

Did You Know? "Let Me Help..."

ENCOURAGING YOUR YOUNG CHILD AT HOME

Are you ever challenged by your child's desire to help? Do you ever wonder if your child is too young? Do you worry about giving responsibilities ("chores") to preschoolers? Sometimes, allowing your child to help can take more time, not less. It can truly be easier to do it yourself! By encouraging your young child to help, however, you are allowing your child to experience mastery by learning something new. You are instilling values. You are teaching your child personal and social responsibility. You are helping him to feel *valued* by making a contribution to his family. You are supporting her to take her rightful place in the world as one strand of a much larger piece of fabric.

Young Children Have an Intrinsic Need to "Work"

All young children *want to help*. Natural curiosity is how children learn. Maria Montessori identified this inborn curiosity as the child's pathway to learning. Young children are not content unless they have an opportunity to develop and learn.

Children's play is their work. Maria Montessori felt that her greatest discovery was that children's "play" was actually the important work of building themselves. She observed that children have a natural drive to *work* in order to develop. She said, "A child's work is to create the person she/he will become."

Children's **needs** are
their pathways to growth.

All young children use their hands to "work" and learn. The best thing we can offer children is an environment where they can freely move and explore and find purposeful "work" in their everyday life. Children need us to open doors and then step aside. By using their hands to learn, children *naturally* develop a love for work, a sense of order, self-confidence, inner discipline, and concentration

One of the most calming activities for a child is concentration. Be on the lookout for times when your child is beginning to concentrate while doing an activity. Honor that moment and protect her from interruption. When a child becomes involved in her work, she enters into a point of deep concentration. These periods can last for long stretches of time. Any Montessori teacher will tell you that during these times of intense concentration, children become *so* involved that they almost experience a oneness between themselves and their activity. What the child chooses to do is not as important as the level of concentration brought forth. The activity needs to challenge the body and the mind, and it must be able to be repeated as many times as needed. Deep concentration can occur while washing carrots, spreading peanut butter, counting beans, or painting a picture. (*Note: Watching TV is*

*"The hands are the instruments
of man's intelligence."*

-Maria Montessori

not the same thing; it produces only passive, non-participatory concentration.)

Children love repetition. Adults become bored, but a child's delight in an activity actually seems to be *enhanced* by repetition. Through repetition, a child gains confidence and mastery. For this reason, young children like to do the same thing over and over again.



Maria Montessori knew the intrinsic value of work. It is the inner pleasure of a job well done that brings us a sense of accomplishment. Experiencing self-motivation will help a child in his work for his entire life. Maria Montessori believed that we should not make children dependent on adult praise for what they do because it robs them of their own deeper feeling of satisfaction. A child's delight in the process of discovery is more important than the outcome. This sets the stage for a child finding sustainable pleasure in work later in life.

I know happiness does not come with things. It can come from work and pride in what you do.
—Gandhi

Children want to participate in everyday family life. “Human beings of all ages want to be able to communicate with others, to challenge themselves, to do important work, and to contribute to society,” writes Dr. Michael Olaf, Montessori educator. This is human nature at its best. It is true for children, too. This desire is especially strong during the time when the child, who has been observing all kinds of important activity going on around him, has finally developed the mental and physical skills to stand up, walk, use his hands, and participate in *real* work.

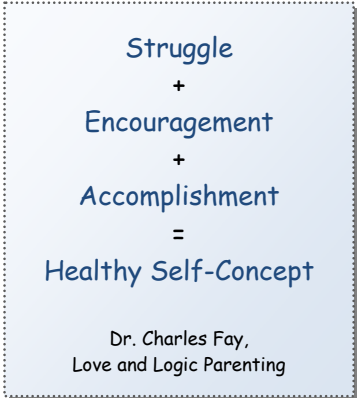
The child's purpose in working is different from ours. As adults, we usually look for the quickest and

most efficient way to carry out a task. “A child, on the other hand, is working to master the activity and to practice and perfect her abilities. She may scrub a table for hours, but only when she feels the urge. She may sweep the floor every morning for two weeks and not again for a month—because she will be occupied with mastering something else,” says Olaf. Through these activities, the child is learning to be independent in thought and action. She is learning “to concentrate, to control her muscles, to analyze logical steps, and to complete a cycle of activity.” The purpose of this work is the inner satisfaction and the development of the child. That is why, after completing a sequence of work, “a child becomes calm and satisfied...and because of this inner peace, full of love for the environment and for others.”

