

Effective Parenting and Montessori Philosophy

Session #1: “I can do it!”

Parents and Children are more similar than we might imagine, but also can have vastly different goals – and both can have mistaken goals. Both have skill strengths and challenges and personality traits which could be very different from one another, even though all the building blocks came from the parents! As a parent it is important to remember that you and your child might not cohabit easily. At first the burden will be on the adult to recognize and make accommodations for this. Later you will be able to work with your child on negotiations to meet the needs of both parties.

The Montessori philosophy teaches us to first honor every human being, no matter how young, as a complete and unique individual due our respect. We generally all LOVE our children, but may not treat them with RESPECT. And for those of us guiding children on their path of development, Dr. Montessori encourages lots of observation and liberty so that you can interpret the needs and the goals of the child.

I like the Positive Discipline [Mistaken Goals Chart](https://littleacornsmontessori.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/mistakengoalchart.pdf)

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I wanted to start by introducing that because as we go along you will see how the sometimes mistaken goals of the child, and the common responses of parents can lead to very common struggles. And I love how the Montessori methods can help us to avoid falling into these common issues.

#1 Goal - Attention

The primary thing that children want is to be noticed and included, to be seen as capable and valuable contributing members of their community. Undue Attention is mistaken goal #1 because it is very common. When a child wants attention, it does not matter to them if it is negative or positive, if their goal is attention, they will take whatever satisfies this goal.

We can help prevent the development of undue attention-getting behaviors in young children through the following:

- Find ways for children to gain useful attention
- Give attention to positive behaviors
- Allow children to have their feelings
- Maintain clear boundaries, not changing them due to tantrums or misbehavior
- Engage children in problem solving
- Set aside **quality** time with your children

Set them up for success in their environment:

“Any child who is self-sufficient, who can tie his shoes, dress or undress himself, reflects in his joy and sense of achievement the image of human dignity which is derived from a sense of independence.” -Maria Montessori

- Do you find yourself doing most things for your child in an environment set up for adults? How can you make everyday tasks and chores child friendly, developmentally appropriate, and accessible? Get curious!
 - When your child spills, do you clean it up for them? What if they had a bucket, a sponge and a small stool to give them access to a sink? They could get their bucket and sponge and clean up their own spills!
 - When getting dressed, does your child have far too many options, inappropriate options for the season, or are their shelves, drawers and hangers too high? An easy modification is to put a small set of options at your child’s level, on a shelf, in drawers, or on a low hanging rack. Keep it simple and select clothing that your child can easily take on and off.
 - Are they hungry or thirsty and waiting on you to get them a drink or food? Set up a shelf with pre-approved items that you are okay with your child eating at any point during the day, think bananas, apples, and other healthy snacks. Limit the number of items to 3 or 4 per day to avoid snacking too much between meals. Be sure to have plates, bowls and utensils available to them as well, and a small dish bin to put dirty dishes. Model how to get their food and clean up after themselves until they get the hang of it.

Expand your thinking. What else could your child do independently? Could they warm food in a microwave? Could they wash their face? Could they feed the pets, put dirty clothes in the laundry, sort their laundry, fold their laundry, fill or empty the dishwasher, clean the cat litter box, make their bed, button their sweater, zip their jacket? It is fun to think about how you might set up the environment in order to make your child successful at a new opportunity.

Why are we so passionate about independence?

- The feeling of successfully doing something meaningful on one's own is a huge factor in building a sense of self-confidence. It builds over time, as one success leads a child to feel more confident that something they want to try will also be successful. And strong self-confidence is a key factor in long term success and happiness.
- There are many opportunities to build physical coordination: hand grasp, wrist rotation, finger control, core strength, balance, spatial awareness. And young children seek opportunities for maximum effort, so let them move the kitchen tower, or a table or chair, or a bucket of water themselves.
- There are opportunities to learn order and logical sequence of events. Learning to put things where they belong so we can find them when we want them later! Learning the sequence of washing a table, from clearing the table surface, to getting the table cleaning bucket, filling it with water, dipping the scrubber in the water, then in the soap then scrubbing the table top in small circles. Then using the sponge to carefully wipe off the soap, rinse and ring out the sponge and wipe again. Then drying with a towel. Then emptying the dirty water, making sure the cleaning tools are put away tidily in the right place. That is a lot of steps!
- Learning how to do things correctly offers opportunities for practicing appropriate behavioral boundaries and sets them up for learning some self-discipline and follow through. (The sponge does not get thrown on the floor when you are finished, the bucket of water does not get poured on the table, etc.) When you know that they know how to use a sponge, you will feel more confident in requiring them to use one to clean up a spill for themselves.

- **Being helpful and independent gives the child opportunities to seek and receive your highly valued attention through positive and helpful actions, and to spend time with you doing the daily chores that do take up a lot of our adult lives. When they feel included they are less likely to seek attention through negative behavior.**
- Doing REAL work is much more engaging for children than being relegated to pretend participation. Engagement teaches concentration and concentration brings a feeling of peace and joy.

Some of the common things I see going off track include:

- **Rushing the child** - It takes them longer to do things. Plan your timing for success. Start them earlier. Create charts to help them remember the steps needed. Be careful of your verbal and non-verbal communication telling the child they are doing something wrong if they can't get their shoes on fast enough, for example. Instead saying in annoyed voice, "hurry up, I'm going to be late for work!" Try, in a calm voice, "It's time to go to the car. I will help with one shoe and you can do the other." Or "It is time to go to the car. Bring your shoes and you can finish putting them on in the car, or at school."
- **Guiding every step for the child** – A parent picking up their child from school will often say "Get your water bottle. Get your jacket. Get your bed roll. Get your backpack. Say goodbye to your friends." This does not give the child any opportunity to be responsible or to feel capable. A better process would be to talk with your child about all the things that they bring to school and need to bring home again perhaps the day before going to school. And then you could make a visual chart to look at home to help them. And then when you arrive at school you can ask "When we leave school what do we do?" Often they will be able to tell you the steps and you can give them a huge smile and note how they are so responsible! If they forget a step, then you can gently remind them, maybe even bring your visual chart so they can figure out what they forgot for themselves.

- **Shaming or Nagging the child** – When adults get stressed or frustrated we can use language that be hurtful. Sometimes I hear “I’ve asked you 5 times.” Or “I’ve shown you how to do this many times.” Or “Why are you doing this?” This kind of language can be shaming, making the child feel they are not capable or that they have done something wrong because they are not able to master a skill or task. And honestly, they don’t generally rationally know WHY they are doing something, and even if they do, they probably won’t tell you. : -) If you hear yourself saying these sorts of things, look in the mirror (as Michael Jackson sings).
 - If you have asked 5 times then you are not following up your words with actions. Explain your expectations and the consequences for not complying once and then follow through.
 - If you have shown a child many times, maybe there is something not child friendly about the situation – the clasp is too difficult, the shirt is too tight, the pitcher is too heavy, the drawer is too high. Ask the child to show you and observe where you see the difficulty arises for them and come up with a more child friendly solution.
 - If you are finding yourself asking “Why are you doing this?” Refer to the mistaken goals chart. It is probably for attention or power or one of the other mistaken goals and you can find ways to offer them the attention or power they are seeking in a positive scenario.