

Montessori in the Home

How to Create a Montessori Prepared Environment

Think carefully about family activities and arrange the environment to include the child.

By the front door have a stool to sit on, a place within reach to hang coats and a basket for shoes. In the living room, have shelves for organizing a few of the child's books, toys, puzzles, or games. Add a child size chair and table for the child to work on.

A cupboard in the kitchen can be made available to the child with plates, glasses and silverwares. Put healthy snacks and foods on a low pantry shelf and refrigerator so your child can help himself. Adaptations can also be made in other rooms.

Entry Hall



By the entry hall: a chair; a shoe basket; a basket for mittens, hats and sun glasses, and hooks within reach for jackets



.. and a mirror for grooming.

Kitchen



Child size table and chair; a stool and hooks for backpacks and lunch boxes



Child size broom and mop



Low shelf in the refrigerator for snacks

Bathroom



In the bathroom: a stool, a book, wipes and a chair for the child to reach the sink



Living/Family Room



In the Family Room: child size chair and table; low shelves with favorite books, toys and games

A Rich Environment

A rich environment creates interests and extends the child's experience, widening his grasp of such things as music, art, history, geography, science, language, and math. Observations, over the years, of the child's built-in curiosity and interest in all these areas of study and accomplishment, have taught us to focus on the preparation of the early environment and allow the child to choose and to teach herself. The adult's challenge is to be sure that the environment offers all of the key experiences necessary for the laying of this foundation.

In the home, rather than relying on verbal lessons, computers, TV, or videos (or other examples of passive learning) because the subject is academic, we rely on the same abilities developed in the areas of practical life and good toys.

We create an environment rich in experiments, games, materials, and books which the child can select as the interest arises, providing experiences of hand and mind working together for an intelligent purpose.

Beauty and Order

Rather than keeping things in large toy chests or boxes, we use trays and baskets for most things. The child's belonging can be sorted in baskets, boxes, and on shelves, into types of clothing, blocks, and other toys, puzzles, art materials, kitchen tools, etc. This makes finding and putting away easier and enjoyable.

Having a place for everything, on a child-friendly scale, encourages both independence and self-discipline. Children know where to find what they need, and where to put it when they're done. An ordered environment also has fewer distractions, allowing children to focus on the task at hand.

Less is More. Don't put out too many toys and books at one time. Those being used by the child at the moment are sufficient. It is a good idea to rotate – taking out those books and toys that have not been chosen lately and removing them to storage for a time. Children grow and change and they need help to keep their environment uncluttered and peaceful.

Everyone at every age is affected by their environment. Habits of organizing the environment reduce stress and aid the development of an organized, efficient, and creative mind.



The child selecting a basket of toys



The child at play



The child putting a basket of toys away

Independence

“The child’s first instincts is to carry out his actions by himself, without anyone helping him, and his first conscious bid for independence is made when he defends himself against those who try to do the actions for him” (Montessori)

Children have an innate desire to do things for themselves – help me to help myself. This drive for autonomy and independence is biological. If we do not acknowledge and facilitate this inner drive of the child, we will frustrate his endeavors, which may lead to deviated behaviors.

In devising her method, Montessori had but one aim: to assist the child’s natural development. Because the end point of a child’s development is a self-sufficient, well-adjusted adult, any assistance we offer to development must by definition foster independence and self-sufficiency. Our role as educators is thus to aid the child’s growth towards independence.

Allow your child to help at home and care of himself. Take the time to teach each skill separately and to repeat the lesson as needed. The child does not need help, only instruction.

Allowing the child to participate in the daily work he sees going on around him is an act of great respect for, and confidence in, the child. It helps him to feel important to himself and to those around him. He is needed. Each task your child masters adds to his confidence, self-esteem and sense of belonging.

“Adults work to finish a task, but the child works in order to grow and is working to create the adult, the person that is to be” (Montessori)

Because the child is working to master the activity and to practice and perfect his abilities, he may repeat that activity many times. Adults must therefore be patient and give the child the time and space he needs to accomplish the task at hand.

The Needs of the Parent

Parents do not always have the time to include the child in everything and should not feel bad about this. A teacher is available to the child for this work all day long, and trained to give lessons and help the child grow toward independence. It is too much to expect a busy parent to do this perfectly. Begin with just one thing, perhaps putting the napkins on the table for a meal, and gradually add to the tasks in which the child can participate and eventually take over. This effort on the part of the parent pays off for the adult as well as the child as we observe that the child’s method of working is not just to get the task finished, but also to enjoy it! One of the most important lessons we can learn from the child is how to bring our whole selves, mentally, physically, and spiritually to the task at hand and to enjoy each moment of life.

The following pictures illustrate what a young child can do, and enjoys doing, given the right tools and instructions:



Plant care



Window washing



Flower Arrangement



Washing dishes



Sweeping



Cooking



Grooming and dressing



Hand wash



Laundry



Vacuum cleaning



Pet care



Gardening