

Working at Home with Young Children

Many parents don't have the benefit of specialized Montessori training, so supporting children's learning at home can feel challenging and downright overwhelming. From our shared perspective as Montessori teachers, we'd like to offer you, the parent, some good news: you don't need to be a certified teacher to work with your child effectively! Instead, here's what you will need:

- 1. Patience, patience, patience.** This prerequisite seems pretty obvious, however, the patience you need to parent can feel different than the patience you practice when guiding your child's learning. Adults may become frustrated with young children's responses to learning for the following reasons: the adult's expectations of the child are too high, the adult isn't emotionally prepared to work in that moment with the child, or the child is not emotionally prepared to work in that moment with the adult. The common denominator in all three of those aforementioned reasons, can be summed up in one word: expectations.
- 2. Release your expectations.** This may be easier said than done for certain personality types, and is an ongoing practice for us all, especially during trying times. While planning is essential to the teaching process, children's responses to the lesson plan are unpredictable. For example, sometimes in the classroom we are surprised by how interested or disinterested specific students are in an activity. This leads us to evaluate potential causes for the interest or disinterest. Through it all, Montessori teachers learn quickly what aspects of the learning process they can control: the environment, the daily schedule, social-emotional responses to children's behaviors, and adult feeling states. In

this unprecedented time, it is critically important to take stock of your feelings prior to actively guiding your child's learning. Allow yourself some time each day to feel centered and calm. This may mean going for a jog, practicing yoga, catching up on the phone with a friend, mindfully breathing, or making art. Your well-being is a critical and often overlooked aspect of being an effective teacher. Dr. Montessori referred to this aspect as "spiritual preparation of the teacher". A teacher's positivity, or inner light, fosters the calm environment necessary for learning to occur.

3. **Prepare your space.** Think about your child's Montessori classroom. In that space, he or she can access materials with ease. Evaluate your child's ability to independently access materials and clean them up in each room of your house. Keeping a few activities on low shelves is helpful to this process. Consider designating a specific rug for your child to set up prior to beginning a floor activity. This practice aligns with his or her school experiences and is part of the Montessori work cycle. The cycle begins with a child selecting an activity, placing a rug on the floor or finding a lap desk, taking the activity to the designated area, working on the activity until he or she reaches an internal sense of completion, putting the activity back in the same condition and location it was found in, and returning the desk or rug to the appropriate area. The work cycle is a daily practice in the classroom yet requires adult flexibility at the toddler level. Sometimes your child may begin working without a mat or table. If he or she is purposefully working and concentrating, **do not break your child's concentration with a command to get a rug or go to a table.** Simply wait until another opportunity presents itself to **suggest** a rug or table. If there are materials available to children that involve significant clean-up, (i.e.

painting, food preparation), walk your child through the steps involved, have clean up materials at the ready for them to assist (i.e. sponges on a low shelf), and designate a space for messy activities to happen regularly. For example, an old rug with a child sized table on it, a basket of smocks, and a tray with some watercolors, a paintbrush, and a tiny amount of water in a container, invites your child's creativity in a contained space to make clean-up a breeze.

4. **Observe to plan and plan to observe.** Remember when we said that teachers are often surprised by what materials specific students gravitate toward or reject? When that happens in the classroom, teachers make a mental or physical note of it. Guided by the power of observation, teachers, like scientists, hypothesize as to why the student is engaged or not with the work. Here are the questions to ask yourself as you observe your child:

- a. **Can he or she appropriately use the material?** For example, a child may not be able to open and close a specific jar without adult assistance. The parent observes this and then arrives at choices: model how to unscrew the jar, leave the lid on very loosely, or substitute the jar with a different model altogether. Observe what part of the activity your child struggles with and then arrive at a solution. Sometimes the solution is time, waiting for the child's interest or physical development to "match" the material. Sometimes it's a matter of working behind the child so that he or she can obtain the proper physical orientation required to see how the adult unscrews the jar or puts on a

shoe. You may need to provide “hand over hand” assistance, gently placing your hands over your child’s as they carry a heavy tray to a shelf, for instance.

- b. Am I setting the child up for success?** This question dovetails with adult expectations. Are the adult expectations for the child’s use of a specific material too high? Too low? Does the material have too many pieces? Is the level of adult management with the material oppressive or too lax? Observe and amend as needed. Also, allow time for your child to develop an interest in the material. You can help generate interest by appearing excited to work with the material yourself. Materials do not need to be changed daily. **Offering some of the same work each day provides a sense of security and routine for your child.** Your child is your best teacher, and he or she will let you know when they do or do not want to engage with an activity.
- c. Create guided learning experiences around your child’s interests.** For example, if your child loves trucks, tailor a lesson plan around that theme.

- 5. Trust the process.** Please know that we would love to be with your child in the classroom right now! In the meantime, we are here to support you. You’ve got this! Learning is not a linear process dictated by human made time tables. Our typically developing toddlers learning, won’t be permanently affected by a temporary reduction in classroom hours. Cultivating a peaceful, child-friendly environment indoors and outdoors, and creating a daily routine that feels manageable for child and parent, will keep your family connected to the values and instructional guidance that the toddler community provides.

6. Have fun. Montessori learning and teaching is a daily practice, perfection is unrealistic.

Enjoy this precious time with your little one,

Ms. Jess & Ms. Betty

Daily Schedule (amend as your family's rhythm dictates). *Written from a toddler's perspective.*

Theme: "In the Garden"

7:30 – 8:30- Wake Up! Stretch, help make breakfast.

I can: put out napkins, bowls, dishes. I can chop, spread, peel. I can wash dishes.

8:30- 9:00- Dressing and personal care.

I can: practice the potty, put on my shirt and pants, brush my hair and teeth.

9:00- 11:00 - Work period that incorporates the theme "In the Garden".

I can: read books about nature, help plant a real garden, plant a seed in a plastic cup, go on a nature scavenger hunt, identify bugs outside, make a mud kitchen, pick flowers and arrange them, learn the importance of bees and worms, learn about the four seasons, learn the names of gardening tools.

11:00 – 11:30 - Make a snack. What food can you incorporate from the garden? Can you make a "food rainbow" on your plate?

11:30- 11:45- Watch a Youtube clip from school. Have a virtual playdate.

11:45-12:15- Make a nature craft. Play a game independently or with family.

12:15- 12:30- Personal care. Prepare for nap or rest time.

12:30-2:30 - Nap or rest.

2:30- 5:00- Make a snack, resume play, help with chores. Next major transitions: dinner and bedtime. Enlist your child's help with dinner and stick to bedtime routines.

I can: Sort laundry, feed pets, clean up my toys, sweep the floor, take out recycling, wash tables and chairs. I feel capable and important when I help my family.