



Montessori House

Curriculum for Infants and Young Toddlers

Birth through 18 Months

www.MyMontessoriHouse.com

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Preparing the Floor for Safety and Mobility



Infants can get stuck in the smallest of spaces as they explore

The Montessori program for infants and toddlers centers on providing an environment that is safe for them to explore as they strive to become independent in their daily activities.

It is vital that your child be safe as he or she begins the first movements of life that involve wiggling on the floor, developing muscles and strength that will eventually lead to crawling, standing, and walking.

Here are some safety points:

- Secure all electrical outlets using plastic plugs.
- Remove all electronic devices that have small button batteries that your child can swallow (charge your Blackberry in your room or a closet).
- Do not charge electronics at floor-level outlets. The best thing is to have an outlet installed in a closet with a locked door.
- Make sure your infant cannot reach anything that will pull something down from above such as a cord to a lamp, a fringe of a tablecloth, or the edge of a decorative bowl.

Clothing and Dressing



Infants and toddlers should wear comfortable cotton clothing that encourages the development and practice of secure movement.

Clothing for infants and toddlers:

- Should not bind or pinch.
- Does not have uncomfortable buttons or zippers in front or back (remember that your child spends a lot of time lying in positions that you would not).
- Does not restrict movement.
- Protects the legs and knees for crawling, and protect the bottom from bounces on the floor. No dresses for toddlers.
- No floppy sleeves, long ties, bows, or dangly things that will get in the way as your child washes his or her hands or uses the toilet.
- Avoid belts and unnecessary pieces to a garment.
- Look for t-shirts and tops with pictures of real things such as planes, animals, or dinosaurs, rather than cartoon characters, so that you have immediate and new vocabulary words as well as examples of good art and design.
- Shoes are for protecting the feet on cityscape, so look for soles that are flexible, comfortable, and promote movement. If a shoe starts to rub or be uncomfortable, immediate remove it from your child's wardrobe before it causes permanent damage. The concept of "breaking in" shoes is a myth; shoes are supposed to be comfortable when they are worn. Look for wide toe box, zero drop shoes such as Wildling, SoftStar, or moccasins.
- Barefoot! Your child should be live barefoot for the best body and brain development, from the small muscles of the feet to the alignment of the head. Foot deformities start in infancy, so we must protect these little feet.

If you want to buy a dress for an occasion for your toddler, make sure the material is high-quality cotton or other natural fabrics with no rough seams inside or tags that will make her uncomfortable. It is better to buy a few very high-quality items for your child rather than numerous cute, but cheaply-made outfits that will be uncomfortable. The goal is to facilitate movement, comfortable sitting, and self-dressing and undressing.

Promoting Tactile Learning



Since young children learn through touch, make sure everything is touchable. Your great-aunt's porcelain vase does not count as touchable yet. Later, when your child's fine and gross motor skills will allow him or her to successfully embark upon such projects we will work on exercises for carrying and touching delicate objects.

Sometimes, it can be hard to assess your home environment for child safety as well as the promotion of the tactile sense, so here are some ideas:

- Can your child go about his or her day easily and touch everything within reach?
- Does each room your child uses have child-sized shelves or a table with select items for him or her to use?
- Are sinks, tables, chairs, and toilets/potties easily accessible and child-sized?
- Does your mobile encourage touching and sensory exploration? Or is it too delicate to be pulled at? If so, remove it.
- Have you created a play area where your child can use a rail or solid piece of furniture to practice pulling him- or herself into a standing position?
- Can all of your furniture including low tables withstand your child's attempts to climb? Remove any delicate or unsafe pieces.

Frequently, there will be something in your house, such as a flight of stairs that your child obsesses about using because he or she sees everyone else in the family using it all the time. Can you figure out how to make it child-friendly and usable? The stairs in the picture are a great example of a problem made into a piece of classroom equipment for learning! Perhaps there is a big couch or a too-high table that could benefit from a child's step? Watch your child to see where your home's hotspots might lie.

Photo credit: Baby-safe soft toys and clothing from Wendy at www.iheartguts.com

Development Timeline

Your child's brain and body need to develop in parallel, so we observe the child's actions and ability to use his or her hands as a measure of development.

Milestones:

Birth through 3 Months (Montessori sleeping setup)

Movement

- Slithering
- Working on head control

Activities

- Singing and talking to your child
- Vision is still not focused -- use high-contrast mobiles
- Gobbi mobiles and similar
- Suspended ring
- Rattles
- Infant bell

Hands

- Born with a strong instinctive grasp
- Begins to look at his or her own hands (between 2 to 3 months) as this instinctive grasp fades

3 to 6 Months

Movement

- Mastered head control
- Turning from front to back develops
- Works on scooting (head up, arms in front)
- Sits with assistance on the floor or at a child-sized table/chair

Activities

- Keep singing and talking to your child
- Babbling
- Short informal presentations
- Rattles
- Simple toys to manipulate

Starting Out

If you take away a task that captivates your child today,
they will never experience the joy of accomplishing that task tomorrow.

