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Montessori at Home

Have you marveled at the remarkable order of the Montessori classroom? Has your toddler told you that at school she pours her own juice? Does your teenager hang or put away all her clothes—without being asked?



Encouraging order, independence, and self-motivation are fundamental to the Montessori approach. Carefully designed classrooms allow students to develop competence in caring for themselves and their surroundings. And from the sense of pride that "I did it myself" blooms the confidence to take on the world.

Bringing Montessori principles into your home can be a valuable bridge to what your child learns at school. Here are some ways to build that connection.

Create an Ordered Environment

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.



To make things accessible to your young child:

Provide low shelves or drawers for clothing; lower the rod in the bedroom closet.

Keep a small step stool in the bathroom and kitchen so your child can reach the sink.

Arrange toys and games on low open shelves with a particular place for each. Sort smaller items into trays or baskets by category, such as puzzles, art supplies, and blocks.

Put healthy snacks and foods on a low pantry shelf so your child can help himself.

Pour drinks into small, manageable pitchers placed on a low refrigerator shelf. Keep cups within your child's reach—along with a sponge to clean up spills.

Teach Real-Life Skills

Montessori students are taught to take care of themselves and their classroom and to be helpful to others. They wash tables, organize shelves, prepare their own meals, and assist younger children. In addition to mastering real-life skills, they come to see themselves as valued members of the community.



Having your child help at home can bring similar rewards. Take the time to teach each skill separately and to repeat the lesson as needed. Each task your child masters adds to his confidence and self-esteem.

Young children, for example, can peel vegetables, fold their clothes, match their socks, and care for pets. "Tweens" can sort the mail and take out the recycling. And adolescents can prepare the family dinner, read to their younger siblings, help with computer maintenance and home repair, and manage their own bank account.

Promote Concentration

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The ability to focus and concentrate is an important skill for learning. You can help develop your child's concentration by observing what sparks her interest. Set her up with the means and materials to explore it, and let her work without interruption.

While your child's work environment should be free of distraction, it doesn't have to be away from family activity. Some children prefer working at the kitchen table or reading in a cozy corner of the living room to holing up in a bedroom or study. Observe your child's response to various environments, ask questions, and make adjustments as needed.



Nurture Inner Motivation

Children are most willing to apply themselves when they feel there's intrinsic value to their work. Some parents use external rewards as motivation, but only pride and pleasure from within has lasting, and meaningful, effects.

Montessori teachers refrain from using traditional classroom rewards such as gold stars and merit-based privileges. Instead, they focus on nurturing each child's personal sense of accomplishment. Even praise is given sparingly—saved to acknowledge a child's effort, rather than the outcome of her work.

By expressing encouragement and appreciation for your child's efforts, you—like her teachers—help nurture an inner motivation that will serve her for life.

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