

PREPARATION OF THE HOME ENVIRONMENT

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Introduction

We created The Preparation of the Home Environment to give parents information on how we work with the children at school, and how you can transfer some of those methods into your child's life at home.

The ideas put forth in this pamphlet are merely suggestions. Any activities your family participates in can be broken down into logical steps and the Montessori Method applied. You do not need to buy special Montessori materials used in class to teach your child. In fact, we strongly discourage you from doing so, as we have special training to introduce these materials in specific ways and because your child will not be as attracted to the work at school!

Many of the activities mentioned in The Preparation of the Home Environment are appropriate for toddlers and pre-school age children. We will make note if an activity is more suitable for a particular stage of development.

Below are the names of two catalogs which might be of help to you in preparing the home environment. They offer items such as pitchers, mops, buckets, etc. which are sized appropriately for toddlers and young children.

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Preparation of the Home Environment

Bathroom:

- mirror at child's eye level
- toothbrush and comb within reach
- towel, wash cloth and towel rack within reach
- steps at sink so child can turn on tap and wash hands

Bedroom:

- low clothes rack and hooks in closet
- place for raincoat, boots, rubbers, snowsuits, shoes, etc.
- a bed that child can enter and exit by himself
- toy shelves -- low and in a neutral color (toy shelves are preferred over a toy box because they attractively display the toys)
- small table and chairs
- shelf for books

Living room:

- small comfortable chair near a good light
- the possibility to see outside through a window
- beautiful, interesting objects in the environment that the child can safely handle

Kitchen:

- child's own chair at the table
- possibility of getting own water at the sink when she wants it
- sponges and towels at child's level so she can wipe up her spills
- low drawer that contains any materials she needs for participating actively in the care of the home environment

All children should know the names of all objects in the home environment.

ACTIVITIES A SMALL CHILD CAN EASILY PERFORM IN THE HOME ENVIRONMENT

- *Turning a water tap on and off*

- *Scrubbing sinks*

Material: a sponge 2"x 3", a small can of cleanser with only one hole uncovered

(Caution – the cleanser should be stored out of the child's reach.)

In the first stage the adult applies the cleanser, the child turns on the tap and scrubs the sink with a sponge. Later the child applies the cleanser under adult supervision and then carries out the activity as above.

- *Helping unload groceries*

Put bags on floor. Let child hand you things and put away things at his own level.

(Caution: Some cans are too large to be lifted safely by a child.)

- *Dusting*

Material: Pretty flannel cloths cut 6"x6", a small baby's hairbrush, some place to put the dirty cloth.

Call child's attention to the dust. Ask him if he would like to be a helper. Show him how to wrap the cloth around his fingers and wipe away the dust in slow, careful strokes, changing position of the dust cloth on his fingers as he notices dust collect. The brush is used for carved furniture, nooks and crannies. Child can dust furniture tops, legs, baseboards, corners, ornaments, etc.

- *Vacuuming*

Material: a vacuum cleaner

Most children love to run vacuums. Show child how to connect the parts of the vacuum.

(Caution: Make it very clear that an adult is to plug it in!!)

Show him how to turn it on and off and how to clean different parts of the rug.

- *Sweeping*

Material: small broom, brush, dust pan

Show child how to sweep dirt into a pile with the broom. Hold dustpan and sweep dirt into it with the little brush. Carefully carry the dustpan to wastebasket and empty it. Wash off dustpan.

- *Pouring*

Material: Small attractive pitchers

Child can pour milk, juice and water for himself and others. At first pitcher should contain only as much as the glass or cup 2/3 full. Later pitcher contains more than one glass will hold.

- *Setting Table*

Child helps parent put out dishes and silver and carries them to table one thing at a time. Later parent sets one place as an example and child sets a place for each family member. Finally child sets table by himself, counting out each thing he needs. Of course items should be put down within the child's reach.

- *Sponging off plastic table tops and counter tops*

Material: small sponge 2"x3"

Show child how to wet and wring out sponge from a tap. Child carefully sponges off counters, etc., putting crumbs in a pile or sweeping them into his hand.

- *Putting away toys*

This is a habit. Encourage your child to replace each toy on the shelf after he has used it. Sometimes children get out so much so fast that they get frantic and impossibly frustrated. If this happens, the adult should put away the toys with a friendly manner and say nothing.

