



# Montessori at Home

Sensible tips and easy adaptations to make your home child-friendly, not child-proof!

We all want our children to be safe. From the time they are babies, we move breakable objects up high, put locks on low drawers and cabinets, and anchor furniture to the walls. As soon as our little ones start to crawl, we baby-proof our homes and make sure that they can't reach, open, or access a large majority of the house. While there are certainly a number of items that should be kept out of reach and inaccessible to children, a few minor adjustments can ensure that your home adapts *with* your child and that your child's needs are taken into consideration in all rooms of the house.

In putting everything away and limiting our children's access throughout our homes, we create an environment in which they are dependent on us for nearly *everything*. They need us to help reach, open, unlock, tie, fasten, and carry. Their growing need for independence - "I do it!" - combined with our need for control usually ends in frustration for both parties. This might work in the short term, while your child is still very young, but as they get older and more capable of caring for their own needs, you'll want to reassess your home environment and make a few minor adjustments here and there. The earlier, the better, but keep in mind that children grow and change and your home should, too!



## Safety First: These rules still apply

- ❑ Keep dangerous or toxic items out of reach of children
  - ❑ Medications
  - ❑ Household cleaners
  - ❑ Pesticides
  - ❑ Alcohol
- ❑ Firearms and weapons should be stored in locked cabinets or removed from the home
- ❑ Sharp kitchen knives and tools should be stored out of reach and available only with adult supervision
- ❑ Anchor bookshelves, dressers, and other furniture that poses a fall hazard, to the wall
- ❑ Use common sense - adult supervision and guidance is the most important factor in making your home child-friendly and accessible

## Getting Started: A few simple items every home should have

- ❑ *A small, lightweight step stool* - It makes more of the adult-sized environment available and allows the child to do more things for himself. Consider multiple step stools for different areas of the home, like one for the kitchen and one for the bathroom, or have one on each level of your house.
- ❑ *Tension rods* - Easily modify closet spaces without drilling holes in the wall. As your child grows, rods can be moved and adjusted for height. Put one in their bedroom closet and the hall closet for coats and jackets.
- ❑ *Removable hooks* - Hooks that can be peeled off the wall without damaging the paint are the best! Use them in the bathroom for low towels and washcloths, the entryway for coats, jackets, and backpacks, or the kitchen for small brooms and dustpans.

## Basics Concepts: Keep these in mind

- Keep it simple* - Too much is too much! When it comes to decorating or organizing for children, too much is never a good idea. Too many options are overwhelming to little ones. Keep choices to a minimum, colors and patterns low-key, and rotate through seasonal items so that a year's worth of toys, clothes, and books are not out all year round.
- Keep it low* - Get down and look at each room from your child's perspective. You'll gain a different appreciation for the struggles they face and a better understanding of the cause of (some of) their frustrations.
- Think independence!* - A Montessori-inspired home is one that allows for opportunity for a child to do something for him or herself. Ask yourself at various steps along the way, "How can I make this easier for him to do it himself?" or "Will she be able to use this without my help?"

## The Child's Bedroom

- Arrange the child's room neatly and simply.
- Place a low rod or low pegs in the closet so your child is able to take out and put away his own things.
- Low drawers for easy choice of clothing (dividers help)
- Low shelves for books and/or toys
- Low mirror to see reflection and for grooming
- Comb and brush accessible

## The Child's Bathroom

- Stool in front of sink and toilet, if needed
- Low mirror

- ❑ Accessible soap, towel, toothbrush, toothpaste, comb and brush

## The Kitchen

- ❑ Small sized utensils available for work
- ❑ Child sized, easily accessible clean-up supplies (bowl and sponge, dustpan and brush)
- ❑ Stool in front of sink
- ❑ Child apron available with front fastener for messy work
- ❑ Small bowl of snacks such as carrot sticks or grapes and small pitcher of beverage in refrigerator and glasses stored low for independent snack. When your child requests food or drink, you can respond, “You may get it.”



## Indoor Play Area

- ❑ Ample shelves with each toy in its place
- ❑ Small table and chairs
- ❑ Toy boxes used only as containers for sets of items such as only blocks, or only dolls and doll clothes
- ❑ A variety of sturdy toys and art materials available and changed often
- ❑ Art area with low easel, newspaper or plastic on floor, 3 or 4 “mixable” colors of powdered paint with detergent flakes mixed in, varied applicators (brushes, printing objects, sponges, spools, rollers, markers, crayon, chalk)

## Outdoors

- ❑ Gardening area with child-sized hoe, rake, shovel, and watering can
- ❑ Ample, varied spaces with equipment for running, climbing, swinging, observing nature (e.g., ladder laying flat, obstacle course with buckets, ropes, hoops, etc., tire swing, trees, balance beam of board and blocks, sprinkler/pool)

## Outings

- ❑ Car games (how many things can you spot that begin with the sound “b”, that are red; can you read the numbers on license plates; sing and make up songs; make up stories and tell part of a story and let the child finish it; name things in a category; play “Who/What am I”; play “What if...” give the child a hypothetical situation - it’s good for both imagination and independent practical thinking and can offer reinforcement on safety rules, courtesy, etc.
- ❑ Excursions to the zoo – the entire area need not be covered in one visit. Follow your child and occasionally give him an example of what observing really is. Sit or stand and watch a particular area or family of animals for some time. Read about certain animals before the trip.
- ❑ A non-rushed trip to the grocery store. Let him walk instead of ride through the aisles with you. Oranges, we need six – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Point out, name, examine gently, count, weigh, discuss, etc.
- ❑ On weekly library trips try looking for factual, simple books with clear attractive illustrations or photos.

## Strategies

- ❑ If the child is not old enough to be able to reason (about the age of 5), do not attempt to reason with him. Give two or three choices that are acceptable to you, and then follow through with the one chosen by the child.
- ❑ Begin at birth to teach your child grace, courtesy and respect.
- ❑ Give simple norms of behavior. Introduce the rules and limits of you household gradually. Make them possible for the child to adapt to. Once you have made them, be consistent and remember, your example is the best teacher. Don’t exhibit a behavior you do not expect from your child. The child is observing you with his entire being.
- ❑ Try to anticipate most behavior needed for daily situations.
- ❑ Teach by teaching, not correcting. Tell the child it is your turn first, and then it will be his. Show how the work is to be done, using as few words as possible. Don’t forget to show him how to clean up and where to return things.

- ❑ Realize that there are no three and four year old liars. Children of this age cannot distinguish between reality and their desires. If they want it, it must be so.
- ❑ Regarding technology and its use in the home, use discretion and remember, “The child’s intelligence can develop to a certain level without the hand, but if it develops with the hand, then the level it reaches is higher and the child’s character is stronger.” (Maria Montessori)
- ❑ Respect and observe your child. An inner guide is directing him. Become sensitive to anticipate his needs and aid him. Read the Montessori philosophy. Do nothing for a child that you can teach him to do himself.
- ❑ Reflect on a typical day – were the majority of your encounters with your child of a negating or restraining nature? Build up a positive relationship between you and your child – play games with him occasionally, but not constantly. Give him your total attention, if only for a little while.
- ❑ Matching games, which stimulate sensory perception, are easily invented and prepared. Example: present him with a color; then ask him to show you objects of that same color in the room. Show him a piece of wood, glass, plastic, etc. and ask him to find other objects made of this or that.
- ❑ Expose your child to as much as possible – people, places, and things.