Ruth Elizabeth Carnahan

Whether your child is an infant reaching for mobile or a toddler trying to fit pieces of a puzzle together, this quotation from Dr. Montessori will help guide you. Our goal in Montessori is to create an environment full of learning material that allows your child to satisfy his or her current developmental needs for the body and brain.

The ability to experience self-sufficiency in the basic care of oneself is a key step to developing the whole child. At your child's current age, this self-sufficiency may only be possible in the attempt to push upwards from the floor to wiggle slightly on the stomach. A bit later, it will be an attempt to roll over or scoot across the floor. And then there will be the effort to move from crawling to standing and walking. Reaching, grasping, and carrying will be parallel developments.

During the first several years of life, it is always easier to do things for your child than to patiently explain and wait while your child experiments and struggles. But these early years bring natural stages of development that must not be missed. When your child expresses interest in eating independently, you must be ready. When your child wants to start using a toilet, have his or her little potty ready to go next to the big toilet. Waiting until later will make your child miss a natural attraction and readiness for an important developmental stage.

Your challenge will be to figure out what materials your child needs at his or her particular stage of life and to provide them. We suggest that you take notes as indicated as you go along, then review them at the end of each week or two-week period.

Ergonomic Instructions for Parents



Example of a good sleeping and lying position: The baby is free to move, the surface is flat, spacious, and relatively hard, and there are no bars.

In the peace and quiet of his or her Montessori bedroom, your child should be free to nap during the day whenever needed.

At nighttime, maintain a bedtime that is consistent in time and preparation, so that your child comes to expect this routine. A meal and a bath, followed by story time or quiet interaction in a room with a calming nightlight, will help your child wind down at the end of the day.

Several key points to keep in mind:

- Continue the patterns established in your newborn phase, being continually aware of your infant's developmental changes so you can adjust the daily and nightly routine.
- When your infant cries, approach softly and quietly to see what kind of cry it is. Is your infant uncomfortable, like the baby in the cramped basket photo? If it is sleeping time, take care not to turn on bright lights. Do not immediately rush in noisily, pick him or her up, and grab a bottle. If your infant had been crying because he or she was mildly uncomfortable in a way that you can easily fix or



Progression of a bad setup: You can see that the infant has developed in a curved position, so that his entire body has a “C-shaped” slope with the spine itself in a curve. The arms cannot extend, putting pressure on the shoulder joint, and compressing the neck. The lower back and hips are similarly at a stressed angle. Almost every newborn has a perfect spine, but you can see how spine and joint problems begin very early.

When your baby shows signs of discomfort, start by removing items that could be distressing your child. For the babies in these baskets, the solution is obviously to remove the basket.

No pacifier! The baby was fussing due to discomfort, so the parents stuck a pacifier in his mouth.

On the following page, you will see that the baby has no view of anything except the walls of the enclosure. And the physical constraints of the enclosure limit the baby’s ability to move, slowing down both body and brain development.



Photo credit Rodnae Productions , Pexels

This setup is better because it is flat and bigger, but you can see that it is still too small. The baby can at least lie flat, but you can see her right arm would like to stretch out farther, but it is curled against the side of the basket.





An example of a perfect setup: A pure 100% organic wool blanket creates a luxurious sleeping pad in this baby's bedroom. When she was younger, she would awake early to play with her own feet, move her limbs, and begin wiggling in advance of rolling over. Now she awakens without crying and begins looking around her little bedroom. A baby in a Montessori bedroom setup develops months ahead of a standard American pediatric baby development schedule.

By using the Montessori bedroom, you provide your child with more mobility, so he or she can become accustomed to moving around the room intermittently during sleeping hours. If you hear your child crying, see if he or she settles down without help.

Ergonomic Carrying



Photo credit: Samuel Aboh on Unsplash

Seated on his mom's hip provides an ideal healthy hip position for the child, and mom's arm secures the child without compressing the base of his spine, enhancing the strong position. The child maintains an upright position independently, developing a range of strength and coordination, and his bare feet are free to move. Note that the mother is now able to maintain an ideal ergonomic position for herself in this setup, keeping her spine in healthy. Contrast this ergonomic position with that of a car seat. Take your baby out of the car seat immediately after parking.

Key Concentration Exercises

Your child has an amazing ability to concentrate and focus at this age. The important thing is to observe and see what captures his or her attention. Is it the tassel on a pillow that moves back and forth? Is it a shadow on the wall as the sun rises? How you respond to your child's early attempts to concentrate and learn about the world around him or her will mold your child's skill in concentration for a lifetime.

If you are a parent, teacher, or child care provider for more than one child, a room that is set-up properly to provide independent mobility in complete safety will be the most beneficial step you can take towards fostering development at this age. More important than any piece of equipment or toy, the ability to develop fine and gross motor skills is key to parallel development of the brain and body.

