

## **NURTURING A PEACEFUL SCHOOL COMMUNITY FOR CHILDREN, STAFF AND PARENTS - GUIDELINES**

Maria Montessori declared that “Establishing lasting peace is the work of education”. She indicated in her work that “the child is both a hope and a promise of mankind”. “The work of education” plays a key role in supporting and guiding children in preparing them for their lives, while creating a better foundation for a more peaceful society.

Montessori education focuses on the development of inner peace. Teaching children the skills of communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution will equip them to work towards peace in a challenging world.

Young children possess the ability to acquire enormous behavioral, social, linguistic, environmental, and cultural information and the quality of early experiences has a significant impact on foundational skill acquisition and the development of brain architecture in a way that later experiences do not.

Therefore, early childhood is the optimal period for developing peaceful interactions among peers and peace-making skills because this is the period when children develop the cognitive capacity to understand themselves and others while beginning to learn and acquire social skills and capabilities.

As for integrating peace education in the classroom, educators have an important role as bridges to peace, especially by serving as a good role model, building strong relationships with children, and continuing to grow as an educator.

Educators are positioned to build quality parent–educator relationships because of potential for interaction. Frequent interactions provide opportunities for parents and educators to form collaborative relationships. The work of early childhood educators includes engaging families facing parenting stressors and living in vulnerable circumstances.

School authority, staff, students and parents have responsibilities for ensuring welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments that respect diversity and nurture a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self.

### **Welcome!**

When you are greeted warmly, it conveys a **positive atmosphere**; someone cares that you are there. Apply this to children by **greeting** them by **name** and welcoming them at **eye level (with a smile!)**.

Adults caring for children can set the **emotional tone** of the room. If adults are **positive, caring, and attentive**, the environment in the room will **begin to reflect** this.

Consider simple additions, such as **displaying family photos, class photos, children's art/projects, and a welcome sign**. Incorporate other home-like additions, such as cozy materials (pillows, blankets, comfortable chairs).

The environment will reflect each child as well as the group, and also convey a sense of home.

### **Group work**

Children need to feel being part of a group or family. **Provide** group times such as eating times, project times, and meeting times. It is in these groups that children will become aware of each other and gain a sense of the class as a whole.

It is also in these group times that children are **instilled** with a sense of responsibility to **care for each other** and for **the environment**.

Have the children, along with the adults, think of rules or "living ideas" for the group. State and write the rules in a positive manner, such as "We use inside voices" vs. "No yelling."

This is an important time for both children and adults **to share** ideas, especially in **solving** conflicts. Offering children **the voice** to discuss and make decisions **means** that they are **an important, competent** member of the group.

### **Natural connections**

Nature has a way of adding beauty, **a sense of calm**, and creativity to any **environment**. Create **opportunities** daily to expose children to the outside world, **especially getting outdoors to play!** The fresh air and physical exercise will provide a pathway to good health. Research shows that children who are physically healthy are happier. Happier children create happier environments.

**Display** beautiful items from nature in the **inside environment** (especially those the children discovered!) such as seashells, leaves, flowers, rocks, interesting sticks, and plants. The children begin to see the adult's respect and awe for natural materials, and also show a sense of honoring and caring for something. Caring for nature reflects caring for each other.

## Engaging Environments

Lots of time and **space to explore**, along with developmentally appropriate, interesting, creative materials, **help children focus**. Boredom or having nothing to do can be the cause for unwanted behaviors, but a child happily involved in play reflects an engaging environment and in return supports peaceful environments.

### Be a peaceful role model

Guiding and offering **peaceful solutions** to children during conflict is one of **the most important skills** offered to children. Even at an early age, children can learn to start problem solving and resolving conflicts. Model words to encourage sharing and turn taking:

- "You both want a turn with ..xxxxx.... How can you both get a turn?"
- "Tim is using...xxxx..... Did you want to ask him for a turn?"
- "How can we help each other?"

A child **happily involved** in play reflects an engaging environment and in return supports **peaceful environments**.

**Role playing** is important in practicing **problem solving**. **Offer** the children problems to try and solve. Use **everyday** experiences that the children are working on (sharing, clean-up, being kind) without using names. It is helpful to practice with puppets or small animal (or people) figurines.

Role-play different situations that you notice amongst the children. Talk about peaceful ways to resolve the conflict. You can define and discuss **compromise**, **taking turns**, and **listening skills**.