Allowing a child to help is an act of respect for him. Allowing the child to participate in the life he sees going on around him is an act of great respect for, and confidence in, the child. It helps him feel important to himself and to those around him. Think of the difference in our feelings for a guest who comes to dinner in our home and sits the entire time (expecting to be served and waited on), compared to someone who we welcome into our kitchen to talk and to laugh while we prepare the meal together. In the first instance, the guest is separate and the relationship is formal. In the second, we share our life and the relationship is intimate—a true friendship. (M. Olaf)

“Helping” Also Teaches Important Values

Helping builds character. When “times were tougher,” everyone had to pitch in and help. In primitive societies, and even in quite recent times, children always participated in the life of the home. Children learned early on that hard work and perseverance were just a normal part of life. Today, things are very different. We can give our kids a lot more, so we don’t *need* to ask as much from them. As a result, many children don’t get the chance to learn at home the value of struggling hard for something. Children often don’t get the opportunity to contribute. Instead, they learn to expect that things will come to them with little effort or initiative on their part. Therapists often notice that kids who have drug and alcohol problems are those who have never been given the “gift” of purpose or struggle. They have fallen into the trap of believing that good feelings come from the outside, rather than from the inside.



Helping builds confidence. To develop a really strong sense of self-confidence, children have to try some things that are hard for them. They have to struggle a bit and be encouraged by those who love them and then be able to look back on their success with a sense of pride. This is something that no one else can do for a child. A child must experience it for himself!

Helping teaches children that they are important. With our encouragement, young children can take on more and more responsibility for themselves. They can begin by picking out their clothes and putting their toys away. Then they can move on to doing simple chores that help the whole family. What a good feeling it can be for them to know that it is not only adults who are the helpers, but that children can be helpers, too. They feel important and

capable. When children know their help is valuable, they *feel* valued—which means they are more likely to do helpful things for others in the future.

LOVE IN ACTION

"By becoming active helpers in a world needing our attention, children learn to feel the powerful presence of love, through action and work,"

-Morgan Daleo,
Curriculum of Love

Helping provides a sense of belonging. Too many kids today lack a sense being needed by their families. The consequence of our high-stress life-style means less time spent together, both in work and in play. This contributes to children feeling less connected. When children don't get this feeling at home, they seek out "belonging" in other places. *Who would think that children would feel more connected to their family by having to do chores?* But it's true. In my practice, I have seen how children who come from families who expect them to take on regular chores feel much more connected to their family. As they get older, they may not always *like* their jobs, but they experience a sense of belonging, and they know they are needed. They see that their family functions better because each person carries a part of the work. Outsiders can feel the difference, too. There is a sense of family unity.

Helping teaches children to be of service to others. To be of service to others shows "*love in action.*" Sadly, children today are not always shown that an important step in being a responsible human being is to consider the needs of others. We learn most clearly about service through the process of being a caring family. It is within our homes that children first learn to care and be kind toward one another. We show our children how people take care of one another, even in our small, everyday tasks. As parents, we need to practice maintaining a conscious awareness of giving in the spirit of love, without expectation or reward.

Children sometimes need to be reminded to help simply because it is our human responsibility to take care of one another. If children at a young age see how we help one another, they will become aware of how their actions can help to meet the needs of the larger community of which they are a part. Even watering plants becomes an important task in contributing to the food of our world. Begin simply, by including your children in the work you do:

"I'm folding this laundry so you and your brother can have clean clothes to wear. Would you like to help?"

or

"Let's sweep up the leaves in our neighbor's driveway while we are sweeping ours."

This practical approach to helping others draws on children's natural love of real work and their sense of pride in accomplishing meaningful tasks in the world around them.

Where Do I Start?

Children love doing all the activities connected with looking after themselves and their surroundings.

That is why, in a Montessori Classroom, we call family work "Practical Life" activities. These include preparing food, setting the table, wiping the floor, washing dishes, and dressing.

Between the ages of one and five, children love these jobs and they are delighted to do them. Isn't it interesting that young children enjoy the tasks we adults like least?

