

Learn. Grow. Become.



Woodinville Montessori School[©]

a nonprofit organization

Montessori at Home

“Free the child’s potential, and you will transform him into the world.”

A primary goal of the Montessori classroom is to give each child unlimited opportunities to develop his/her own capabilities. It is toward this end that every aspect of the child’s experience at school is planned to minimize the need for adult help. Independent behavior is one of the greatest assets any child can have as he proceeds through school and then life beyond.

We see that parents often have great difficulty making the transition from nurturing and caring for an infant, to allowing a toddler or preschooler to develop his own abilities. As parents, we all continue to do things for our children long after they can and should be doing things for themselves. Some parents go so far as to place themselves in the role of servant to their child, because it provides their own sense of value and purpose, or because their culture or past experience tells them “this is what parents do”. To teach a child to perform a task for himself and then to restrain oneself from doing it for him the next time, requires infinitely more patience, time and self-discipline. It is also infinitely more valuable to the development of that child.

Each time we do something for a child, we rob him of an opportunity to learn and perfect skills. We are only reinforcing the child’s sub-conscious sense of helplessness and inferiority. We also are reinforcing passive rather than active, responsible behavior. There are times when help is appropriate, but we need to remember the consequences of our actions when we habitually wait on a child.

There are children who completely or occasionally resist being responsible for their own toys, dressing, clean up, etc. Your response will depend on the cause of the behavior. Sometimes children need to have us back off, and sometimes they need to have us buckle down. Observe the behavior and ask yourself:

- Is my child responding this way because I have done everything for too long, or am I expecting too much too soon?
- Is my child becoming more dependent in response to stress in our/his life (new sibling; new house; new school; one or both parents absent for a while; separation of parents; visit by a relative, parents preoccupied, holidays, etc.?)
- Is my child becoming more dependent just after, or before some developmental leap?

- Does my child have a more passive personality or is he maturing slowly?

Try to be flexible enough to meet the needs of the moment, but do not succumb to the urge to do everything for the child in lieu of dealing with the tantrums, mess, and/or balking.

SETTING UP YOUR CHILD'S ENVIRONMENT AT HOME

Most preschool age children love doing things with you and for themselves. This is part of their programming to be doing things that support the development of their minds and bodies. Very important aspects of a child's personality develop through participation in the everyday life of a family. Your house should be adapted to support this desire and encourage the love of work by:

- giving them tools and furniture to fit their size
- overlooking less than perfect results
- providing order and encouragement for them to maintain order

Participation and growth of self confidence are the goals here, **not** perfection. All children of this age should be responsible for cleaning their place after meals, caring for their room and toys, wiping up their own spills, and cleaning up after art projects. Once the adult shows or models these behaviors to the child, he can continue to perform these tasks himself. These personal responsibilities lay the foundation for good work habits (order, sequence and work cycle), and give the child a sense of accomplishment and well being.

BATHROOM:

- mirror at child's level
- toothbrush and comb within reach
- towel, washcloth and towel rack within reach
- steps at sink so child can operate faucets (lower hot water temp.)

BEDROOM:

- low clothes rack and hooks in closet
- place for coat, raincoat, boots, shoes, etc.
- a bed that the child can enter, exit, and make alone (mattress on floor with a comforter or washable sleeping bag)

- toy shelves that are low and neutral in color – these are preferred over a toy box because they can be kept in order
- a small table and chairs
- a shelf for books

LIVING ROOM

- a small comfortable chair near a good light
- the possibility to see outside through a window
- beautiful interesting objects that the child can safely handle

KITCHEN

- child's own chair at the table
- stool at sink so he can operate the faucets
- sponges and towels at his level so he can wipe up spills
- a low drawer that contains his own materials for participating in food preparation or house cleaning

ACTIVITIES A SMALL CHILD CAN PERFORM AT HOME

TURNING A WATER TAP ON AND OFF

Demonstrate how to turn the water on to wet a toothbrush or hands, then turn it off so that water isn't wasted, then turn it back on to rinse.

SCRUBBING SINKS:

Materials: a small sponge 2X3", a small can of baking soda or spray bottle with vinegar and water

Lesson: The adult gets the sink wet, applies a tiny bit of baking soda, and scrubs the sink with a sponge. Rinse the sink. Offer the child a turn to do it himself. You can also do this by spraying the sink with vinegar water and wiping it dry.