One conflict resolution technique that children love is to have one object in the classroom that is always used when children are resolving conflict. Children face each other (or sit in a circle) and whoever is holding the object gets to talk. No one can interrupt, and once the object is passed on, the next person gets to talk exclusively.

**Peaceful environments** take **time to build** and take **continual care** in order to maintain. In the process of creating and implementing **peaceful** environments, we are in turn nurturing **peaceful and caring** children.

Peaceful environments raise children's awareness, knowledge, and skills for prosocial behavior. Children also display an enhanced positive attitude toward themselves and others, and more cooperative, socially positive behavior in the community.

Include into classroom curriculum songs, books, and games that dealt with peace, love, and kindness while encouraging pro-social behavior. Young children have the ability to process complex information, behaviors, and abstract concepts like peace. In addition, through appropriate approaches, peaceful education benefits children's behavior.

### **Some ways to include peace in your curriculum:**

1. Start by defining the word "peace" with your children. You can ask children what they think it means; their answers will probably be very enlightening. They are often surprised to realize that peace can be found many places. It doesn't just refer to "world peace". They can have a hand in creating a peaceful environment wherever they are.

Peace may look a little different to everyone. Rather, it's learning how to deal with conflict in a way that doesn't put the rights, wants, or needs of one person over the other.

2. If you have an annual event, like a concert or other performance, **choose "Peace"** as the theme every so often. You may also challenge the children to draw or paint pictures of "peace" and what it means to them. Much insight can be gained by looking into their responses.

3. Have children participate in **the care of their environment**, showing respect for the materials, pets, plants, and other children.

4. When studying geography, history, and other cultures, **emphasize respect for the diversity** of traditions and customs found around the world.

5. Be a **good example**. Don't argue with parents or other teachers in front of the children. Speak **respectfully** about other people. Don't gossip. Show **kindness**. It can be easy to forget that children are watching your every move and learn more from what you do than what you say.

6. Establish **special holidays** and **rituals** for your classroom. These can include **joyful** celebrations as well as **sad** occasions (like the loss of a pet). Everyone can share in the planning, decorating, and celebrating.

### **Tips for developing positive relationships with parents:**

Having a **friendly, positive** relationship with parents as a teacher isn't a necessity, but it certainly makes things easier. When you have troubles in the classroom, you have someone on your team that can work with you outside of the classroom. Additionally, an **example** of a **positive** adult relationship could be something that your students desperately need.

To children, their parents are their home team and their safe space. When they can see that their parents trust you, they will likely follow suit.

### 1. Wear a smile

The best way to foster a positive relationship with parents is simple: smile! But do so genuinely — don't wear a smile to appease your students or their parents, or to hide your true feelings.

When you greet parents in the morning, exchange niceties and be mindful of your expression. When parents see you as someone who is cheerful and happy to see them and their child, they'll be more likely to want to develop a positive relationship with you. Turn that frown upside down, and see how much of an impact it makes!

### 2. Learn their names

Addressing parents by **their first names** is an easy yet effective way to establish a **positive relationship** with them. When you take the time to learn these small tidbits, it shows that you **do care**.

Parents know that you have an extensive list of names to memorize, so when you go the extra mile to do so, they'll more than **appreciate** it. Before long, they may consider you **a friend** and not just a teacher!

### 3. Learn to communicate effectively

When we form new relationships with people, the first thing we do is talk. Humans are social creatures at heart. When we want to form a relationship with another person, we express that intent verbally. Even though you might have the best intentions, **remaining quiet** can **portray** you as **pretentious** or **indifferent**.

If you aren't the chatty type, you can start a **weekly newsletter** or email chain to at least keep parents in the loop. Many parents will see those efforts and appreciate them, resulting in a more friendly and pleasant relationship between you all.

### 4. Ask questions

If you hope to create a **positive relationship** with parents, you need to **show interest**. And the simplest way you can do that is by **asking questions!** Get on the same level as the parents and ask simple **questions** about their **children**. For example, you might ask who the child's favorite toy is or inquire about their favorite snack.

This might seem like a small gesture, but it will move mountains when winning new parents over. The only thing most parents want is a teacher who has their child's best interest at heart. If you can prove to them that this is your goal, you'll be a winner in their book!

### **5. Don't wait to speak or call parents until there's trouble**

The **worst** thing you could do is to **wait to speak** or **call** a parent when their child has a problem at school. No parent likes to have a conversation with a teacher about their child misbehaving. If you are **only** speaking or calling to report **negative** information, parents will **dread** conversations with you.

