



General Guidelines for the Montessori Approach

The Montessori approach to education embodies an attitude to life and underlying principles that can be applied to any situation, providing an environment and a supporting adult that considers the needs of children as they grow and develop.

In this period of time when you are home with your children you do not need to recreate ‘school’ nor become a Montessori teacher. It is also quite possible to do without Montessori material and still have a Montessori approach.

At all times, we try to adopt an approach that helps children learn for themselves. You helped them learn to walk, to talk and to become sociable and so much more, you did this patiently and were delighted when the children responded, showed determined interest and surprised you with what appeared to be sudden acquisitions that appeared to come out of nowhere! Your children absorbed what was around them, practiced it in their own time and mastered it. More importantly you didn’t make them feel a failure if they didn’t master these things following your timescale of expectation.

Here are a few things that might be useful to you at this time:

- Research shows us that children who are relaxed and happy learn much more easily than those who feel stressed.
- Much of what your young children learn can be picked up from you automatically in the way that you go about the everyday tasks in life.
- Children learn best when they do so at their own pace – learning and mastering the everyday things in life gives children confidence and confident children are ready to embrace challenges.
- Children need to make their own discoveries – learning how to give just enough help but not too much is an artform - let children experience the joyfulness of discovering things and telling you all about it is an experience that cannot be lost.
- Children learn when they are interested – it may help to choose the right time of day when they are ready for something new and challenging. Things that just need practicing can be done at any time of the day. Be prepared to

stop a game if they are unwilling to play or becoming frustrated.

- Children learn by doing – the more active and involved they are, the more likely they are to become engaged and interested. Getting that balance right can be challenging at any time.
- Children need encouragement and recognition rather than praise or treats. Focusing on extrinsic rewards takes away from the intrinsic value of learning. Use phrases that recognize effort “that took a long time, you must be happy to have completed it” or “that wasn’t easy but you kept going”.
- Mistakes are an opportunity for learning. When children make a mistake, it shows that they are encountering ideas, actions, skills and thoughts that are new. It is important to cultivate a positive attitude to these ‘mistakes’ and help your child feel that it is fine if they make a mistake and they can just try again and will gradually gain mastery of the activity.

And some key Montessori principles:

- Repetition. Allow your child to repeat an activity as much as they want.
- Movement. This is the way young children develop. Encourage movement during the day at all times.
- Choice: Children learn best when they have chosen an activity. If your child is struggling to choose an activity, you can give a (limited) choice “would you like to do this or this”
- Observation: Take time to just watch and observe what your children are doing. You can see what they are interested in, what they enjoy, where they need more help or repetition, what distracted them, what they concentrated on and much more. You will be surprised what you discover.

Lastly, these are challenging times and everyone is coping as best they can. Try not to put yourself or your children under too much pressure. Your children will continue to amaze you with their capacity to learn even in these very different circumstances.

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