Basic Principles of the Montessori Method
The Family and the Home Environment

Preparing The Home Environment For The Young Child

Principles

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT:
Movement is an essential characteristic of life and one of the most important aspects of development in the child’s first years. Regard for safety is the first priority. Physical movement should not be hindered by artificially imposed boundaries. The adult should always be aware of barriers in the environment that limit movement. This development includes the cognitive, emotional and physical development. When movement is restrained the child’s growth is stunted.

SENSE OF ORDER:
A sense of order provides security in the child’s first early years. The infant that has a consistent routine can, over time, anticipate what follows from one event to another. This predictability makes the child feel more secure. As the child develops he/she becomes freer to explore and catalog information where by outer order becomes inner order.
In the home this may seem like an impossible task, however, limiting your child’s possessions, clothing, and toys is the first step.

INDEPENDENCE:
The adult must trust that the child will do what he needs to do. There is a natural sensitivity and drive to become independent. By thinking the child is not doing enough or that the child needs more, the adult creates interference and becomes an obstacle to the child’s independence. The important question is: How can I help my child to do it by him/herself?

Look at the room from the child’s perspective and determine if your child is able to reach the tools and things he needs to carry out his personal tasks and duties to be an integral part of the working household.

SELF – MOTIVATION:
The child is born with an innate motivation to reach out and explore the environment. The child gets thwarted if the environment is unresponsive and provides no satisfaction from the child’s efforts. It is important to set up an environment that lessens the likelihood of failure and increases the likelihood of success. The success insures that the child will repeat the action.

CONCENTRATION:
The child must be allowed to complete a cycle of activity. This takes observation and respect for his age and personality. As the child gets older there is an innate sensitivity to concentrate. Oftentimes, adults interrupt according to their need and not the need of the child.
RESPECT AND DIGNITY:
Respect and dignity should underlie all the principles of the home environment. A child must be allowed to act from his/her own choosing. In this way, he/she learns to master the self and can regulate his/her own conduct. The most respect we can give children is to try to better understand their growth and development in an environment that addresses their needs. The way in which we speak to a child is critical in the home environment. Dignity, or lack thereof, is often found at eating times or bathroom procedures.

IMPORTANCE OF TIME:
The young child is very capable of being independent and doing things for himself/herself. However, often the failure of the child to carry out tasks is not due to his/her capability, but to the time pressure imposed.

SHOW RATHER THAN TELL:
Children, when they are shown rather than told, are capable of doing many tasks. The difference between the adult and the child is that the adult can know how to do something by telling. The child needs to be shown. Children are able to watch a person or activity, and then repeat that activity in exactly the same way and manner as shown.

IMPORTANCE OF THE ADULT:
The most important part of the child's environment is the adult. Children absorb the attitudes, characteristics, personality traits, speech habits, mannerisms of the adults who relate to them. Raising children is an awesome responsibility.
Supportive Home Environment: A Checklist for Parents
By Mary Holland Stration

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In the Secret of Childhood, Montessori wrote: “The adult’s work is to build up a transcendent environment.... the child’s work is to produce an adult.” As the adults in your home environment, you can assist your child with this great task. Allow your preschooler to experiment, explore, try fail – and try again.

Give acknowledgment for the child’s achievements: “You really did set the table.”

Give encouragement when things don’t work out so well: “Sometimes it’s hard to learn to do something new, but people usually get better with practice.”

Assist the child in discovering the many things independently. By preparing and structuring your home environment to facilitate exploration, you can provide your child with practical opportunities to master skills, experience independence, and feel like an important and useful member of the family. This also models the behavior of showing respect for others.

Here are some possibilities that our family has tried with success:

**The Living Room**
- Child size chair
- Table for the child to sit/work at
- Favorite things storage space: A shelf lower in a bookcase works well as a place to keep things that the child plays with in our family/living room ie: basket of Lego
- Small rug or mat to define the child’s territory when working on the floor
- Provide shelves for toys, books or games
- Shelves inside and doors to close for neatness
- Limit amount of toys. Rotate
- Allow a child to dust and vacuum
- Allow a child to feed pet, water plants

**The Kitchen**
- Step stool
- Allow the child to do table setting/clearing
- Allow child to put silverware away
- Provide small pitcher for pouring
- Special storage space - low – for child’s use
- Basket of utensils the child uses to prepare food
- Plastic mat to use on the counter to define child’s work area
- Self-serve snacks on a low refrigerator shelf, small juice pitcher, fruit, sliced cheese, crackers
- Small paper towel rack at the child level or sponge for cleaning up spills
- Small cups and glasses in easy reach
- Dishes: Plastics are so light and impervious to carelessness that the child can miss the need to perfect his or her movements. Real dishes are more likely to induce careful handling
- Small table and chair

The Bathroom
- Stepstool to stand on while using sink
- Low towel rack, hook or ring
- Sponge for wiping up splashes
- Personal storage space
- Small Soap
- Drinking cup
- Bathtub toy container
- Low clothes hook
- Low mirror

The Bedroom
- Chest of drawers (use only the drawers the child can see into for most everyday clothes)
- Full length mirror or low mirror
- Closet: low hooks, lowered rod, small hangers
- Calendar
- Bulletin board for posting the calendar and displaying special work
- Mats for floor work
- Table and chair
- Art supply box – materials to practice skill ie: paper, scissors, pencils, crayons, glue, water, color paint
- Wastebasket
- Low shelving for toys and book
- Storage box under bed
- Hamper for soiled clothes
- Allow child to match socks, dish towels, wash clothes

What rooms and items can you think of to complete the list?