

Parenting our Montessori 3 to 6-year-old at home during the pandemic

(An expanded version of Montessori Parent Coronavirus Survival Guide)

Jana Morgan Herman & Sara Bloomberg

Parenting tips

Before getting into the nitty-gritty, the furniture moving and art materials ordering, before opening the next email from your child's teacher, or trying to keep up with your neighbors, take a breathing break. Try to take a deep full body breath and see the next few weeks, or however long school is closed, as an opportunity to build memories for you and your children. One day, you and your family will all gather and look back on these times with laughter and love.

As you begin this journey with your family, be kind to yourself. Be compassionate to those around you, your partner, your children, and your extended family. You might have moments in the next few weeks when things are not humming along as smoothly as you want them to. In those moments, it's important to breathe deeply. Notice your inhale as you breathe in and your exhale as you breathe out. You can even recite "breathing in I know I am breathing in, breathing out I know I am breathing out." Be present in that breath. Know that even if you might feel alone, you are not. Others are experiencing the same feelings, and it can be helpful to reach out to them and ask for help.

Take the time to be present. Observe the jagged moments as well as the fluid moments when everything is smooth sailing. Try to notice what has happened to contribute to those moments in which you feel like everything is running seamlessly. Perhaps, in those moments, jot down what you have done, phrases you have used, what has led up to this moment, so that you can replicate the situation again.

Now it's time to take a look at your schedule and carve out time for YOU. This might sound cliché, but you cannot be a well of positivity for others unless you take care of yourself. You deserve time for self-care. Carve out times in your day where you can sit, drink a cup of tea, take a bath, read a few pages of your favorite book or talk with your

partner or friend about your day. Take care of yourself, ground yourself so that you can be fully present with your children, even in those moments when you want to pull your hair out.

You have so much on your plate! Making sure everyone is safe, maintaining the household, keeping up with work deadlines, being available for Zoom calls with your supervisor - it's a lot to handle! Perhaps you can carve out a teensy bit of your day to reflect on your times with your children. Many Montessori educators use a journal to reflect on their daily challenges and successes. We ruminate, sometimes in one sentence, sometimes in many pages, about what went well and what didn't. This can be helpful practice daily anyway, even under normal circumstances.

Some questions to ask yourself and reflect upon could be:

- **When thinking about your day, what went well?**
- **What could have gone better?**
- **What needs were unmet?**
- **What could you do to meet your needs/the needs of your children?**
- **What can you do to help your children meet their own needs?**
- **What ideas do you have for the next few days?**

In addition to being kind to yourself, understand that you should not be trying to take the place of the esteemed Montessori educators who usually take care of your children. It's not helpful to try to replicate everything that you think your child's teachers do. Your space is different; your children are different; your expectations should be very different.

A sense of humor, including the ability to laugh at yourself, even as the colossal mistakes are unfolding, is vital! Most Montessori educators know that our errors are humbling, and they teach us our most valuable lessons. Role modeling the ability to laugh at yourself is also a precious lesson for your children to observe. The more they see you making mistakes and then being lighthearted about them and moving on, the more they understand that making mistakes is a normal part of life.

Visual Schedules

Children between the ages of 3 and 6 thrive when there are boundaries and order. We know that they need security and consistency. Typically, your children, whether they