- *Other Activities You Can Develop Could Include:*

- rolling socks
- folding cloths and linens
- storing cloths and linens
- weeding
- raking leaves
- watering plants indoors and outdoors
- helping wash a car
- helping wrap packages
- helping decorate the home for holidays
- washing and drying dishes
- sorting clothes for a wash

When your child performs an activity to help care for himself or the home environment, acknowledge his progress regardless of the result.

Ex.: "You worked very hard on that!" Do not redo any part of it at all. As you child gets more practice and becomes able to perform the physical parts of the activity with ease, he will begin long cycles of repetition. These cycles of repetition are often annoying to adults. However, they enable the child to work with interest and, eventually, concentration.

Socially your child will go through three main stages. First he will perform an activity for herself and her inner needs. Later he will be able to perform the task occasionally when asked. At this point the child begins to control his will. Finally (about 1 to 1-1/2 years later) he will perform the task anytime asked or whenever he sees a practical need.

In the beginning it will be difficult for your child to perform water activities without making a big mess. Have several beach towels on hand to help clean up the water. Several times later there will be very little spilling and the child will be able to do most of the cleanup himself. DURING THIS TIME IT IS IMPORTANT FOR THE ADULT TO MAINTAIN A FRIENDLY ATTITUDE AND A SENSE OF HUMOR! Remember, acknowledge what he does and tries to do. The most important aspects of a child's personality and intellect develop through participation in the everyday life of the family. They are order, sequence, independence, self-control, self-respect, and the joy of learning and accomplishing something purposeful. A child lives to work. From this vital work of building an adult she derives the joyfulness that learning through discovery can bring. All of this will result in an adult who will enjoy the life-long feeling of self-respect, independence and concern for others.

A WORD ABOUT TOYS

Toys should be safe. They should challenge your child's interest and imagination without being too difficult or too easy. If your child plays poorly or destroys a toy, it is either too simple, too difficult or is in such deteriorated condition that it is impossible for him to use it with a sense of joy, wonder or fulfillment.

We recommend neutral colored toy shelves because they offer the possibility of displaying a toy in such a way that it attracts and lures the child to it. Each toy should be washed often and have all of its parts. If a toy is difficult to store or keep neatly on the shelf, make an attractive box for it. Each toy that has removable parts should have a beautiful small box for the storage of those parts.

Marvelous handles for wood puzzles can be made by using a wood awl and making a small hole in each piece. Put a little glue in the hole and insert a mini eye screw. Also it helps if the adult numbers each puzzle and all of its corresponding pieces on the back.

Toy rotation results in better use of toys. Children always feel that some of their toys are “new”. Only 8-9 toys need be on the toy shelves at one time. The others should be stored accessibly. As your child tires of some toys they can be replaced by stored toys. Of course if a child asks for a “stored toy” he should be able to have it.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN THE MONTESSORI HOME

Language is a communication based on order. In the home, spoken language has a most important part to play in the development of your child’s potential. Parents must make language exciting. It needs to be used with joy, care and love. Children begin to love and savor words as an expression of the spirit of humanness. Language creates pictures (mental images) in the mind of present, past and future. Through it, we create love and hate.

We have three types of language usage: spoken, written and read. Spoken language is important because words are easier to recognize when they are known as spoken and heard. In fact, the great preparation for reading and writing is done through spoken language. This can be done in the ordinary home and garden. Reading and writing are the by-products of spoken language.

Unfortunately communication in the American home often disintegrates into an amazing series of nods and grunts between husband and wife, parent and child. It is a vital task of time to develop the language exploration of the child. After all, the child does not imitate the sounds of the household animals, but the human voice. The quality of the child’s language reflects the quality of the home communication and environment of the home. Here are some ideas of how the parents can create an excellent language environment for their child:

1) Extension Vocabulary

The child should know the name of absolutely everything in the home and garden. If you are at a loss on how to start, look at Richard Scarry’s Biggest Word Book Ever and Busy, Busy World. EVERYTHING!

2) Careful Language, Brilliant and Striking

Language is something that must be used with care. Order, grammar and syntax are most important. The child absorbs and incarnates into himself the language of his environment. Is it interesting? Is it the best you are able to speak? Is it forceful, meaningful, clear and concise?

3) Poetry

Poetry is easy to read. Young children particularly appreciate it. Try poems of Robert Louis Stevenson, Blake, Browning, Carroll, Child, Coleridge, Dickinson, Holmes, Longfellow, Rosetti, Scott, Shakespeare, Shelley, Tennyson, Whittier and Wordsworth. To the young child, poetry offers rhythmical language, extraordinary expansion of vocabulary, and the possibility to savor the spirit of humanness through the repeated readings and memorization of fine literary works.