HELPING UNLOAD THE GROCERIES:

Put the bags on the floor. Let the child hand you anything above his level, and let him put away anything he can reach, unless it is too heavy. It is great to have him sort the

groceries first, as sorting meets developmental needs of preschool age children, and helps them achieve a sense of order.

DUSTING:

Materials: small micro fiber cloths cut 6X6", a small baby's hairbrush, a place for dirty cloths.

Lesson: Call the child's attention to the dust. Ask if he would like to help. Show him how to wrap the cloth around his fingers and wipe away the dust with slow careful strokes, changing the position of the cloth as the dust collects. The brush is used for carved furniture, and nooks and crannies.

VACUUMING:

Material: a vacuum cleaner

Show the child how to unwrap the cord and assemble the vacuum. Make it clear that an adult has to plug and unplug it, and that the vacuum must never be run on the cord or on wet places. Teach him to operate the on/off switch and how to follow a pattern of vacuuming.

SWEEPING:

Materials: an adult broom with the handle cut to child size, a dust pan, and a dust brush.

Show the child how to sweep all the dirt into a pile with a broom. (We use a taped square on the floor to help with creation of a pile.) Hold the dustpan and sweep the dirt into it with the little brush. Carry the dustpan to the garbage and empty it carefully. Put everything away.

MOPPING:

Materials: an adult mop with the handle cut to child size, a bucket, a tile, cement (garage, floor, patio, deck) or vinyl floor.

Show the child how to wring out the mop and how to systematically clean the floor. If you do not wish for them to do this in your house, let them do this work on sidewalks, deck or in the garage.

SPONGING OFF TABLETOPS, PLACEMATS & COUNTERS:

Show the child how to wring out a sponge. Carefully sweep crumbs into a pile and then sweep the pile into the hand, and throw out the crumbs. Rinse the sponge before putting it away. The sponge should be cut in half for the small hand of the child.

POURING:

Materials: small attractive pitchers that hold only a cup or so (creamers) at first, later use 4 to 6 cup size-half full

By providing appropriate sized pitchers, your child can pour his own juice, milk, water, cereal, or pet food into a dish etc. Show him how to wipe up spills, and encourage him to serve others as well.

SETTING A TABLE:

To begin, the adult sets one place as an example and lets the child set the remaining places. Put the dishes down at the child's level, but put more than he needs so that he will have to figure out what he needs. Children can also clean their own dishes after a meal and load the dishwasher, or place them on the counter. Try to eat sit down meals together (breakfast, dinner) several times a week if this is not a daily occurrence in your home. It's never too early to expect children to eat neatly, using good table manners, and to practice these skills.

PUTTING AWAY TOYS, MAKING A BED:

Provide shelves not toy boxes please. If you want your child to put their toys away like he does at school you have to act like the teachers and encourage/ insist that this becomes a habit. Remind the child to put away each toy as he has used it. Have separate containers for every toy that has pieces so they don't get jumbled together. Insist that visiting children also help clean up the toys. Limit the number of toys on the shelves. Sometimes children get out so much so fast that they become overwhelmed, frantic, and impossibly frustrated. If it happens that their room becomes total chaos, you will have to help restore order. Have the child work with you if he is mentally fit to cope with the mess or do it in small sections until the room is cleaned up.

A low bed with only a comforter or sleeping bag is easy for a child to pull together, and by age 4, he should be doing it each day!

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES: (a few of many possible)

matching and rolling socks	recycling	stacking firewood
wrapping packages	decorating for holidays	sorting clothes, folding, putting away the laundry
feeding pets	dust and wash the car	cooking of all sorts
raking leaves	load & unload dishwasher	watering plants
weeding	sand wood	scrubbing cupboards
cleaning out the garage	polish tile	wash windows

When your child performs an activity, acknowledge her effort regardless of the result. Do not redo any part of her project in front of her, and if possible, do not correct any part of her work. As your child has more practice, and becomes able to perform the physical parts of the activity with ease, she will begin long cycles of repetition. These cycles of repetition sometimes are annoying to adults, but extremely important to the child in this developmental stage of her young life! From this repetition the child develops concentration and interest, so the need to repeat should be respected when possible.

Your child will go through three stages as he learns an activity. First, he will perform it for himself and his inner needs. Later, he will be able to perform the task occasionally when asked. At this point, the child is beginning to control his will. Finally, about 12 to 18 months later, he will perform the task whenever asked or when he sees a need.

