

## Family dynamics: The Montessori approach

### Considerations:

1. Siblings are all different.
2. Prepare the home environment.
3. Reduce labels on children's abilities, personalities, and position in the family
4. Provide some independence in living together socially

Montessori (1946) stated that, "the adults, the child, and the environment are a trinity. They should be considered as one" (p. 213). Montessori's research demonstrated that "just as we cannot directly help the child's body to grow into adulthood, so we cannot form their mind or character for them. But we can supply their mental needs as we supply their bodily ones, and both should be treated in an equally scientific way" (1931/2017, p. 20). Additionally, she confirms that "we cannot with our efforts, create a man or woman. That is the task of the child themselves, and it is the most important side of the whole educational question: what the child themselves accomplishes of their own power and not what adult can do for them" (2020, p. 44).

### Each family is unique.

Families have complex histories and are distinctive in their own contexts. Parents are generally the lead of a family, so their approach, social and conflict resolution skills, cultural expectations and individual temperaments significantly influences all their family. A parent or child with additional needs, such as autism or Downs Syndrome create discussions and acceptance of boundaries around fairness within a family. As what is possible or 'fair' for one is not necessarily deemed fair to others. The Montessori approach allows for each member of a family to learn, grow and develop their social skills and ability to live together as harmoniously as possible. As Montessori said, "we can see clearly what is necessary to give in order to help the child. It is to give the possibility of independence, of living together and carrying out social experiences." (2020, p. 28).

Montessori (1931/2017) said "children are so responsive that if you treat your child with kindness and consideration, they too will be kind. If you let them pursue their own little affairs and interests undisturbed, you will find that they will be less inclined to disturb yours. Try to interfere with their activities as little as possible, there is no need to worry about them growing up ignorant or ill-mannered. Instead, they will be observant, intelligent, independent, and persevering, and these qualities lie at the root of personality" (p. 61).

### The adult's role

Preparing the environment is a keystone Montessori principle, whether it is the environment at home or in an educational setting. Montessori (1946) stated that "if we give children the right environment and this warm care of the adult, we will see all their naughtiness disappear" (p. 119). In the book *Maria Montessori Talks to Parents*, (1931/2017) states that "we give the child nourishing food so that their little body may grow, and in just the same way we must provide them with suitable nourishment for their mental and moral growth" (p. 20). Later in the book she confirms that "children develop their brains as well as their bodies through movement, and in the process of concentration, self-discipline, and perseverance with an active interest, the foundations of character are laid. To give our children a fine start in life we must see that their surroundings satisfy their need for activity and development, remembering at the same time that our own part is not that of instructor and interferer but of helper and friend" (p. 51).

Reduce labels on children's abilities, personalities, and position in the family. For instance, a child may be good at running, whilst their sibling is good at building towers, or one child may be quiet and more accepting of change whereas their sibling might be moving constantly and loudly engages with life. Each child can help others if they are not made to compete with each other but just to become the best that they can be. How a parent talks

about individual family members has a profound impact on their children. Montessori stated that “A child is an eager observer and is particularly attracted by the actions of the adults and wants to imitate them. In this regard an adult can have a kind of mission. They can be an inspiration for the child's actions, a kind of open book wherein a child can learn how to direct their own movements. But an adult, if they are to afford proper guidance, must always be calm and act slowly so that the child who is watching them can clearly see their actions in all their particulars” (Montessori, 1936/1983, p. 93)

Rewards and punishments. Montessori (1912/1967) said that “like others I had believed that it was necessary to encourage a child by means of some exterior reward that would flatter their baser sentiments... in order to foster in them a spirit of work and of peace” (p. 61). However, she was astonished to learn very early in her research that “a child who is permitted to educate themselves really gives up these lower instincts. I then urged adults to cease handing out the ordinary prizes and punishments, which were no longer suited to our children, to confine themselves to directing them gently in their work” (1912/1967, p. 61).

Montessori (1931/2017) clarified adults that alternatives to saying “don't do that” has a much greater chance of success. She said, “I do say that ‘don'ts’ are far less effective – indeed they are often definitely harmful when they fill a young child with fear or resentment – than providing them with some alternative activity at which they may work joyfully, forgetting all about the previous activity or behaviour which you were anxious for them to stop” (p. 28). In her book, *The Absorbent Mind*, Montessori spoke of the child's development stating it “follows a path of successive stages of independence, our knowledge of this must guide us in our behaviour towards the child. We have to help the child to act, will and think for themselves. This is the art of serving the spirit, an art which can be practised to perfection only when working among children” (p. 257).

#### Considerations for adults that Montessori highlighted also include:

“The adult ought never to mould the child after themselves but should leave them alone and work always from the deepest comprehension of the child themselves.” (1956/1970, p. 18)

“The spontaneous urge towards development, which is within the child, dictates its own pace. It is the part of a wise and loving parent to stand by, to watch the little one's activities, to observe their growth rather than to try to force it” (1932/2017, p. 28).

“We can love our children so dearly that it makes us blind to what is best for them. We can desire so eagerly that they shall grow into fine men and women that we correct and frustrate them at every turn without once realising that they have within themselves the power of their own development” (1932, p. 28).

“On every teacher and every parent, I urge not great instruction, but humility and simplicity in dealing with small children. Their lives are fresh, without rivalry or external ambitions, it takes so little to make them happy, to let them work in their own way towards the normal development of the men and women they will be” (1932/2017, p. 18).

“Every detail of a child's life has rules, mysterious laws. Every detail is of importance, so we must respect everything, even if it does not seem logical to us. We do not know the consequences; we are not the judges, but the servants of nature” (1946, p. 52).

#### References

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