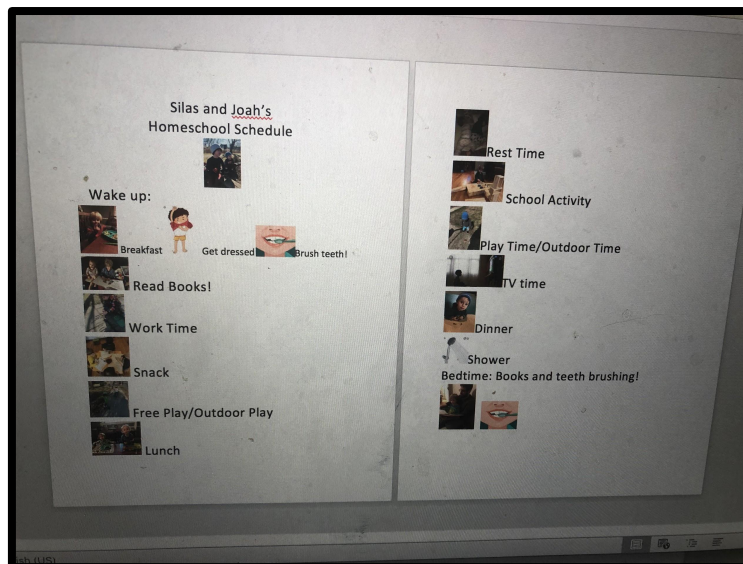
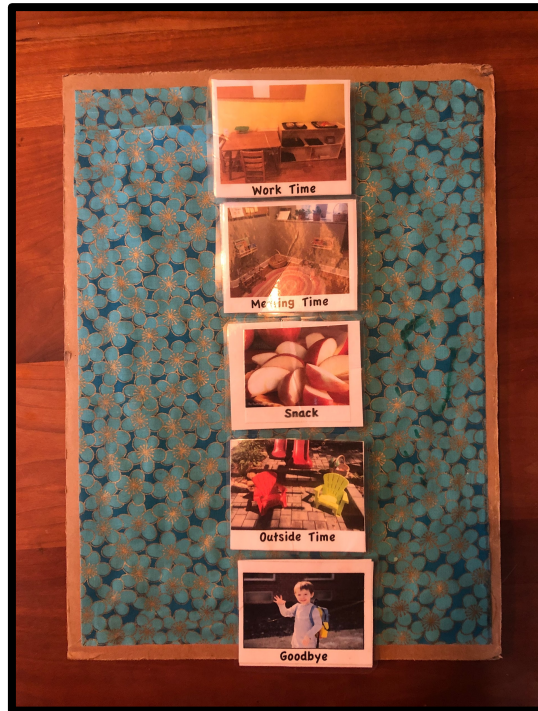
are enrolled in a Montessori school or not, experience some kind of schedule. Schedules help children feel at ease. Visual schedules, which your children can look at and read, can make their lives feel much more predictable. It's advantageous to try to keep your children on a schedule that is similar to their school day routine. Creating a schedule can also be an enjoyable family affair.

There are so many ways to create visual schedules. One method involves inviting your children to draw visual representations that depict specific occurrences throughout their day. For example, your child might draw a person in bed, waking up, and then write "wake up" on a separate piece of paper. Next, on another piece of paper, they might draw themselves brushing their teeth and write the words "brush teeth" on a separate piece of paper. (Take care to notice where your child is with regards to their language development. Many children might not be developmentally ready to spell the words correctly, and that is just fine and perfectly aligned with Dr. Montessori's philosophies.) Some families document rituals such as waking up, brushing teeth, eating breakfast, work time, lunchtime, relaxation time, outdoor time, bath time, dinner time, and bedtime. Take care not to have too much on the schedule because it can be overwhelming for your children.

Another way to create a schedule is to use your phone and photograph your children in action throughout the day. If you have a printer, you can print out the images and have your child write the corresponding labels. An even more natural way to create a schedule is to look for the images you need in newspapers and magazines. Children can cut or tear the images and create the matching labels.

Once you have amassed all of the images and labels that document the pivotal parts of your day, you can help facilitate the assemblage of this helpful tool. You can use a wide variety of media to piece this together. If you have children who sew, invite them to sew the various pieces of the schedule together. If you have hole punchers and yarn, your children can punch the holes in the paper and then thread the yarn through the holes. Paper clips, staplers, and wire are other tools that you can use that make this experience more of a fine motor extravaganza for the whole family. Tape and glue are also excellent ways to assemble all the pieces of your schedule.

Once the schedule is complete, please work with your children to find the perfect place to hang it. Remember, the child's eye level is the ideal height for this valuable piece of art.



Both images Courtesy of Meghan Murray

Some families choose not to create visual schedules; they find them to be restrictive and not conducive to allowing children to follow their passions. You understand the

needs of your child much better than anyone else. Creating a reliable schedule is helpful because children typically feel safer when there is order. Keeping a schedule that is somewhat similar to the one they experience at school will also help ensure a smooth back to school transition.

Routines and Procedures

Around the fourth or fifth week of school, most classroom communities gather together to reflect on ways that their community can function with success. The teachers might begin the meeting by verbally speaking about some things they notice. The teacher might say, "I notice that some children walk and others run. I wonder if it's safe to run inside?" Usually, an older child responds and says, "It's not safe to run inside because you could bump into someone and get hurt." Another child might say, "We don't run!" From there, the conversation meanders into how we can all work together to make sure we are all safe. Usually, it's the elders in the group, the 4, 5, and 6-year-olds who reflect on their days and what they can do to help make sure that everyone is safe. As Montessori educators, we reframe the suggestions or procedures in positive ways so that children hear positives instead of negatives and are inspired to be their best.

Other procedures might be:

We push in our chairs.

We put our work away before we start a new work.

We walk when we have scissors in our hands.

