

# Supporting your child at home

**Ana Pickering** shares some ideas about how you can support your child's development from birth.

## Infants

■ Support your baby to trust in his environment – respond quickly to his cries with a gentle touch, quiet voice and empathy so he quickly learns that his needs will be met and that his world is safe.

■ No one likes to be physically moved without warning; be respectful and tell your baby what is going to happen next. Wait, then pick the baby up; he will soon be able to anticipate what is coming next.

■ Use proper words and sentences with your baby; the richness of your child's vocabulary will depend on what the baby hears around them. Read to your baby from a young age – then she will discover words beyond everyday vocabulary.

■ Throw away the jolly jumper and the walking ring, and take your baby OUT of the car seat; leave it in the car and put him on the floor as often as you can.

■ Fasten a long mirror on the wall at floor level so your baby can see herself; your baby will see a different view of the room and begin to connect her movements with her reflection.

■ At meal time limit conversations and media distractions so your infant can focus on discovering texture, taste and the eating experience.

■ Respect your baby when concentrating; give your baby time to explore and play until he has finished. Wait until your baby tells you he is ready for something new.

■ When your baby is sitting provide a discovery basket with a few interesting objects made with natural materials; household objects are just perfect and fruit and vegetables in season are fabulous.

## Children

■ Keep a routine, be predictable... this kind of low-key steadiness breeds a sense of safety and security; children who are worrying about home are not primed for learning.

■ Tell your child what the plan is for the day; explain where you might be going and who they may see. Give your child advance notice of change – 'After I have finished hanging out the washing we will put the Lego away and then we will get in the car to go to the supermarket.'

■ Encourage your child to dress herself; it doesn't matter if the clothes are backwards, inside out or don't match.

**“Limit choices to a manageable level for the child at each stage of development. A young child can choose whether to wear a blue t-shirt or a green t-shirt but not what time they want to go to bed!”**

■ Show your older child how to hang out and fold laundry, how to put the rubbish out, how to mow lawns. Teach her how to use hammers and screwdrivers and how to paint.

■ Make sure your child can independently open her school lunch; replace difficult-to-open packaging and plastic wrap with easy-access reusable containers.

■ Have firm boundaries and be consistent with your rules in your house – children will learn quickly the expectations: what is not OK at home might be OK at their grandparents' house and vice versa. Limit choices to a manageable level for the child at each stage of development. A young child can choose whether to wear a blue t-shirt or a green t-shirt but not what time they want to go to bed!

■ Develop a sense of self as a 'giver'; let your child choose something to donate to a charity and keep the discussion alive with your child... what can we do to help?

■ Look around your Montessori preschool - you will see little alcoves



for quiet activities as well as communal areas. Take this concept home and have child-focused spaces for reading, puzzles and activities of the moment in addition to communal areas so your child can join in all family activities.

■ Say what you want to happen, not what you don't want to happen: 'Put your feet on the floor, that's the only place they go' rather than 'Please don't kick your brother!'

■ Avoid empty and over-frequent praise and again replace with a description of specific actions. For example replace 'You are such a good girl' with 'I appreciated how you put your book aside to help with the dishes.'

■ Young children are in a sensitive period for order. Use this sensitivity to help them learn where things go in your house: dirty clothes in the hamper, shoes by the door, plates in the cupboard, cups on the shelf, coats on low hooks.

■ Offer only a few toys at a time, storing the others away and rotating what is available so that there is not a large and overwhelming profusion of toys available all the time.

■ In your busy life it is easy to become disconnected from your child's conversation. Take time to reflect on what it is that your child has communicated each day.

■ Give your children experiences and more experiences; instead of buying them lots of 'stuff', go on a road or bus trip, discover a local park or beach, go for a bike ride, fish off the wharf, share a musical experience. ■

**Ana Pickering** is the editor of *Montessori Voices*, the quarterly magazine produced by Montessori Aotearoa New Zealand where a full-length version of this article was first published. She is an AMI 3-6 teacher and parent of three children. Thanks also to all the Montessori teachers and parents in NZ who contributed to this feature.