In the beginning, water activities are often accompanied by large messes. Have several large towels on hand for the child to soak up the water. You will need to help at first with clean up, yet each time there will be less to clean up, and the child can do more himself. **It is important that you maintain a friendly attitude and a sense of humor in the face of these types of water based events!**

Television and Screen Time

Based on an article from “KidsHealth” for Parents and an article from University of Michigan Health Systems:

- On average, children spend nearly four hours a day watching TV, DVD’s and videos.
- 68 percent of 8 – 18 year olds have a TV in their bedrooms; 54 percent have a DVD/VCR player, 37 percent have cable/satellite TV, and 20 percent have premium channels.
- In 63 percent of households, the TV is “usually” on during meals.
- In 53 percent of households of 7th to 12th graders, there are no rules about TV watching.
- In 51 percent of households, the TV is on “most” of the time.
- Children with a TV in their bedroom spend an average of almost 1.5 hours more per day watching TV than children without a TV in their bedroom.
- Many parents encourage preschool children to watch TV.
- Most children’s programming does not teach what parents say they want their children to learn. Many shows are filled with stereotypes, violent solutions to problems, and mean behavior.
- Excessive TV viewing can contribute to poor grades, behavior problems, sleep problems, obesity, and risky and challenging behavior.

Fact: Each year, the average child spends 900 hours in school, and almost 1,023 hours in front of a TV screen.

Based on the findings of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), children in the U.S. spend 4 hours a day in front of the TV, although the AAP guidelines recommend 1 to 2 hours at **the most**. The AAP also recommends that children under the age of two should have **no** “screen time” (TV, DVD’s, videotapes, video games, or computers) at all! These findings are based on current brain research where it has been proven that the first two years of a child’s life are a critical time for brain development. The “screen time” gets in the way of the child’s time interacting and playing with other children and adults, exploring his environment, and time of physical movement (fine and gross motor

skills, balance, etc.) The TV can be construed as a tool when it is used on a limited basis for educational purposes, and occasional entertainment, not for “babysitting” or for constant escapism.

Violence on TV is a concern especially for children between the ages of 2 to 6. Frightening, violent images stay in the child’s brain, and create undue fear and anxiety. The child at this age cannot simply be told that the images are not real, because at this time in the development of their lives, the child cannot distinguish between what is real and what is fantasy.

Ways to teach your child good TV habits:

- Limit the number of TV watching hours:
 - Stock the room in which you have your TV with plenty of other non-screen entertainment (books, magazines for children, toys, puzzles, board games, etc.) to encourage your child to do something other than watch the television.
- Keep televisions out of your child’s bedroom or “playroom”
- Turn the television off during meals
- Do not allow your child to watch television while doing homework
- Treat television as a privilege that your child needs to earn – not a right to which he is entitled. Tell your child that TV viewing is allowed only after chores and homework have been completed.
- **Try a weekday ban.** Schoolwork, sports activities, and job related responsibilities make it difficult to find extra time for the whole family during the week. Save TV times for the weekend, or record shows to watch later. This way you will have more time to spend with your family on meals together, reading and physical activities throughout the week.
- **Set a good example** by limiting your own TV viewing.
- **Check TV listings and program reviews before you let your child watch TV.** Choose shows that foster interest and learning in hobbies, sports, and education (reading, science, history, etc.)
- **Preview programs** before your child sits down to watch them.
- **Create and post a family schedule** each week that limits the time and the shows that are on each week.

- **Watch TV with your child.** Sit with your child, even if only for a few minutes, to assess the tone and content of the show. Check in occasionally...
- **Have conversations with your child about what he sees on TV,** and share your own beliefs and values. If you see something that you do not approve of, turn the TV off and have a discussion about how you feel, and why you do not approve. Ask the child thought provoking questions, such as, “Do you think that it was alright for those men to fight? What else could they have done? What would you have done?” If people are being discriminated against or mistreated, talk about why it is important to treat everyone with dignity and fairness, even though they appear different. You can use TV to generate conversations about difficult or confusing situations and express your feelings about touchy subjects such as sex, love, drugs, alcohol, smoking, work, behavior, and family life. Teach your child to use the TV as a learning tool, by teaching him to question and learn from what he views on TV.
- **Talk to other parents, your child’s teacher, or your child’s doctor** about their TV watching policies, and child friendly programs that can be recommended.
- **Offer fun alternatives to television.** When your child wants to watch TV, offer him another alternative such as a board game, play outdoors, read, work on a hobby or craft, listen and/or dance to music. Make music! There are endless opportunities for fun without a television involved. Spend time with and enjoy your children. They grow fast!