

Did You Know?

Child Development Tips

Insights & Suggestions from Montessori Teachers



In 2007, Montessori education celebrated its 100th anniversary. As a way of honoring the occasion, AMI Montessori teachers throughout the United States contributed their thoughts and observations to create a list of 100 parenting tips from conception to adulthood. These ideas were supplemented with current research on child and cognitive development and published in a small book called *One Hundred Child Development Tips*.*

These suggestions reflect the cornerstone of the Montessori educational philosophy: using all the child's senses for learning, offering *age-appropriate* activities, encouraging *independence*, giving *freedom* and *responsibility*, setting *structure and limits*, and teaching *environmental order, beauty, grace, and courtesy*.

"Raising a joyful, focused, compassionate, creative and curious individual is a journey filled with many gifts."
H. Petersen, Ph.D.

Here are a few suggestions for the preschool age group offered from many "voices of experience" to help you journey with your child.

- ✎ **Tailor your parenting approaches to the unique temperament traits of your child.** Temperament is the way that a child responds and interacts with people, materials, and situations in the world. Temperamental differences between babies can be seen when they are as young as 4 months old. Although research indicates that temperament may only vary modestly throughout our life, *parents can help their children to adapt their temperament to their surroundings*. Thomas and Chess were the original researchers in this field and classified people into nine categories based on activity level, approach/withdrawal, mood, rhythmicity, persistence, attention span, adaptability, threshold, intensity, and distractibility. Also, assess whether your child has an introverted or extroverted personality. The personality type influences how your child learns and copes with the world.
- ✎ **Provide limits and structure for your child.** A child must experience clear, consistent and appropriate expectations, guidelines, feedback, and enforcement/follow-through in order to feel secure. It is important that parents agree on these and the rules should be consistent with their values. Be sure to present your child with advanced warnings regarding changes that may lead to acts of parental enforcement. When not adhering to established limits, a child should be given limited choices regarding how to proceed, and you should take a firm but kind stance in the enforcement procedure. For example, if you are dropping your four-year old son off at school, be consistent in how you approach the drop-off process. You may want to give a warning that you will soon be at school, so that he can prepare himself for the transition. When you arrive, let him know that it is time to leave the car and go to class. If he does not comply, give him a choice: he can get out of the car on his own or with assistance. If you or another adult help him, please try to be patient and gentle. After school, talk to your child about the issue and have him think of solutions for the future. *Expect your child to test the limits and try not to take it personally*. As your child develops, have the rules and limits reflect these changes.
- ✎ **Provide unconditional love and avoid rewards and punishments.** Your child's self-esteem will benefit from your expressions of gratitude and appreciation for his productive behavior, activities, and work (e.g., saying thank you for setting the table or waiting patiently). Your child will also learn from comments about the natural consequences of his actions (i.e., things that happen without parental interventions, such as "If you

throw your food on the floor, you may not have anything left on the plate that you like to eat.”). Be careful not to talk to others in his presence as though he is not there. Furthermore, allow your child to answer the questions that are presented to him by others. Believe in our child’s own process.

- ☞ **Honor your child’s work, ability to focus on details, and growing concentration by not correcting or interrupting him.** Doing otherwise creates a dependence on adults and a loss of confidence in his abilities. For instance, refrain from commenting on unmatched clothes, inside-out shirts, shoes on the wrong feet, and the like. Instead, ask if your child is comfortable and offer help if necessary.
- ☞ **Have a designated place for everything used by your child and teach him to return items when his tasks are completed.** Remember, external order promotes internal order. Have small baskets and trays to display toys, tools, and work with just a few items per basket. Simplify and store extra toys in the closet to be rotated every two weeks.
- ☞ **Have an arts and crafts area where there is a low table and accessible art supplies.** Art activities promote creativity as well as the development of fine motor skills, perceptual organization, sequencing, and analytic thinking. Organize the art area with only a few choices per medium (e.g., paper sorted by color, colored pencils, clay, glue, scissors, collage materials, beads with big holes, etc.). An outside art easel may also be good for painting with fingers or brushes. Have your child get into the habit of wearing an apron. This not only protects the clothes, but signifies the importance of the activity and denotes a start and a finish to it.
- ☞ **Set up a reading area.** Have 4 or 5 nicely illustrated, well-written, non-fiction books displayed with covers facing your child (children have a hard time recognizing books by their spines). Incorporate reading time into your everyday routine. Let everyone have a chance to read. If your child is not reading, ask him if he wants to tell a story from a book he knows.
- ☞ **Have your child share in the household work.** This may include activities such as washing dishes, cooking, dusting, sweeping the floor, folding clothes, and watering plants. Showing your child how to participate as a productive member of the family and community sends an important message about his value and the importance of his contributions. Use child-sized items when possible, including brooms, dust pans, whisk brooms, watering cans, buckets, sponges and towels. In the kitchen, make available a cutting board, knife (use only with adult supervision), colander, vegetable peeler, mini grater, juicer, etc.
- ☞ **Promote language and emotional development by engaging in meaningful conversation using specific, accurate speech and precise vocabulary.** Be sure to listen and elaborate on what your child is saying. Other important ways to promote language development are through eating meals together and exploring nature together.
- ☞ **Slow down and work at your child’s pace.** Do not over-schedule the day. Permit your child to fully absorb and reflect upon his activities.
- ☞ **Avoid interrupting your child when he is focused.** Interruptions teach a child to be distracted. Your child’s internal thoughts will cultivate self-discipline, creative, and positive perceptions about self and work. During these periods, your child is beginning to develop knowledge about himself.
- ☞ **Show an interest and curiosity in the world.** Your questions will stimulate your child’s own thoughts, ideas, and choices.
- ☞ **Enjoy nature together – plant a garden, go for walks, look for insects, and explore.** This will aid in the development of respect for all living things and facilitate a better understanding of the world. At this age, your child can walk up to two miles (usually a child can walk his age in miles). Spend time outdoors exploring plants, insects, and rocks. Your child will be fascinated by what the world has to offer. Please follow your child’s pace.
- ☞ **Do not explain things in too much detail.** Your child is in the sensorial period of learning, so his learning is optimized by hands-on experience.

