

## Practical life for toddlers

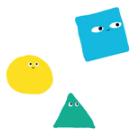
The practical life activities are basically everyday life activities, involved in all aspects of life. Toddlers gain knowledge on how to accomplish a practical life activity by observing. They have been observing for their whole life, even before they could walk and talk and before they could coordinate their movements well enough to be actually involved in such an activity. From the very beginning practical life activities are done TO the child AROUND the child and this way they start feeling important and they learn to trust in themselves and the environment, that somebody will feed them, clean them, help them. Soon they start collaborating (in dressing, for example) and later they start being independent. The role of the adult is very important – he must observe the child and know when to pull back in order to provide the child with the necessary conditions to become independent.

Through practical life activities a child becomes integrated in the family, becomes a part of it and starts learning the rituals of the first social group they are a part of – the family. Even though practical life activities are being done in every household, every family has specific ways to do them, uses different tools to accomplish an activity and so on. For example, in some families, people use a sponge to wash dishes, in others – they use



a brush. They might use liquid dish washing soap or gel for washing dishes. They might put the washed dishes beside the sink or on a dish drying rack or they might wipe them dry right away. Such differences may exist in the process of doing any other everyday life activity. These activities are also quite cultural because in different parts of the world people have different ways of doing them, depending on their surroundings, climate conditions, culture, traditions and religion. Actually, through all these activities children learn what it is to be a human being.

The practical life area is the biggest area in a Montessori toddler classroom. It is, actually, a great part of the home environment as well. When children start walking, they have their hands free, they can finally try to actually participate in all those activities that they have only been watching for about a year now. It is great to offer them real experience – not a toy kitchen/iron/vacuum cleaner but to let them really participate in the



housework. At first they can only do it together with parents and this way they start feeling a part of their community.

### **Areas of practical life**

#### ***Care of self***

Here are included all the activities that are connected to personal hygiene and looks: washing their hands, washing their face, wiping their nose, brushing their hair, cleaning their shoes, brushing their teeth, dressing and undressing, preparing food (peeling, cutting, squeezing, mixing, grating). All of these things teach them a skill but their

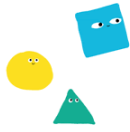


purpose goes much beyond the technical skill. For toddlers all activities must be practical based – washing dirty hands, cleaning dirty shoes and polishing them with real polish, cutting fruits with a real knife.

#### ***Care of the environment***

Washing dishes, drying dishes, washing clothes, hanging clothes, ironing clothes, arranging flowers, watering plants, cleaning the leaves of plants, drying a table or the sink, washing a table, sweeping a table, sweeping the floor, mopping the floor, dusting the shelves, setting the table – these are all activities for taking care of the environment that toddlers are able to do. Again, every activity must have a purpose - washing dirty dishes and dirty clothes, watering dry plants, mopping a puddle of water, etc.

In a Montessori classroom the practical life activities are colour coded – this helps children to understand that certain items belong together. For example, all the items for washing the dishes are yellow: a yellow jug, yellow washbasins, yellow sponge in a yellow bowl on a yellow tray, a yellow towel. This satisfies the toddler's sense of order and helps them orientate in the environment. In a Montessori classroom there is a place for everything and everything is in its place. Having the activities colour coded helps the children to put everything in its place. Each activity is designed so that the child can perform it independently after a presentation. Each activity is always ready to use. The bowl or washbasin must be big enough to contain all the water from the jug. It is difficult for a toddler to estimate the amount of water to pour and they pour all of it at once. Then



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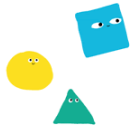


the bucket in which the child will throw away the water must be big enough to contain all the water from the bowl/washbasin. And, of course, everything must be proportional to the child's size. Cleaning up is a part of the activity. After working with a certain activity, the child must clean and dry up everything and leave the activity in the same way as it was upon starting. Nevertheless, in a Montessori classroom there is only one activity of each kind so it is not always available. One child could be using it at the moment and this means that if another one wants to use it, they must wait. This way they learn grace and courtesy, they learn to wait, to take turns. Also, if they have to wait for an activity, it gains more value.

### *Grace and courtesy*

Maria Montessori firmly believes that all our movements must be graceful. And courtesy is cultural. It varies from country to country. Often when people are at home with their family or with friends, courtesy drops out. Nevertheless, when we are around children we must remember that we are a role model and the child absorbs not only our words but also our way of speaking and our behavior. We must speak kindly and treat nicely not only the child but also the other people we communicate with. When children start using courtesy, it is an indication for their development. A child should never be forced to say "please", "sorry" or "thank you." If they see and hear the adults in their environment doing it, they will know the meaning of these words and when they are used and they are likely to start doing it themselves but they should only say them when they really mean them. By forcing them to say words that they don't mean, we teach them to lie. We teach them that they just need to say a word and they are redeemed but being





sorry for something doesn't just mean to say so – it means to realize that you hurt someone and by realizing it you will do your best never to do it again.



Etiquette is a great part of *Grace and courtesy*. Behaviour at the table is important and the adult is a role model. Children learn how to set up a table, to eat neatly, to properly use cutlery, to have a conversation at the table but talk only with an empty mouth, not to interrupt other people, to ask politely to be given something, to excuse themselves when they leave the table. Etiquette concerns also going out, behavior in a public place, communication with people outside of the house. All of this is, of course, strongly cultural and the child is learning the proper behavior for their own community.

### *Movement of objects*

Carrying a chair, carrying a table, carrying a tray from the shelf to the table and back, rolling and carrying a rug or a working mat, carrying a jug, carrying a bucket, carrying a plate – for everything that needs to be moved in the environment the children must be given a presentation on how to do it correctly. By all means, objects must be carried one by one and always in both hands.

### Purpose of practical life

- Teaches a **practical skill**.
- **Adapts to the culture/group/family** – through practical life activities toddlers are integrated in their families and start learning about their culture.
- **Functional independence** leads to **intellectual independence**
- Helps develop **concentration** – completing an activity, consisting of following certain steps, requires concentration and toddlers are able to completely immerse



in an activity. The most important thing for them at that moment is to be allowed to concentrate on the activity for as long as they need and not to be interrupted.

- Helps develop **sense of order** – as everything else in the environment, there must be a place for everything and everything must be in its place. It's important to put all the objects back in their places when they finish working and to return the activity in its original looks.
- Helps develop **language** – with an adult naming every object they use for a certain activity, they enrich their vocabulary and connect the word with the meaning through the realized purpose of the object.
- Assists in the development of **self-esteem and self-confidence** – repeating an activity makes them better and better at doing it and they see that they can manage on their own and feel the power they have.
- Refines the **movement and coordination** – both gross and fine motor skills and equilibrium. They will spill, they might fall down while they carry a bucket of water, they will pour more water around the flower vase than inside of it at first but with repetitions they will get better and much more coordinated.
- Increases **intellect** – Maria Montessori believes that it is through the movements of the hands that we develop our intellect.
- Develops the **will** – they have knowledge and because of that they can make informed choices.