

## **Montessori style parenting**

Some tips on how to apply the Montessori method at home, regarding the human factor.

### **1. Mind your pace**

In modern times people race through life, always busy, always in a hurry. We have schedules, we have a whole mountain of plans and everything has to be done on time. Toddlers don't have an idea of time. They live in the moment. They are here and now. When you say "hurry up!" and they don't (because they can't), you get anxious, start rising your voice, they get upset, you get angry and in the end everybody is unhappy.

What can you do? Have realistic expectations – slow down, plan less, grant your child the time and space to explore life at a slow pace, and allow time for movement, observation and conversation. Join in and allow yourself to be fascinated by the small things that that your toddler is just now discovering.

### **2. Respect the child**

Often people overlook children, saying that they are still small, too young to understand, not able to do anything. A lot of parents just keep their children dressed and well-fed and wait for the moment for them to grow up and be able to participate in the adults' life. In fact, children are people. Maria Montessori calls children "the makers of men." They are no less than adults and they are able to take part in normal life.

What can you do? Respect your child. Speak and listen to your them as you would speak and listen to an adult. Get down to their eye level, look at them in the eyes when you speak. This way they feel safe, not dominated, and more connected to you. It assures them that you care, that you really intend to communicate and have a dialogue, not to just give orders and expect them to comply with them.

### **3. Focus on learning**

There is a difference between teaching and learning. Toddlers learn. Parents wish they could teach them but sooner or later they realize that it is not really working this way.

What can you do? Provide your toddler with the space to learn. Prepare the environment at home and give them the freedom to interact with it and get the most of it in their way and in their pace. Spend a lot of time outside and let them discover nature. Provide experiences for them to make discoveries by themselves. Develop love for books. Do experiments together. Always answer their questions and if you don't have an answer – do your best to find it out together. Look it up



in a book, make a trip to the library, ask a neighbor or an expert. Be a role model – small children learn how to do things when they observe and copy adults.

#### **4. Observe and follow the child**

Oftentimes we try to show children how to do something and even though we respect the child, we give them space and we are being a role model, they are still not learning from the experience that we are trying to provide. That could happen because, as we said, children as also people and as such, they have their own interests. Moreover, there is a good time for them to do things and maybe we didn't choose the good time.

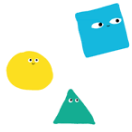
What can you do? Observe the child. Follow them in their interests. Provide them with really valuable for them in the particular moment experiences. A toddler can only learn something they are interested in. If you try to impose things on them, they will simply not accept them. They will follow their inner drive to learn. They love to learn. Just maybe sometimes not exactly what we expect them to learn. Provide them with a rich (but not overstimulating) environment and observe them. They will show you their interest and you can simply follow it and enjoy the sparkle in their eyes when they manage to satisfy their inner drive.

**5. Include them in daily life** — Not all adults have the patience to let a toddler participate in daily life activities. After all, you can do it much faster and house work is not going to wait for you – it simply piles up, right? If this is the way you think, then think again. Could you ever learn a skill without practicing it at all? How could you possibly expect your children to start helping around the house when they turn 10 or more? After all, you never allowed it to them before and now they don't have the skill and they don't have the will.

What can you do? Daily life activities are simply practical life. Young children like to be involved in cleaning, doing laundry, cooking, setting the table, loading and unloading the dishwasher or even washing the dishes in a traditional way. They can mop, they can dust shelves, they can give food and water to a pet. They can keep the order in their room and in the house. They learn by observing and copying and they master their skills through repetition. The trick is – they need more time.

#### **6. Put yourself in their shoes**

Do you get angry sometimes when your child will simply go on their way and not yours? And they would even get angry and start screaming and crying if you insist on yours? There are two sides to every story. What would seem to you the logical way to do something might not be the way your toddler would do it.



What can you do? Try to see things through their eyes, try to figure out what the problem might be. It could be extra difficult if the child is not able to verbalize it. Acknowledge their feelings. They have the right to them as much as you do. The difference is that you have much more experience and you are able to deal with yours and they are still not. Next time your child is crying “for no reason” look at them, kneel and look directly in their full of tears eyes and see how small they are and how big is the emotion that they just cannot overcome on their own. Give it a name, understand it, be there for them.

## **7. Use alternatives to bribes, rewards and punishments**

The child would not do what you ask them to unless they are promised some ice cream? They run around the house and accidentally break an expensive vase and you send them to their room to calm down?

What can you do? First of all, think about how your expectations comply with reality. You might be asking for too much. Or you might be simply asking in a wrong way or in the wrong time. If a toddler is concentrated on an activity, it is just not the right time to prompt them to use the toilet or give up what they are doing in order to go somewhere. Wait for a moment of distraction. If you would like them to help you around the house just ask them for help. Younger toddlers are usually just happy to help. Older toddlers feel appreciated when they are given responsibilities (appropriate for their age). Your appreciation and smile is a reward for them. Also the personal satisfaction of work well done. They really don't need any material rewards. They don't need punishment either. They need to see consequences. Breaking a vase and being sent to their room just doesn't make any sense. Cleaning up (together) after the accident and being explained that now the vase is broken and cannot be repaired and it was beautiful to have a vase of flowers in the room but now you can't have it anymore will touch them more than going to their room, which would just make them feel angry, lonely and misunderstood.

## **8. Follow the rules**

Do you feel like in your house everybody is doing whatever they want? The reason could be that you have no rules and set boundaries.

What can you do? Set some simple rules and make sure that everybody follows them. Really everybody! Rules cannot only apply for children, as they are an equal part of the household. There might be some special rules for them to ensure their safety but any rule must be first explained, then accepted.