Michael Olaf suggests that children have always shown us their interest in practical life by pretending to cook and clean, taking care of a doll, carrying out adult conversations, etc. "But when given the chance, they would much rather be doing the *real* work of the family and community, instead of pretending. A child would prefer to remove real dust from a dusty shelf with a real child-sized duster, to help collect the dirty laundry, or to fold it, to take part in preparing real meals, rather than to pretend to do these things with toys."

Child-sized materials are important. Having a little table available (clean and cleared) can help a child be ready to work. It can also help her focus on her work and stick with it until she is finished. A child-sized apron for cooking, cleaning, and 'helping' can be useful, too. In a child's eyes, it shows the importance of the work. It can also mark the beginning and end of a task. Use an apron that can be put on and fastened without help, and be sure to hang it on a low hook where your child can easily reach it. As Michael Olaf says, the purpose of the apron is not about protection of clothing but to lend a feeling of respect to the child's "real" work.

What's "Practical Life"?

- **Taking Care of Myself** (dressing, brushing teeth, folding, buttoning)
- **Grace, Courtesy, and Concern for Others** (empathy, good manners, saying please and thank you)
- **Care of the Environment** (cleaning, dusting, picking-up, sweeping, gardening)





Take some time to think about your child's working environment in your home. How can you arrange it so that it *really* works for your child? Think about the tools or utensils your child would enjoy using as practical life supplies. You can either adapt your tools or make or buy child-sized ones for cleaning, preparing food, cooking, wood-working, and gardening. (For a nice selection of child-sized items, see www.for-smallhands.com/store.)

Cut off the handles of brooms and mops, find a small watering can and bucket, purchase a small trowel, a little hammer, etc. Work with your child to make an apron or cut up a dust rag, and let him put his special touch on it. If you like working in your garden or your garage shop, keep a few good-quality but small size tools in a special place near your own things within easy reach for your child. Show your child how to use them, clean them, and put them away when work is finished. For a child, "even just a few minutes a day along side parents doing important 'adult' activities can have a great benefit and begin a new way of communicating and living together." (Olaf)

Children respect beautiful things. Just as we do in the classroom, Olaf suggests that "whenever it is possible and safe, we give beautiful, breakable materials to the child, respectfully sharing with him what the rest of the family uses—pottery, glass, metal, real tools. There is a great increase in the self-respect of the child when she is allowed to use our things, instead of being given plastic substitutes." As Maria Montessori discovered, children show special respect and care for materials when they are beautiful and breakable.

Create a sense of order. Children are helped by having a place for everything. Young children, particularly, crave a sense of order. As much as possible, encourage your child to "have a place for everything and to have everything in its place." When everything has a 'home,' children more easily put their things away. Think about it. Try having low cabinets where children can get their own dishes. Keep those things that children need on a regular basis within their easy reach. Place storage baskets or bins on low, open shelves for play materials. Children quickly learn which item goes where. In the classroom, anything that is taken out must also be put away. Expect that your child can do the same at home—with a little encouragement.

"Help me to do it myself."

"From the earliest possible age, the child must be provided with things which may help him to do things by himself."

(Maria Montessori)

Start with small tasks.

With busy lives, we don't always have the time to include our child in everything we do. So start small. Real jobs can begin around age two. Show little ones how to wash a few tiles on the kitchen floor or wipe fingerprints from the woodwork. Success may come slowly at first. You can begin with one thing, such as having your child put the napkins on the table for a meal, and gradually add to the tasks in which the he or she can participate. Little by little, your child will master the job and eventually be able to take it over. Karin Salzmann, in *Montessori Talks to Parents*, insists most four-year-old girls and boys are capable of driving a nail very well. Fives can even scramble eggs. Follow your child's lead. Where do they show interest? Obviously, many tasks are too overwhelming for a young child. Learn to break large tasks down into smaller parts. It's hard for a preschooler to know where to begin when told to "clean your room." However, "let's dust this shelf" is quite manageable.

Work together and show children how. It can be difficult, at times, to have patience with allowing young children the space and time they need to do their "work." Salzman suggests that taking the time to *show a child how to help* is actually easier in the long run than trying to keep him or her occupied and out of the way. Find ways to have fun working together. Choose times you will enjoy. Plan ahead what your child can do to help. Montessori teachers practice lessons by themselves before giving them to be sure there are no snags. If there is anything especially difficult (such as unscrewing a lid or turning on a tap), show your child how to do this first. Do your best to help your young child to associate working with good feelings, rather than bad ones. And remember to say "please" and "thank you." This encourages your kids to say it, too. (From *Montessori Talks to Parents*, NAMTA)



Allow children to help dress themselves.