Begin a conversation with your children about the procedures that they have in their learning spaces. Ask them about which procedures they think they need in their home spaces. (Keep in mind that a three-year-old communicates very differently than five or six-year-old might.) If you are a parent who works, and you cannot establish these agreements during the day, then take the time when all is peaceful and quiet to reflect with your children on the procedures your family will agree to use.

Setting Up Your Space

As you set up your space, please don't go out and buy anything. Make do with what you have. Children are very resilient and can work anywhere. In their classrooms, they

work lying down on the floor, at tables, in chairs, or wherever there is space. They balance on clipboards or large books.

Look at what's in your home and use what you have. Large cardboard boxes are perfect because they can be used for storage and as a desk. A large plastic tub with or without a lid can be just as good. One shelf, which is at your child's eye level or below, is wonderful too. A table and chair are also great, but remember that children are easy-going and game for anything. Regardless of what materials you plan to use for tables or storage, invite your children to use the area that you have designated as their workspace. Encourage them to help you clean the space and then invite them to design it with you.

As you are setting up the space, make sure that you anticipate your children's different developmental needs. Three-year-olds can't reach the same things that 5-year-olds can reach. Three-year-olds and four-year-olds do not have the same abilities that their elders have, so they use different materials with varying degrees of safety. Take care to create a space that accommodates all the different developmental needs that are in your family. Try to make sure that whatever you use is child-sized, safe, and can be cleaned.

Even if your children have not been in Montessori environments, they have all been immersed in environments in which they are asked to help clean up and maintain their space. If your children are seasoned Montessorians, then they are all familiar with the concepts of putting things away exactly where they found it. They know that they should leave the work the same way they found it so that it's ready for the next person. In their classrooms, they sweep up their messes; they clean and dry plates and cups when they have used them. They are caretakers of everything in the space. They help clean the shelves, organize their library, pick up their clothes and lunch bags and hang them on their hook, and take responsibility for a lot of their classroom space.

Ask your children how they take care of their environment and incorporate their suggestions into the mix. At the end of each homeschool day, help your children with their clean up. Make sure that the space is as it was in the morning, and give your children several options to help with the clean up. They love to sweep, wipe, and even operate the vacuum.

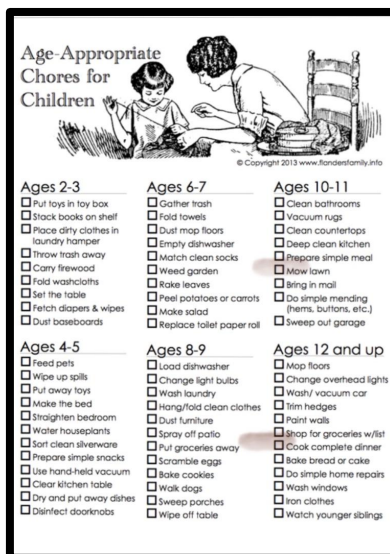
It's healthy to reflect on how things are going with your family. You can have some fascinating conversations and role model problem solving and negotiating in healthy

ways. The list of procedures will evolve as your family gets into the swing of things and life changes, as it always does.

We need to make sure our children have safe physical environments and safe emotional and intellectual environments, too. Children between the ages of 3 and 6 have different developmental needs and abilities. Understanding where your child is developmentally and intellectually can be very helpful for both you and your child as you continue on this path.

Typically children ages 3-6 are on their way to becoming physically autonomous. Setting them up for success so that they can accomplish as much as possible on their own without adults stepping in and doing it for them is very advantageous. Giving children the time and space to complete their tasks in their own way, as they see fit, is most beneficial to them. They might not sweep up every single piece of paper or wash the table as fastidiously as you, but the feelings of confidence and self-esteem that they will experience by completing these tasks are invaluable.

Here's a list of age appropriate chores that you can pick and choose from and start to incorporate into your daily life.



In the Kitchen

There are many ways to modify rooms in your home, and the most accessible place to start is the kitchen. Instead of needing to create a whole new space that is devoted to the area of Montessori education called Practical Life (the part of the studio where children pour, scrub, etc.) you have a kitchen! A sensible place to start is in the fridge. At school, children are free to snack when they are hungry. This freedom works for a few reasons:

- For the most part, children drink water and eat whole grains, fresh fruits, and veggies. Because every choice is healthy, we don't worry about what they are eating.
- Everything is accessible. In the studio, children have access to a small kitchen-like area. In your kitchen, you can devote a shelf in the fridge and a bottom cupboard to foods and drinks for your children so they can serve themselves when they are hungry.

