

Supporting your child at home 2

In the last issue **Ana Pickering** shared ideas about how to apply the Montessori philosophy at home. Montessori teachers and parents around New Zealand share some further ideas about how you can support your child's development at each stage from birth to adulthood.

Infants

- Feed your young baby in a quiet environment, with lots of skin to skin contact. Give the gift of your full attention; focus on the baby and talk while you are taking care of his or her physical needs.
- Provide a safe, supportive environment that allows your baby to see around the room and the time and space to move freely.
- Provide your young baby with interesting things to look at and safe objects to hold and explore with hands, feet and mouth; mobiles made of natural materials that she can focus on and rattles to reach for, touch and hold.
- Try a low bed, instead of a cot, so that your baby is free to move, to access his bed when tired and to rejoin the family when ready.
- Choose clothing so your baby is free to slither, crawl, climb and walk, and dress herself. Provide pants with elastic waists, shirts that fit easily over the head and shoes that are easy to put on and off.
- When your baby starts on solids encourage her to gradually feed herself, use a spoon, cut up food with a small butter knife and drink out of ordinary cups.

Children

- Let your child help; feed the cat, close the curtains, turn on the lights, clear the table, scrape plates, do dishes, put away toys, peel vegetables, and she will experience the satisfaction of helping her family.
- Have firm boundaries and be consistent with your rules in your house – children will quickly learn the expectations: what is not OK at home might be OK at their grandparents' house and vice versa.
- Help your older child gain the skills to deal with the wider community – car manners, shop manners, telephone

manners, email manners, how to ask for help from other adults or children.

- When your child asks a question, answer with 'I don't know. How could we find the answer do you think?' Depending on their age show them how to use books, the internet, and other people to find answers to their questions.
- Avoid empty and over-frequent praise and again replace with a description of the actions. For example replace 'You are such a good girl' with 'I appreciated how you put your book aside to help with the dishes.'

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- Ask your Montessori teacher how to use letter sounds, not letter names, when your child is interested in learning letters. When your child is learning to write words, it is crucial to use lower case rather than capital letters, since lower case is used more frequently.
- Read to your child at any time during the day, not just at bedtime. Read books that are slightly above your child's age level, vary the style/genre, read poetry, tell stories, model writing - keep a holiday journal and write down a story/sentence about what you did each day.
- Ensure your child has uninterrupted time to play and explore each day – if his play is constantly interrupted he



will become frustrated and unable to concentrate for long periods.

- Help your child develop their concentration span by providing interactive activities with a clear beginning and end and 'control of error'. Jigsaw puzzles are fantastic. Encourage your child to count everything. Count steps as you go up the stairs, count knives and forks while placing them on the table together, count letterboxes as you walk by.
- Find open-ended toys for your children to play with: toys that can be used in a variety of ways and encourage exploration and creativity such as wooden blocks and art materials.

Adolescents

- Keep eating dinner around the family table with your teenager as important connections and sharing occurs during this family time.
- Adolescents benefit from adult mentors outside the family circle such as teachers, sports coaches, or family friends
- Teenagers need the comfort of intimate, supportive peer groups: make your home an 'adolescent friendly' zone.
- Give your teenager an allowance and support them to budget for clothes, entertainment and other negotiated items.
- Support your teenager to find a part-time job – you will be amazed how competent they can be in the workplace!
- Keep talking with your adolescent. Adolescents still care what a parent says, especially if it is non-judgmental and empathetic. ■

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