

Learn. Grow. Become.™



Woodinville Montessori School

a nonprofit organization

Interdependence 10/ & Independence 20/

*The First
Plane of
Development
0-6 years*



*In the progress of
personality, first comes a
declaration of
independence, then a
recognition of
interdependence.*

-Henry Van Dyke

How are independence and interdependence related?

Interdependence is mutual dependence between two or more things. Montessori education teaches children to recognize interdependence in all elements of the living and even the non-living world. This is the basis for our strong emphasis on prosocial behavior. The pre-school aged child is still growing in independence. Until a child fully attains her independence, she is unable to fully respect or provide for another's needs. Throughout this growing independence, it is very important to set limits for the child (a whole new chapter on independence). Montessori said, "to let the child do as he likes when he has not yet developed any powers of control is to betray the idea of freedom."

What is prosocial behavior?

Prosocial behavior refers to voluntary actions that are intended to aid or benefit another person or group of people. Such actions may entail some cost, self-sacrifice, or risk on the part of the child.* Examples are sympathy, generosity, kindness, charitable donations, service, sharing, etc. It also encompasses grace & courtesy and conflict resolution. In other words, all the behaviors required to be a productive member of society when the child is grown.

How does a child learn prosocial behavior?

Montessori and current research tells us the first stage of a child's development, from birth to age 3, is an incredible time of unconscious development. The child absorbs both the environment around him and the quality of his interactions with humans. She will learn her native language, adapt to the culture she is raised in, and honor any social order of her surroundings. Research tells us that prosocial behavior begins in infancy and becomes more complex throughout the lifespan. This unconscious learning can never be wholly eradicated from our being. From 3 to 6, development becomes more conscious and prosocial behavior increases in complexity as children learn from interactions with their peers and adults.

If that's the case, what are we supposed to do as parents?

The most important thing we can do is *role model, guide and set limits* for our children. They require consistent expectations, routines and reactions.

Role modeling and guiding may look like this:

- Parent says "Good morning" to the teacher every day.
- Child begins to say "Good morning" to the teacher.
- If your child does not imitate, ask a guiding, open-ended question like "What would you like to say to your teacher this morning?" The child may or may not respond, but continuing to model and guide will help them to learn. After years of practice, saying "Good morning" becomes part of the child's day.

Setting limits is an art that is ever-evolving and personalized to your child. What works for one child may not work for another. All parents set some limits in common. These limits usually ensure the safety of our children. While we let them walk independently, we hold their hand in parking lots and on sidewalks. How they walk in a hallway, however, is a more interdependent action. This shared space requires courtesy to others. Sometimes a child will be uncooperative in these areas. As a guiding parent, we offer them a choice: "You can walk appropriately (hold my hand, don't run, etc.) or I can carry you. Which would you like to do?" Montessori encourages us to "teach children limits with love or the world will teach them without it."

*Mussen, Paul and Eisenberg-Berg, Nancy. *Roots of Caring, Sharing, and Helping: The Development of Prosocial Behavior in Children*. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1977.

Benchmarks of Independence/Interdependence		
	Typically, Infant/Toddler student by age 3 may/will be able to...	Typically, Early Childhood student by age 6 may/will be able to...
Self-Help (for more benchmarks see the Independence Guide)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...dress themselves (shoes, pants, zippers, etc.). ...use a tissue/cover cough when reminded. ...avoid common dangers. ...show manners while eating. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...say birth date and parents' names. ...know 911 and when to use it. ...stay on the sidewalk. ...eat neatly and use napkins. ...dress appropriately for their comfort.
Emotions/ Self-Esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...display a wide variety of emotions. ...separate easily in a familiar environment. ...take pride in their achievements. ...attempt to comfort others. ...resist change and have difficulty with transitions. ...resist help and insist on doing things for themselves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...verbalize emotions before resorting to physical displays. ...comfort others in distress. ...transition to a new activity at the request of an adult. ...sacrifice immediate desires for a delayed reward. ...leave a provoking situation.
Grace & Courtesy/ Social Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...play with one or two other children. ...engage in cooperative play or circle time. ...say please and thank you. ...interrupt appropriately. ...begin to obey rules. ...greet people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...interrupt appropriately and wait for others to finish speaking. ...obey rules without a supervising adult present. ...explain consequences. ...display appropriate behavior for a situation and follow social norms. ...initiate appropriate conversation topics. ...contribute to group conversation. ...begin to work and play without disrupting others.

Independence is not a static condition; it is a continuous conquest, and in order to reach not only freedom, but also strength, and the perfecting of one's powers, it is necessary to follow this path of unremitting toil.

Maria Montessori

Examples of guiding language:

- The most important aspect of guiding language is explaining the child's feelings so they have language to explain how they feel in the future. "I see you're sad." "I see you're angry."
- Never force a child to say they are sorry. Explain how he has caused hurt and tell him to ask the injured/upset child what he needs to feel better. If they will not ask, then you ask. You can then assist the child in doing what the injured/upset child has asked.
- Remember to talk through a situation, and *don't ask why*. Ask "Did something happen?" or say "Tell me more." *Why* is not a question they can answer.
- Make limits and rules clear and consistent. When there is a problem, refer to the rules as the reason they should not have done something. This way there is no blaming on either side.
- Saythings like:
 - Would you help me with...?
 - How can we...?
 - What do you think?
 - How do you think (other child) feels?

Remember, it's OK if...

your Infant child...	your Toddler child...	your 3 year-old...	your 6 year-old...
...does not share. ...tests you at mealtime and bedtime. ...acts impulsively. ...explores <i>everything</i>wants an adult present constantly. ...enjoys being the center of attention.	...does not share and defends her possessions. ...displays shyness with strangers. ...resists change and has difficulty with transitions. ...fights for control and resists you. ...is "clingy." ...only plays with one child at a time. ...says "mine."	...does not share. ...talks loudly. ...is demanding. ...only plays with one or two children at a time. ...resists change and has difficulty with transitions. ...experiences extreme emotional fluctuations. ...gives paradoxical responses or is inconsistent. ...insists on doing things independently. ...resists help. ...takes pride in achievements.	...behaves inconsistently. ...asks why. ...feels upset when others break rules and seeks justice. ...develops an interest in culture. ...requires more and broader social interactions. ...experiences many other changes. See the <i>Interdependence Guide for the 2nd Plane of Development</i> to see ongoing benchmarks and examples.