

Montessori Pedagogical Guidelines for Supporting Learning at Home During COVID-19

“It is necessary that the human personality should be prepared for the unforeseen, not only for the conditions that can be anticipated by prudence and foresight..... For success in life depends in every case on self-confidence and the knowledge of one’s own capacity and many-sided powers of adaptation.”

(Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence, Appendix A*, 1948)

Respect

We respect humans of all ages, recognizing each as having their own unique way of learning and being. As such, we seek to provide individualized learning opportunities and guidance specific to each child and family’s needs. We acknowledge that children and adults, parents, teachers, and school administrators are experiencing a great amount of stress and trauma, therefore flexibility and genuine concern for the wellbeing of all takes precedence over academic learning goals.

Adaptability

Montessori philosophy and practices by design are meant to be adaptable to any culture and social needs. The needs of the children and families we serve during this time call for us to look beyond our typical classroom prepared environments, beyond our tried and true Montessori materials and beyond the lessons in our albums. We recognize that the child’s prepared environment is now the home and we must adapt lessons and expectations based on the wide variety of resources both physically and emotionally available within these home environments.

Community

In this time of physical distancing, social cohesion is more important than ever. All of us need each other. We need to expand the community spirit we cherish in our Montessori schools and classrooms bringing it into the hearts and homes of our children and families. Connection must be our main focus. Using a variety of digital platforms to be together in ways that make sense according to the age, size, interests and culture of your class. Have lunch together. Sing together. Dance together, Do yoga together. Play games together. Have sharing time. Foster ways for students and families to collaborate remotely in large and small groups. Encourage the role of social responsibility for all community members. Each member’s contribution to care for the home and family, as well as participating in the remote learning environment is valued.

Order

All humans thrive when there is order in their lives. Children especially need predictability and structure. Establish a prepared remote environment through routine. Carry on with the rhythm of your classroom as much as possible, as appropriate for your age group. Regularly schedule on-line lessons/gatherings. Present familiar songs, stories, classroom rituals. Create new structures for learning together remotely. Evaluate their effectiveness with your students and/ or parents as appropriate for your age level. Adjust when necessary, but as much as possible create routines, then stick to them. Provide resources to families to help them establish order and routines that will work for their family and child.

Independence

Help them help themselves is one of the foundational principles of Montessori. Our classrooms are designed to enable children to independently meet their own needs and contribute to the community. As children grow older in Montessori environments, they increasingly become more responsible for their own learning. Our current learning at home situation provides both challenges and opportunities related to this vital need for independence. Parents of younger children are likely to need support in preparing their environment to encourage independence. Activities recommended for young children must consider the ability of the child to do the work independently and parental limits to support children with complex activities while meeting other responsibilities. Older students can be encouraged to own their own learning with teachers providing guidance and accountability appropriate for each individual child.

Choice

Education is not something we do for or provide to children. Real learning and personal transformation are the result of engagement in freely chosen meaningful activities. Choice can happen naturally in well prepared school environments where there is an abundance of materials and activities that call to the child. The home environment may or may not provide for the same level of independence and choice. Our goal must be to help parents and children create opportunities for meaningful engagement and purposeful work at home. Resources, suggested activities, and lessons must include opportunities for choice with clear age appropriate expectations. Given the stress of the current situation, we must be flexible and offer choice for when, what, how and how much work will be done.

Creativity

Being thrust into this new way of teaching and learning can be a catalyst for creativity on our part as guides and on the part of our students. It is perfectly ok to use resources outside of our albums. Be open to experimentation and discovery. Be kind to yourself and your students if these experiments do not turn out as desired! Model for our students how we learn from our mistakes! Many students have fascinating projects of their own going on in their homes. Encourage this as an integral part of their learning and have them share to inform and motivate their peers.

