

Bringing Montessori into the Home

Practical Life Activities

Practical Life activities are those everyday activities children see older members of their family perform. They are part of the family's daily routine and order. As children learn these new skills they experience the benefits of this order. The child will then begin to view themselves as individuals who are capable of making a contribution within the family and to others through learned cooperation. When children feel useful and needed in the family their self-confidence and self-esteem soar to new heights. Performing simple everyday "adult tasks" bring great joy for the young child.

An easy place to begin is in daily care of self:

- It is an important first step to help the young child to begin dressing themselves.
- Simplify their clothing; it can be frustrating for the child with overwhelming choices or complicated clothing not conducive to early toilet training.
- In preparing for the next day it may be helpful to lay out their clothes the night before. Give the child ample time to navigate zippers, buttons, and snaps.
- Spend some time in their room observing their space. Identify any barriers that limit the child's independence.
- It is a great idea to have a designated specially prepared space in each living area for the child to choose a work based on their interest and ability.

Chores a 3 to 6 Year Old Can Do:

In the Kitchen-

- Set the table
- Clear the table
- Load and unload the washer
- Wipe the tables
- Prepare breakfast/ snack
- Wipe up spills
- Sweep
- Scrub or peel vegetables or fruit
- Assisting in cooking meals
- Help with the garbage

In the Bedroom-

- Put dirty clothes in the hamper
- Choose clothes and get dressed
- Make bed
- Put clothes away
- Clean up toys
- Fold clothes
- Help with pet care

Outside-

Shoveling
Raking
Gardening

Preparation of the Home

In the Bathroom-

Brush hair
Brush teeth
Wash hair
Pick up bath toys
Blow nose
Wash body
Clean face
Fully use the bathroom

Other chores-

Clean up toys
Turn on and off lights
Arrange flowers
Pack and carry a bag
Put on and zip jackets
Put on shoes
Water plants
Clean windows
Dust
Use a small vacuum

The goal here is to prepare each room in the home in which the child spends time. By preparing the living space to meet the needs of the child it provides the child with independence. Adults spend a great deal of time child proofing their home for safety; however, try considering preparing your home for 'guided' independence. Though this may seem like a lot of work initially, it will free you from being constantly asked for potentially unnecessary help. Below are a few simple ideas for areas in your home your child can easily navigate:

Child's Bedroom:

1. A low to the floor bed that the child can get in and out of with simple linens for them to learn to make their bed.
2. The closet should be free of clutter and obstacles. Lower the closet rod so your child can hang their clothes up and/ or take them down. Rod extensions can be purchased to temporarily modify the height.
3. A chest of drawers that open freely and are arranged with the lowest drawer containing the most commonly worn clothes.
4. Hanging pegs or hooks mounted low on the wall can help offer a space for smaller items that need a hook such as a bag or robe.
5. Have a child sized chair and books in a basket so your child can spend some quiet time reading.

Play Area:

1. Have shelves instead of toy boxes so that the child can see their toys/ materials laid out beautifully in smaller baskets or trays. This promotes order rather than chaos.
2. The shelves should be low enough for the child to reach the top shelf.

Bathroom:

1. A step stool to reach counter and toilet. Have a mirror at the child's level.
2. Toiletries such as toothbrush and toothpaste placed within the child's reach.
3. Separate laundry basket for the child's dirty clothes.

Living/ Family Room:

1. A low drawer/cupboard/shelf for the child's dishes.
2. A booster seat or child sized chair. Keek-a-roo chairs are a great transition from high chair to toddler seat.
3. Light weight stool to allow children to work at the sink or counter.
4. A small apron for working.
5. Child sized broom, dust pan, and brush for spills.
6. Child sized milk/ water pitcher for pouring.

When your child performs an activity to help care for themselves or the home environment refrain from correcting or redoing the project in front of the child. Glimmerings of concentration will appear as your child repeats the activity. Patience is essential. Some of the most important characteristics of a young child's personality and intellect develop through participation in the everyday life of the family. These

characteristics are: order, understanding of natural sequences of events, independence, self-control, respect for oneself and others, and experiencing the joy of learning by accomplishing a purposeful meaningful task. From this vital work, the child is making a place for him/herself in the family. Montessori recognizes this as, “Constructing Oneself,” and developing a natural love for learning.

Dr. Maria Montessori recognized the needs of the young child and answered those needs within the prepared environment both in the home and school. For the child, her work is an aide to life. Montessori developed her method around the beautiful capacities of the child to learn. It was the child that told her, “Help me do it by myself.”

A Word about Games and Toys:

- Toys should challenge your child’s interest and imagination. If your child plays poorly or doesn’t engage for a long period of time; it may be that the toy is too easy or too challenging for the child to develop an authentic interest.
- Games should have a designated space on a shelf.
- Locate adult games that incorporate the use of numbers or letters that your child may find interesting.
- A simple dice game or dominos set can introduce early skills in counting, numeric patterns and sequencing abilities.
- In addition, the young child should have limited screen time. Electronic games can invite education and hand eye coordination to a young child. However, it is an externally driven motivation that can lead to weak concentration skills.

Resources for Toilet Learning:

- <http://www.themontessorinotebook.com/montessori-approach-toilet-training/>
- <http://www.dailymontessori.com/self-development/toilet-learning-vs-toilet-training/>
- Diaper Free Before Age 3: The Healthier Way to Toilet Train and Help your Child out of Diapers Sooner by Jill M. Lekovic
- Toilet Learning Montessori of Alameda- google the pdf document

A Few Points:

- If you pursue it, go cold turkey, no diapers ever again (not at night, not on vacation, etc.)
- Find a time where you can devote all energy to it- longer break, summer
- Make it the most natural thing, do not over emphasize or get over excited if they use the toilet- avoid sticker charts, and extra bribery for using the toilet
- Make sure the bathroom is not distracting