Children first learn to undress themselves. Later, they learn the skill of dressing. Choose clothing that is easy to remove and put on to help children practice these skills. Young children always want to have choices, so set up the environment to work for both of you. Hang two outfits (and only two!) on a low bar, within your child's reach, and let your child choose between them in the morning.

Give choices with age-appropriate chores. Consult the chore list at the end of this newsletter and start with what is appropriate. Observe your child and follow her lead with what interests her. Try not to say "Do it now." Offer a choice in chores. This is important because it gives your child some power. Allow your child to choose between two chores, either of which is okay with you: "*Would you like to put away the silverware or put the napkins on the table?*"

Model doing your own chores in front of kids. Let them know your sense of accomplishment. Talk and think out loud. This is a clever skill to use with young children. For example, you might say, "*Wow! I'm almost finished. Now I'm done and I feel great!*" It's really important for children to know that we don't always *like* the tasks we have to do, but we have to do them anyway.

Pay for chores? Some families believe that helping is part of a child's responsibility to the whole family, so no allowance is paid for specific jobs. Some families pay an allowance separately, but it is not tied to doing chores. Other families feel that a child's chores are his or her work, so pay is earned for specific tasks. Each family must decide for themselves. No matter what approach you take, remember that accomplishment and creativity are reward enough for young children. All children do feel encouraged when their behavior is acknowledged in a positive way. Concrete, visual "rewards" can be especially helpful for some children. Putting stars (or stickers) on a chart, adding marbles to a large jar on the sink, or giving a big hug for a job well done can bolster a child's motivation. One of the best rewards is for any child is time with Mom or Dad!

Focus on your child's effort, not the quality of what she's done! This is so important. Children teach us to enjoy the *process*. They are not as concerned about the end *product*. In this fast-paced world, our children have a gift to offer us. By observing them, we can learn how to give our whole selves to the task of the moment. Watch your child. Let him teach you how to focus on just one thing and experience the pure joy of intense concentration. Let your child show you how to treasure each delightful moment of life as it as it comes to you.

❄
***"Thus the child
becomes the teacher
of the adult."***

(Michael Olaf)

Allow your child to teach you to
how to find pleasure in the
present moment.



RESOURCES

Morgan Daleo, *Curriculum of Love*

Sr. Joesetta Walsh and Nancy Marti, *Open to Wonder*,

Michael Olaf, *The Joyful Child, Essential Montessori for Birth to Three* Reprinted from: *The Joyful Child, Essential Montessori for Birth to Three* (<http://www.michaelolaf.net/1JC13FE.html>)

Dr. Silvana Montanaro, MD and Montessori Teacher Trainer

Karin Salzmann, *Montessori Talks to Parents*, NAMTA

Age-Appropriate Chores

Each child has his own timetable, so ages are suggested and approximate. Ages are on the early side. For boys, who mature more slowly, you may want to add 6 months to ages given. Start with a simple chore and work up to more difficult tasks. Spend two times working side by side on a chore, calmly demonstrating. The third time, step back and let the child do it alone.

1 ½ Years

- Get diaper for self
- Put disposable diaper in trash
- Pick up small items from floor
- Shut cabinet doors
- Turn on dishwasher



- Pull weeds in garden
- Empty waste baskets
- Sort recyclables

5 Years

- Make bed
- Set table/clear table
- Put leftover food away after a meal
- Feed pets
- Fold laundry
- General straightening of rooms

2 Years

- Put away toys
- Get diaper for self or new baby
- Unload dishwasher of plastic dishes
- Put napkins on table
- Fold washcloths
- Take things to the trash

6 Years

- Pour milk for family meals
- Make the salad
- Empty trash
- Weed
- Fold laundry and take to rooms
- Polish silver and brass

2½ Years

- “Fold” napkins



- Help set table
- Match socks
- Put away silverware (no knives)
- Wash vegetables
- Pour measured items into mixing bowl
- Sweep dry messes with a small broom
- Put away broom and dustpan