4) Reading Books

Do you read to your child at least one hour a day (broken into shorter periods)? Is there a great respect for books in your home? Does your child have a tiny library near her bed or some other special place? Is everyday life punctuated with exciting weekly trips to the library? The librarian is trained and eager to assist the parents in selecting fine books for the parent to read to the child. The young child’s desire to read is encouraged directly by reading to her. Read aloud with interest, explain the vocabulary, take a related trip or go to an original source of a subject that interests your child.

5) Which Books

True stories are a must for children under four years. Very young children devote their energy to exploring, ordering and classifying their real environment. Make-believe or fantastic stories confuse this important work. The young child is interested in stories about other children, true things, family life and animals. At about five years, children begin to seek out make-believe and fantastic stories as well as geography, history, music, famous people, etc.

6) Story Telling

Pass along those home-spun yarns your ancestors told their children. Create some yourself to tell to your child. Make up stories about your own child and what she did all day, about your childhood, mild adventure, etc.

7) Communication Between Parent and Child

Do you listen with interest when your child speaks? Do you give him the opportunity to express her interests, thoughts and opinions? Does your family include her in daily life, trips and social relations with other adults and families? Do you insist that family members listen to one another? Do you speak to your child in series of nods and grunts? Do you share your thoughts with her every day? Do you teach him at least 10 new words a day through conversation and reading? Do you communicate the

family values and morals to your child in what you say and how you handle distressing as well as happy situations? By age six the child has adopted the family morality and attitude! Have you given him enough of yourself to last a lifetime?

8) Turn Off the T.V. !!!

Children who spend great amounts of time watching television miss their birthright: social contact and communication with their families, the development of language, the ability to express their spirit, and the closeness that a child derives from family communication. Furthermore, words create pictures in the mind. They are called mental images and are necessary for reading and writing. A child who watches endless hours of television often never develops the necessary ability to form mental images. He is exposed to violence, fantasy and unnatural family relationships. When you turn on television for your child, do you approve of what he will see? Is it consistent with your family values? Read a carefully selected book instead!

9) The Phonetic Approach in the Montessori Class

In preparing the child for reading and writing, we at *The Cobb School, Montessori* present the letters of the alphabet in the following manner:

1. Lower Case
2. Cursive
3. The phonetic sound is presented rather than the name of the letter.

In the Montessori context, the alphabet is taught with lower case letters made of sandpaper for the child to feel as well as see and repeat. Each letter of the alphabet is taught, not by name, but by its phonetic sound. (The names of the letters are given later when the order of the alphabet is being learned.) Sandpaper phonograms, or two letters, which represent a single phoneme, are included to represent the sounds in English that are not included in the alphabet.

Adults who were not taught to read by a phonetic method may find practice and perseverance surprisingly necessary before they are familiar enough with the sounds to repeat them accurately.

Sounds in English can be categorized by whether or not they are voiced and by where the lips and tongue are positioned to make the sound. 1) Labial - p,b; 2) Dental - f, th; and 3) Palatal: alveolar - ch, t; and velar - k, g)

Voiced sounds include:

a, b, d, e, g, i, j, l, m, n, o, r, u, v, w, y, z
ai, ee, ie, oa, oo, ue, ou, oy, er, ar, or, th, au

Unvoiced sounds include:

c, f, h, k, p, s, t
qu, th, sh, ch

The sounds are further distinguished by those which can be sustained (for example: a, m, h, s) and those which are explosive and not able to be sustained (for example: b, d, p, t).

Memorize these sounds and symbols:

at	if	look	up	move	
tub	mug	full	run	win	
tic	hut	am	toss	box	
lid	itch	in	mat	vet	
egg	jam	octopus	us	buzz	
qu	as in	quilt	oy	as in	toy
ai	“	nail	er	“	faster
ee	“	green	ar	“	car
ie	“	pie	or	“	fort
oa	“	boat	th	“	moth
oo	“	book	sh	“	fish
ue	“	blue	ch	“	chin
ou	“	cloud	au	“	Paul

A game that you can play with your child to reinforce the phonetic sounds he/she has learned is:

I SPY GAME

Material: 4-5 familiar household objects the child can name. Objects should have different initial sounds, ex: cup, fork, basket, ring, soap.

Place objects before child. Say the name of each object with him.

Say, "I spy with my little eye something that begins with the sound, C." Child takes the cup. Continue in this manner.