Make your time exploring these activities fun and engaging. We also highly recommend you purchase a copy of *The Joyful Child: Birth to Three*, which contains a wonderful narrative written by Susan Stephenson, who is an AMI trained 0-3 teacher (available on Kindle). There are also many ideas of things to do in the home to encourage your baby and toddler's development in these critical years.

**Happy learning!** 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:

- 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 s/ he can do today that s/he 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 in the home.
- Post a sign in your kitchen to remind you and caregivers to "Help me to do it myself!"

- Give your child the opportunity 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, 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. Obviously, your family needs a common language to communicate with each other, try to make a conscious switch to make the new language obvious to the child.
- Read, read, read in your native language! Enjoy a reading ritual with your child from birth. Children at this stage of development are learning about the world as it is. And so, books with photographs, realistic illustrations and stories based on real life activities are best. Books with elements of fantasy and anthropomorphisation are best left to children of 6 years of age and older.
- Remember that language is not only talking. Touch and facial expressions are also important ways of communicating with children.
- 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.

## TWO-YEAR-OLDS

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 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 good behaviour extremely important. At the same time, the child is not yet fully aware of self as distinguished from others or from 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, and knows and understands more than they are able to say. Language and communication is 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 move into their own bed, 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, play house or shop. 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. Be patient and attentive to your child’s needs. Two year olds are just beginning to follow directions.

## SOCIAL SKILLS

1. Give your child as much positive feedback as possible – when they are doing something right, try to notice out loud. 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/she is not being naughty, they are being curious and this is an important way that they learn.
2. Remember a young child learns much from imitating adults and other children. In this way they learn both good and bad habits.
3. When greeting or speaking to your child, make eye contact.
4. Practice turn-taking while playing games.
5. Help your child learn to initiate a conversation. For example “May I play with you?” “Shall we share the blocks?” “Would you like a turn?”
6. Role-play peaceful solutions to conflicts that could arise. Examples: talking it over, sharing, taking turns.
7. Make sure your child has contact with other children his/her age.

8. Encourage and practice cleaning up after play. Let your child tidy up his/her toys. Turn it into a game, instead of it being a chore.

## 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 your 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!”**, and **“I CAN DO IT!”**

It is important to give your child a chance to be self-reliant and to do it with patience and understanding. If one morning your child shows a particular interest in buttoning his/her own sweater, this is your perfect opportunity to take the time to show them how it is done.

Remind yourself to **NEVER DO FOR YOUR CHILD WHAT HE/SHE IS CAPABLE OF DOING FOR HIM/HERSELF**. By the time your child is 3 s/he should take great pride in doing things for themselves. A child of this age is perfectly capable of dressing him/herself, picking up his/her toys, making his/her own bed (you can tidy it later when the child cannot see) and helping with simple chores around the house.

Your child must be taught independence and parents and other caregivers must resist the temptation to always “help”. Please discourage your child from becoming dependent on you. Anxiety in children is linked to dependence.

1. Be sure your child has some time to play or work without the intervention of an adult.
2. Allow your child to feed independently so he/she can perfect the ability to feed themselves. Show him/her how to use a spoon, fork, knife etc. The child may make a mess but this is an important step in his/her development at this time. Too much correction will discourage your child’s effort. Also, holding a spoon develops the small hand muscles your child will use later on in writing. Make meals and packed lunches look interesting and remember to provide child-size portions.
3. Help your child learn to dress him/herself. Purchase items which can be easily mastered by little fingers. Encourage him/her to try
  - putting on a jacket or coat, or a sweater
  - taking off and putting on their own socks
  - fastening boots or shoes (Velcro, not laces)
  - zipping jackets
  - zipping and unzipping a backpack
4. Independent toileting: Please help your child to become independent with all of the steps involved in toileting. Help them to learn how to pull their pants down, how to sit on the toilet, how to clean themselves, how to flush, dress themselves again and how to wash and dry their hands. This procedure is very important for your child’s independence.

5. Young children love to imitate adults, and think flower arranging, making beds and cleaning things is fun! Allow them to help with simple chores such as, putting groceries away, folding towels or laundry, washing the fruit and setting the table at mealtimes. These are just to name a few. There are endless, exciting jobs for your young child to do in the kitchen and around the house.

### ATTENDING SKILLS, LISTENING SKILLS AND FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS

1. Listen to a variety of age-appropriate music and sing along. For the Toddler, who is learning discrimination of sound, try to avoid background music while you are having language-rich reading or family time.
2. Help your child follow simple two-step directions. Example: Go to your room and get your pyjamas.
3. Limit screen time (eg. TV, phones, tablets and VCR and video games time.). Studies show that passive language learning is not an effective way to learn.

### SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Children at this age associate the speaker with the language. It is important not to mix languages in the same sentence, as this will confuse the child. If you have a dual- or multi-lingual household, this can be to your child's advantage, but it requires discipline and consistency to maintain! Each adult must choose a language of communication to the child and stick with it. The language chosen should be fully fluent, preferably "mother tongue",

1. Encourage communication at an age-appropriate level.
2. Talk about everyday experiences. Describe the process of what you are doing with your very young child as you are doing each step.
3. Find books you can enjoy reading together which describe age-appropriate, real life situations, such as a visit to the Zoo.
4. Use descriptive words. Example: "This pear is juicy." "Find your purple shirt with the white stripes."
5. Help your child learn his/her full name.

### MOTOR SKILLS: FINE AND GROSS

All of the following activities will help your child develop muscle control, give them a sense of enjoyment and achievement. Successfully completing a task builds independence, self-confidence and willingness to take risks.

**Fine Motor:**

1. Use a variety of art materials. Example: thick crayons, markers, scissors, play dough, paints, etc.
2. Do puzzles.
3. String beads on laces.
4. Practice using a glue stick

**Gross Motor:**

1. Running, jumping, hopping on one foot
2. Allow your child to walk up and down stairs
3. Practice going up and down a slide safely.
4. Practice throwing and kicking a ball.
5. There are endless activities you can do with a child!

- Hula Hoop
- Hopscotch
- Obstacle course
- Jogging, skipping, hopping etc.
- Using a bicycle
- Scarf Games
- Dressing up
- Mime games
- Dancing
- Treasure box
- Play dough
- Pasta Jewellery
- Cutting out things: Making a mobile
- Painting, glueing, and using crayons
- Dot Dot Dot
- Cooking

**Cooking** Take a trip to the supermarket to begin your cooking, buy the ingredients together and imagine how delicious they will be. It is fun to find the butter, the flour, the eggs etc. Try to use child-sized rolling pins and equipment. They like to explore the taste, the texture, and the smell of the ingredients. Tasting along the way is part of the fun. Just remember to avoid tasting anything with raw egg in it. It's helpful to pre-measure ingredients and set them up on a small table in the order of use so that they are ready to use and more easily handled independently by small hands.

In summary, the natural progression for a child is always towards independence. As parents and educators, we are called to support this growth toward independence, so that our children develop a strong sense of self and make full use of all of the unique gifts and abilities that they possess.