- ☞ **Encourage home activities that strengthen the hand for writing.** Puzzles, sewing, gardening, molding clay, cleaning, and finger painting all help in this endeavor.
- ☞ **Teach your child about numbers.** There are several ways you can expose your child to the nature of numbers in everyday life. *Count out loud during your activities (Ex: as you walk up steps, fold shirts, stack dishes, slice apples, etc.). *Frequently use numbers in your observations and conversations (“There are four birds on the fence.”). *Play sorting games (Ex: Fill a bowl with an item like buttons, beads, or shells and then have your child sort them by shape, color, or size).
- ☞ **Introduce your child to language sounds by playing rhyming and I-spy games.** Play “I spy with my little eye something that begins with the sound “mmm.” You and your child should both use phonetic sounds to describe letters until your child is older and has good grasp of the alphabet. This helps eliminate confusion in the learning process. For example, when talking about the letter “b” say “buh,” instead of “bee,” or when talking about the letter “f,” sound out “fff,” instead of “ehf.” In pronouncing the letters, your sounds should be very succinct and not drawn out, so as to eliminate (as much as possible) ancillary sounds like the “uh” that follows the phonetic depiction of many consonants.
- ☞ **When you are providing feedback about your child’s work and skills, please comment on the process and details of the effort, not the end product.** For example, use neutral phrases like, “Look at all of the different shades of green you used in your drawing,” or “Tell me about your drawing” rather than “I like your drawing” or “What a beautiful picture.” This will help your child stay focused on his work and develop his skills instead of just thinking about results or gaining the praise and approval of others. Be cautious about using rewards because once learning is externally motivated, a child’s process can lose creativity, focus and passion. Please remember not to interrupt your child when he is focused.
- ☞ **Understand that sibling rivalry is natural, especially when you are integrating a new baby into the family.** Please do not compare your children. It is important to see each child as a unique person with his own personality, strengths, and challenges. Attempt to create alone time with each child every day. Teach your children to collaborate. Stop any aggressive behavior immediately, but do not assume that you know who is at fault when a disagreement arises. *Talk your children through conflicts so that they can begin to understand how to ask for their own space, take turns, and talk about hurt feelings.* These acts will also provide your children with words to label their feelings and to help define their inner realities. Invite your children to work on solving their own problems and come up with their own solutions.
- ☞ **Be a model of courtesy, acceptance, and kindness towards others.** Participate in community service projects, particularly when children can be involved. Teach your child about other cultures by introducing him to other countries through books, products, cooking, literature, people, celebrations, and rituals. For example, pick one country and study the culture and the people for a week or more. Interest and knowledge about another country and culture will foster acceptance, peace, and harmony in regard to cultural /ethnic differences.
- ☞ **Promote lifelong learning by searching for knowledge and scientific truths with your child.** Visit libraries, museums, aquariums, and science centers. Take tours of bakeries, fire stations, candy factories, or whatever is of interest.
- ☞ **Include storytelling in your family’s daily routine.** Your child will love to hear stories about your childhood, your family’s origin, and your daily events. These discussions will aid a child’s ability to visualize and create mental pictures. They will help develop your child’s writing skills by modeling the narrative process and the creation and organization of content. Spatial organization skills like these are important to future math and science skills.
- ☞ **Offer more freedom, with more responsibility.** As your child’s motor skills grow and allow for greater participation in your daily life, slowly offer him more freedom. For example, when your child appears ready for an activity like flower arranging, show him in detail the activity and explain the limits (e.g., “The pruning scissors are used only for cutting the flowers.”) Watch in a controlled environment as your child completes the work. Note that with new work comes new responsibility. Make your child aware of this. If your child is disorderly in the work, put it away until you determine that your child is ready (this may be weeks or months). When given freedom, a child is faced with making choices. This is important in the formation of the intellect.

- ☞ **Establish family times and family rituals.** Meals together are important to the social fabric of your family and establishing healthy eating habits. Limit television viewing and try not to incorporate it into your family rituals or daily routines.
- ☞ **Assure that your child has some quiet, unscheduled, uninterrupted time.** This allows your child to establish his own internal world and develop his own stream of consciousness. Due to your child's growing understanding of himself and the world around him, he is able to reflect on activities and events of the day with depth and focus.

* You may order a copy of *One Hundred Child Development Tips: Insights and Suggestions from Montessori Teachers* by Heather Pedersen, Ph.D. from Sandpiper Press (<http://sandpiperpress.com/publications.cfm>) or Amazon.com.

