

Montessori Explained

Help me to do it myself



Young children enjoy helping around the house

Montessori believed that only when children are free can we discover their real nature and offer them the opportunity to develop their true potential. Barbara Isaacs suggests ways to introduce freedom and independence in the home.

There are no major issues concerning freedom during the first year of a child's life when they have limited mobility. The real challenge comes when babies start to walk and suddenly have the need to explore further a field. This need is very strong and leads to the first real tantrums and conflicts. Children of this age have a very strong drive to exercise their limbs and should be given the opportunity to do so. The strive to perfect their movement is a major step towards independence and contributes greatly to their later autonomy.

Practically this means that as parents and carers we should make sure that part of the day is spent outside in a garden or park. Do not limit the direction or the speed; the child's movement will appear not to have any real purpose but it will give children the opportunity to practice

Young children have a strong desire to exercise their limbs



walking and climbing when they are at the playground. All these skills contribute towards the later ability to problem solve and think in a logical way. They also give the toddler positive feelings of achievement and fulfilment.

Young children can also help you around the house; this will of course not make your chores quicker to complete or done to your usual standard, however, it will give them the opportunity to be with you and learn how you do these tasks. They will want to copy and mirror your skills and behaviours, and with a little bit of organisation you can give them the opportunity to dust, polish and even help with the hovering using the small hand held car vacuum, the dust bug or even the Hoover if they can manage it. They will also enjoy helping with sorting washing, loading the washing machine or dish washer or putting away shopping.

During the second year of life children really love carrying. This works particularly well in the garden – they can help you by carrying pots, filling them with soil, watering the seedlings. But remember that they will need tools and utensils which are easy to handle and so will need to be smaller, for example they will need a their own wheel barrow, spade or rake or even their own gardening gloves, all of which can be obtained in your local garden centre.

The benefits of this involvement will be the development of muscles, growing strength, the opportunity to absorb everyday language as well as a growing sense of belonging and well being as they continue to be in the company of the most important people in their lives.

The child will never again have this deep need to help you as they have between one and four years of age.

Children also begin to show an interest in dressing themselves and you may want to start helping them by putting two sets of clothes out in the evening so that when they wake up they can decide

which one to wear and try to put them on. Equally they should be given the opportunity to feed themselves and wash their hands before and after meals. You may even try to organise your fridge in such a way so that they can access their drinks or a light snack such as cubes of cheese or pieces of fruit if they are hungry.

This approach will require consistency in that you will need to put the clothes or food in the same place so that the child can find them. This can also be applied to the storage of toys. After a while you will notice that quite naturally they will put their toys or books back where they found them.

Remember the child's life operates at their height, so ensure that cloth pegs, towels, tooth brushes, their shoes as well as shelves with books and toys are all easily accessible. This is your way of showing your children they are important to you and that you consider their needs. You will be amazed how this care and attention to detail on your part will mirror in their behaviour during the next stage of their development when they will be able to display initiative and will show you how many things they can really do for themselves! ■

Barbara Isaacs, College Chief Executive of MCI

Tips

Place coat hooks at child height to encourage independence

Use the bottom shelf of the fridge for easily accessible snacks

Use low shelf in kitchen to store child sized plates, bowls and cutlery

Store toys and books on low shelves

Buy child sized equipment for the garden