These presentations should all take place in the child's Montessori bedroom or a Montessori room at home or school. As these settings have no extraneous distractions, your child's natural inclination to concentrate, focus, and observe will be enhanced.

Presentations:

Presentation #1

1. Prepare the high-contrast baby mobile
2. Lie on the floor nearby and observe

How long does the mobile capture your child's attention the first time? _____

How long does the mobile capture your child's attention (on average) in the second week? _____

Presentation #2

1. Talk to your infant and offer your hand

How does your infant respond? What does he or she do?

How long does this simple interaction last if you continue providing your hand and talking softly?

Date your child's grasp changes: _____

Note: Frequently, we interrupt our own bonding time with infants because we want to introduce something new. The best thing to do instead is to follow your infant's lead. Stick to one simple interaction for as long as he or she maintains interest.

Awareness Development Preparation

These exercises address different stages of development as your child matures and becomes physically able and interested in using different muscle groups to achieve specific goals.

You join in for fun only, not as "exercise" for your child (you can use these as exercises for yourself, however, and your child will probably be delighted to watch and may become inspired to join you). Take the dog as inspiration: A loving presence that does not interfere with the child's exploration.

For all activities, make sure you are wearing comfortable clothes that allow your child to see your body movements. Leggings are great for this because your child can see how your legs move. All activities should be done barefoot.



Photo credit Jimmy Conover on Unsplash.

#1 Scooting and Sideways Movement

Join your child in scooting around the room as a precursor to crawling. (This is fabulous adult exercise, by the way). This is a fun way to join your child at his or her level during these crucial first movements.

Your notes

Date of initial presentation ____ Your child's age ____

Observations:



#2 Off the Stomach

Imitate your baby's position rather than trying to teach a position: Observe and copy.

One change we would make to the scene above would be to remove the mat and replace the toys with one cloth ball and a wooden rattle.

Your notes

Date of initial presentation ____ Your child's age ____

Observations:

#3 Rolling Over

Lie on your stomach next to your child. Roll on your back. Roll over on your stomach again. Repeat and encourage your child to join you -- he or she will find this delightful! Do not position your child. You demonstrate and entertain.

Your notes

Date of initial presentation ____ Your child's age ____

Observations:

Infant Object-Permanence Boxes (Series I)

Object-permanence boxes are designed for infants who are just beginning to explore objects with their sense of touch and sight. Are objects permanent? Will they disappear when you cannot see them? This series of exploration, experience, and discovery that objects indeed do not disappear when they are out of sight is a major developmental step.

As you can imagine, the experience of object-permanence is the beginning of the realization that if Mommy drives away, she has not disappeared forever, and she will always reliably come back. Those tears are not because you will be gone for the day. They are because, in your infant's mind, you have truly disappeared from the face of the earth.

Using the same observational skills that we discussed earlier, introduce the box that you think your child will like the most right now. You can also buy several boxes, placing them on a low shelf in your child's bedroom, allowing your child the opportunity to select one.

The most important part of using any of the Montessori equipment is that the piece of equipment you select must exactly satisfy the child's developmental need at the time you present it. We never coax a child to use a piece of equipment because the correct piece will greatly appeal to them with no need to coax.

Putting a small ball into a hole and seeing it reappear is, for an infant, absolute magic. Their sense of discovery and wonder is fostered through the use of these boxes.

As with all the other equipment, the pieces of the equipment are set up so that the holes fit exactly the balls, the drawers have knobs that are right-sized for small hands, and the colors are designed to transition nicely to formal color lessons later in the form of the Colored Tablets.

There are currently four pieces of equipment in this series, starting with the box below and ending with the Box with Sliding Lid, which is the most complex.



The first piece of equipment in this series is the Box with Tray (above). It is the easiest to use because your child only needs to grasp the small ball and insert it into the top hole.

Infant and Toddler Indicative Schedule for Home

Ages 12 Months through 3 Years

Use your child's natural waking time	Morning wake up, drink water, play independently
Interchangeable activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Morning preparation• Breakfast time	Independent toilet, hair combing, dressing Meal preparation/serving/cleanup together
Activities until lunch: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unlimited• Unlimited• Unlimited• Unlimited• Period of child's interest	Child's interest + your schedule determine the activity Active play with music and song Read aloud Outdoor play Outdoor trips/errands/chores with parent Use Montessori equipment
Lunch	Simple meal preparation/cleanup together
Activities until four-o'clock have an interchangeable order: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nap• Unlimited• Unlimited• Unlimited• Unlimited	At the time needed Active play with music and song Read aloud Outdoor play Outdoor trips/errands/chores with parent
Four o'clock meal:	Simple meal preparation/cleanup together
Free activities until supper Including physical play, music, outdoor play, reading aloud, or Montessori equipment.	
Supper	Meal preparation/serving/cleanup together
Progression to Sleep	Eliminate bright lights, take a warm bath, story