Grace and Courtesy

Teach expectations for on-line interactions, both for guided class time and for when students interact with each other on social media without adult guidance. Acknowledge the need for grace and courtesy in our own homes and the homes of our students, recognizing that all of us are house-bound and experiencing more family togetherness than most of us are accustomed to! Practice and encourage kindness, patience and acceptance, with humility. We are all learners and doing the best we can in a stressful situation. Find the grace within and the courtesy to support each other.

Preparation for Life

Always keep in mind the higher goal of supporting the development of healthy capable flourishing human beings. Every moment in life is precious. Remember this in setting a positive tone and in appreciating the challenges everyone is experiencing. Address and incorporate world events and the current situation as appropriate for the needs of your students, acknowledging that these events may be taking a personal toll at many levels on many of the students' families and on ourselves. Encourage students to participate in the work of their families at home: laundry, cooking, dishes, yardwork, sibling care. Support students' grappling with their new living situations.

Love

Dr. Montessori said, "Of all things, love is the most potent." It is love that will get us all through these difficult times. Work from your heart as much as your mind. Approach children and families with a generous eye, recognizing that everyone is doing the best they can. Be available to your students and families. Know that much of what will be accomplished right now is the establishment of a safe and comforting space. Set personal boundaries on when and how you can be reached to create a safe and comforting space for yourself and your family as well.

When Montessori Goes Viral:

Supporting Families of Infants and Toddler at Home Following Montessori Principles

During this time of “lock-down” when most parents are suddenly in the dual roles of their professional work and caregiving, our advice and support are important for everyone’s wellbeing. Parents are quickly recognizing *their* need for their children’s independence, as they seek to telework while keeping their children safe and happy.

Our mission is also two-fold. We may be tasked with providing frequent and varied lesson plans and group classes. Yet our hearts and minds call us to view each child holistically and consider the context of stress and trauma that underlie our present circumstances.

Thank goodness our work is grounded in the child-centered, developmentally based theories of Dr. Maria Montessori. Let us examine core principles and how they should guide our support to families.

Children learn best in a **prepared environment**. At school, we strive to make our classrooms home-like. Now that children are home, let’s avoid making their living spaces school-like. We should help parents understand the importance of the prepared environment in supporting their children’s independence. We can suggest how to organize and display toys, keeping in mind each child’s unique interests and developmental abilities. We can explain how children do more with less, that children become overwhelmed when a toy or building block set has too many parts. We can give tips on how to rotate toys and activities to inspire interest, always leaving in place current favorites.

Children thrive on **order and consistency**. When children can find and care for their own belongings, they feel capable and responsible. When they can anticipate the routines of the day, they feel secure and confident. Children can be independent for long stretches of time when they have carefully arranged spaces for dressing, hygiene, preparing food, cleaning-up, and independent play.

Learning and development are dependent on **movement and spontaneous activity**. Parents need to understand that young children are driven to move in order to learn and develop. We serve this need by providing opportunities to challenge their bodies and to manipulate objects. In every area where the family spends time there can be a space where children can do gross motor and fine motor activities. We can meet with parents and help brainstorm ways to make this possible with what can be found at home.

Concentration occurs when a child’s mind, body and will are engaged. We can help parents recognize the “sweet spot” where an activity has the right amount of challenge without frustration. We can emphasize that young children are most interested in what is **real and purposeful**; that they want to participate in the daily life of the home. Children need **freedom of choice** of developmentally appropriate activities in order for deep engagement and concentration to take place. Because we want to protect this deep mental state we provide time

for **uninterrupted work**. The type of play that children do when their bodies and minds are fully engaged we elevate to the status of 'noble work' as a recognition of its importance in helping children reach their fullest potential.

Once parents understand the importance of concentrated work, we can caution them to avoid interrupting it. Through **observation** we can help parents recognize when their child is focused on an activity, only stepping in when their child is clearly frustrated. They will come to appreciate their child's interests and abilities and recognize their needs. They will notice the tendency for **repetition** as their child exhausts an activity in order to learn a new skill. We need parents to understand that their child's focus is in the **process not the product**. This will help them avoid placing undue attention on their child's end results and minimizing their efforts.