7 Years

- Load dishwasher
- Open cans
- Help with grocery shopping
- Cook simple foods
- Help wash the car
- Sweep floor
- Clean bathroom sinks
- Rake leaves
- Use the washer and dryer
- Take out the trash

3 Years

- Dust lower shelves and low tables (put an old sock over a child’s hand and spray with polish)
- Empty small trash cans
- Carry stacks of clothes to rooms
- Help make the bed (pull covers up)
- Hang clothing on hooks
- Carry laundry to and from the laundry area
- Help feed the animals
- Help wipe up spills
- Bring in the newspaper
- Water garden

8 Years

- Complete responsibility for their room (daily)
- Wash pots and pans
- Clean bathroom completely
- Wash windows
- Vacuum
- Sweep and mop floor
- Sew buttons
- Help with grocery list

4 Years

- Put away books
- Dust higher shelves
- Make own bed
- Set the table
- Clear dishes from the table
- Tear lettuce for salad
- Retrieve the mail
- Dust the furniture
- Help carry and put away groceries



9-10 Years

- Change baby’s diapers
- Clean out refrigerator
- Help with meal planning
- Cook more complex meals
- Wash /vacuum car

11+ Years

By this age, a child should be able to learn any skill, as long as you are willing to teach him/her. Certain skills (i.e.: lawn mowing, babysitting for siblings) will depend on maturity level and/or family circumstances. Parents know best.

Resources for *Small Helping Hands*

Many parents wish they could find items with the “Montessori feel” for their child to use around the house. Take a look at this website: www.forssmallhands.com/store. They offer a wide variety of items that children can use around the home when they want to “work” and be of help. It helps children to be able to use implements that are sized to fit their hands. In the classroom, the teachers set up similar “practical life” activities for the children on a rotating basis each month. It is a favorite area for children.



Glass Pitcher with Lid

For all children, every moment is a chance to learn. Nowhere is this more evident than in the use and handling of breakable items. G274 \$7.50



Traditional Sweeping

Long before the term “self-esteem” was coined, Dr. Montessori introduced the unusual notion that children truly relish taking care of their own world. Q16 \$15.50



Lambs wool Duster

Providing tools with inherently fascinating properties is a key Montessori idea. The attraction of a fun and exciting child-size tool can help children master a real task. Q70 \$3.95



Snack Container

Preparing their own lunch or snack at the table is an absorbing and rewarding activity for young children. D302 \$3.95



Laundry Accessories

The “squish” of a wet cloth, the workings of a clothespin spring, the texture of soap suds... Washing & drying laundry by hand offers the young child as many intriguing points of interest as it did 100 years ago. W42 \$34.95



Children’s Leaf Rake

Instantly visible results make clearing leaves a satisfying job for the young child. They’ll appreciate access to properly scaled tools. SC616 \$5.95

Window Washing Set

This set is complete and ready-to-use--all you need to add is water. PL45 \$14.95



Wheel Barrow

Young gardeners can corral a satisfying load with this sturdy child-size wheelbarrow. SC813 \$49.95



Leather Work Gloves

Young children want to help you carry garden clippings, clear brush and weeds, and do other work in the yard. Sturdy, well-fitting leather gloves protect their hands and help them grip tools firmly. V533 \$4.95



Metal Watering Can

With a 2” sprinkling head, this petite watering can is perfect for outdoor watering. SC605 \$8.95

Small Garden Hand Tools

The perfect accessories to help the garden grow! These three scaled-down garden tools have metal heads attached to wooden handles and includes a trowel. SC633 \$6.95



Child’s Tool Belt

Perfect for junior builders. Our child-size Hammer (V508) fits securely in the loop, and our Retractable Measuring Tape (V507) is the perfect size for the small pocket. A second pocket can hold nails or other small tools. (Ages 3 and up) V511 \$32.00



Measuring Tape

This sturdy measuring tape will be the intrigue of your toolbox. Help children measure everything (as they surely will want to) by showing them how to pull out the metal tape and lock it in place. V507 \$3.95

I'm a Good Helper



Name _____

Week _____

CHORES	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Total
Taking Care of Myself								
Taking Care of My Things								
Taking Care of My Home								
Helping Others								

A SPECIAL PRIVILEGE I earned this week:

Allowance I earned this week:
\$