Try surprising parents calling or speaking to report **exemplary** behavior or something **positive** or **special** their child did. Parents love to hear about their children doing great things. Pretty soon, they will start associating you with positive thoughts, which will only help your case when building those positive relationships that you seek.

### **6. Show genuine kindness and compassion for the child**

A parent's **number-one** priority is **the happiness** and **well-being** of their child. For this reason, it is not enough to simply be on good terms with them. You must also **display** a **healthy** and **positive** relationship with the child.

Unfortunately, parents don't often get to see all the action of the classroom, which is where most of your efforts go. **Smiling** at the child and having an overall **welcoming tone** is the best way to show parents that you are actively involved in their child's well-being, as well.

### **7. Always start with the good news first**

In the unfortunate case that you **have to** share **bad news** with a parent, always **open** the conversation with something **positive**. This information doesn't have to be earth-shattering; it needs to soften the blow of the negativity.

Try highlighting **a good** events, grade or behaviour **before** jumping into the **bad** stuff. The parents might not realize what you are doing, but they will definitely be in a better headspace to take on the bad news you have to share with them.

### **8. Treat them like a customer**

If it's easier for you, try treating each interaction with parents as you would with a well-paying customer. This isn't to say that you want to be transactional; rather, **you treat them with respect** each time you see one another.

You wouldn't wave a customer off each time they entered your business or ignore their presence, right? So don't do it to your students' parents!

## 9. Encourage feedback

Parents want to feel included in all aspects of their children's' lives. When it comes to sending them to school, they face the dilemma of allowing another adult to dictate their child's time. For some parents, this can be challenging.

An excellent way to encourage a positive relationship with parents is to ask them for their feedback. Implement an open-door policy in your classroom where everyone has a say. This doesn't mean that you need to turn your class on its head, but if you're willing to make a few small changes for the sake of the parents, it could calm anxieties and change their perception of you.

## 10. Try not to make assumptions

No matter how much you've seen (and as a teacher, you've undoubtedly seen a lot), you **never truly** know what a person is **going through**. It can be tempting to **make assumptions** regarding parents that seem **uninvolved** or **apathetic**. You **must avoid** this, though.

Accept that you **don't have** all the information about these parents' lives and that you **could never** understand why they act the way they do. This would be the time to show **kindness** and **compassion**, no matter how hard it is to do. The last thing you want is to damage a potentially good relationship over **false assumptions**.

## 11. Show gratitude

Some of the most **impactful words** you can say to a parent are **"thank you."** For as much as you do for their child in the classroom, parents do tenfold at home and on the weekends.

When a parent takes time out of their busy schedule to help you with a task or **open up** a conversation, **thank them!** Showing gratitude proves to parents that you are **genuine and appreciative** of all they do inside and outside of the classroom.

## 12. Create a parent survey

Even if you have already opened your door for suggestions from parents, some will be hesitant to share their opinions. If you want to show parents that you're interested in their feedback, consider soliciting anonymous surveys from each parent.

This will provide them with a safe space to share their thoughts and will further prove that you see the value of their opinions and any feedback that they may be willing to share.

### 13. Create volunteer opportunities for parents

Many parents want to **be involved** in their child's school life but **may not** have the opportunity. You can solve this problem by creating such opportunities for them. Consider asking for **volunteers** to assist you with planning class events.

Even parents that **don't have** time to dedicate to your cause will **notice** and appreciate your initiative. You are presenting yourself as someone who cares equally about parents and students, which will encourage positive parent relationships all around.

### 14. Listen to them

Nothing is more **frustrating** to a parent than a teacher that **presumes** to know **more** about their child than they do. Your teaching career has likely given you ample experience in dealing with children from all walks of life, but parents **know** their kids **best**.

If a parent approaches you with **advice or suggestions**, listen with an **open mind** and let them know that you **hear** them and **care** about their concerns. Parents will be grateful that they have a teacher on their team that wants to work together to ensure the success of the student.

### 15. Have an open-house event / parents-teacher meeting

Invite your students' parents into your classroom to break bread and share ideas. An open-house / parents-teacher meeting event is the perfect setting in which to do this. This will give you a chance to explain what you do in the classroom and what a typical day looks like.

It will also allow parents a time to ask questions and learn anything they want to know about their child's education. Don't be afraid to allow it to get personal — revealing a little about your own life helps parents to see you as a person and not just an employee of the school. **Authenticity is the best way to go.**