It is important to note that we are always in relationship with children. It is through collaboration that we learn and teach. **We model, observe, offer points of interest, and observe again.** Children watch and imitate in order to learn to be like the adults they love, to fit into the world they love. Our caregiving and guidance is a partnership based in love. Parents intuitively understand and appreciate this, but need a reminder in hectic and stressful times. Providing techniques to help them slow down and de-stress may be the most helpful support we can give. Each family's situation is unique and what parents are able or willing to do will vary. We should meet them where they are with utmost humility and grace. As Dr. Montessori said, "**Of all things love is the most potent.**"

Early Childhood Considerations

Respect

- Recognize the unique developmental needs of children 3-6 when preparing and providing remote learning experiences and activities.
- Be flexible in your schedule expectations. Limited or no participating is an option and must be respected. When possible record virtual group meetings and make available for viewing at another time for those who are on a different timetable.
- Keep in mind the limited attention span of young children during group time. Use interactive songs and movement activities to keep young children engaged. Invite children to share.
- Use a variety of methods to reach out to your families to assess their needs and do it often as situations change frequently.

Adaptability

- Focus on concept versus materials. For example, young children like to classify so make suggestions on how to provide experiences for them to classify their home environment such as sorting laundry, finding items and sorting by color or shape. Encourage practical math with everyday objects and life experiences such as cooking or counting pinecones or flowers found in the yard. Encourage language development through reading, storytelling, sound games, listening games.
- Appreciating that learning does take place through all meaningful activities such as building materials, drawing, movement, free exploration.
- Provide suggestions that take into consideration varying abilities, interests, time restraints and available resources at the home.

Community

- Children are missing friends. They need to see each other, laugh together, and play. Make virtual group meetings fun and interactive.
- Have virtual sharing time encouraging children to share their pets, a favorite toy, something found on a nature walk, art projects, cooking projects...
- Connect with each individual family for weekly check-ins.
- Set up shared folders or classroom FaceBook pages for sharing of pictures and videos.
- Provide/encourage opportunities for families, children and/or parents to socially connect virtually.

Order

- The role of the teacher shifts from creating the orderly classroom environment to now coaching families on how to create order within the home and practical spaces for children to work and play independently within the home.
- Virtual options should be limited and flexible allowing families to fit things into their own personal schedules. For example, providing predictable on-line gatherings helps to establish a routine but also having recordings of those gatherings allow families to participate within their own schedule.

Independence

- Be mindful of how much parental involvement is needed with suggested activities
- Provide clear guidelines and procedures for parents so that they can set up activities with the child's independence in mind.
- Help parents understand that clean-up of the activity is also the child's work and provide guidance on how to help children learn cleanup processes.
- Send lists of materials for projects ahead of time whenever possible. Provide ideas for alternative materials with consideration that everyone will not have all the supplies at home and may have a limited ability to purchase them.
- Give parents permission to be observers and allow the child space for exploration, mistakes, and independence in their interaction with the activity.
- Promote process versus product

Choice

- Remind parents that participation is optional and not mandatory
- Provide a variety of activities so children and parents can choose the best fit for the child's ability, interest, and family situation

Creativity

- Be mindful that recommendations "outside of the box" are in alignment with core Montessori principles (concrete to abstract, process versus product, hands on, isolation of a single concept or skill, etc.)

Grace and Courtesy

- Encourage parents to discuss and model expectations and procedures instead of assuming children know these.

- Give parents suggestions and resources for positive and respectful guidance and redirection of challenging behaviors
- Provide resources for self-care and supporting emotional wellbeing for children and families

Preparation for Life

- Be mindful that the best preparation for later school success and life is to provide a safe, secure, loving environment that meets the present needs. Supporting children and families to get through this challenging time is the most important thing we can do to secure a healthy future.

Love

- Let love be your strength and guide.