Prepare the Fridge

- Choose a low shelf in your fridge. Clear it of everything except a small pitcher of water and a few containers of fruits, veggies, or both.
- Fruits: clementines are perfect. Children can easily peel them, which is a great skill to practice. Children get valuable work for their hands and finger strength, and it takes them a little time to do it, so they are developing their concentration. Being able to do this work by themselves also provides a sense of independence. Clementines offer the trifecta of Montessori principles! Bananas are also perfect. For younger children, you can cut the bananas in half or show them how to slice it. You can also demonstrate how to pull a banana apart, lengthwise into three pieces.
- Veggies: carrots, in any form, are excellent. Typical carrots can be scrubbed, sliced, and diced. Radishes are also great because they are easy to grow, and this time of year in North America is just the right growing conditions for them. Radishes can be scrubbed and sliced, and they make an ideal treat after baking them in a toaster oven.

Prepare the cupboard

- Take the bottom cabinet closest to the fridge and find a new home for what's inside.
- Add a few containers of crackers; some small snacks or salad plates; small, juice-sized glasses; a little holder with a few forks, spoons, a spreader, and a serrated butter knife.

Remember, though, that when children first encounter freedom they've not experienced, they practice it a lot! When you set up a little pitcher of water, your children will drink more water than they ever have! Not because they are thirsty, but because *they can*! No worries! Things will settle down as they come to see that freedom isn't going away. The same is true for serving themselves snacks.

Prepare Snacks

For this reason, I suggest introducing something like raw carrot chips or baby carrots that first week. Carrot chips are easy to serve, and best of all, they are inexpensive. Only have big carrots on hand? No problem. Just cut them into slices. Better yet, show your child how to cut them into slices before eating them!

At school, all eating happens in the functional living area. We do not take food to other areas of the room. The kitchen is suited to food prep and eating. If you have a dining room, you might have children sit at the table after prepping the food. Then it's back to the kitchen for clean-up and washing the dishes, or, at the very least, loading the dishwasher.

Even young children can help prep food or even do it on their own.

My children helped in the kitchen in whatever capacity matched their ages. An 18-month-old can wash dishes, scrub fruits and veggies, add and stir ingredients, even, gasp, help cook! If that last suggestion makes you uncomfortable, you can take baby steps to get there over time.

Prioritize the Process, Not the Product

Remember that you'll need to adjust your mindset to prioritize the process for children and not the product. Not much will be Pinterest pretty. That's ok. If we want children to try things out, we have to encourage (without unnecessary praise) and then resist the desire to correct.

Remember, things will break, food will have a less than perfect appearance. If you are trying out a new skill with someone you adore, you may be reluctant to continue trying if they correct everything you do. Montessori said for us to develop a friendly relationship with error.

Relax and enjoy the process.

Slow Down

Whatever you do in the kitchen, pause and reflect on how you can slow down. Often children struggle because the adult moves too fast for the child to see what the adult is doing. If you slow down enough for them to really absorb the process, then when it is their turn, they approximate what they have seen. Again, if they make a mistake, don't point it out. Just "give the lesson" in the same way the next time the opportunity presents itself.

Show, Don't Tell

Also, try not to talk a lot while your hands are moving. Children are used to listening to us, so if we are talking a lot, the child shifts their attention from what the hand is doing to your face and, in the process, misses essential movements. If something is tricky, you can always go back and add more verbal detail later.

In the studio, my goal when I'm introducing something into practical life is to ask myself: is there a way to set this up so the child can do this without me? Abilities will vary by age and will change over time. In our studios, we have 2.5-year-old children and children who are 6 - that's a huge range of skills and abilities! Yet, through reflection and modification based on observation, we manage to meet the needs of all children, and you can too!

For the organization of other parts of the house, think minimalism. When children are in a space all day, organizing is the key to avoiding chaos. Toy boxes require a child to get everything out when looking for one item, so toys are easily lost or misplaced, and often children struggle to attend long enough when they finish playing to put everything away.

Take a morning when everyone is rested and have your child pick out 4-6 favorite toys or materials to display. Store and rotate out other items as a child tires of using them. You can assure your child the stored items will be available later.

Place the items you've selected in a basket, on a tray (a cookie sheet would work, or pie tin could also work), or plastic box (shoebox sizes are great). If you do not have a

storage cube unit or shelf, you can line the items up along the top of a fireplace mantle, coffee table, on top of a bookshelf, or even along the edge of a wall.

If it is possible to create a little nook for reading books or observing out of a window, children will enjoy such a space. You might even use a large box as a library nook. Children love being in small places, making little forts, or playing in cozy spaces.

Bedrooms

Your child's room will be a place of rest, play, and relaxation while you are home. If it is possible to organize the room with your child, do. Some children may get anxious while you clean. If that is the case, let them know what you are doing and get their input on what they value as most important. Is the bar in the closet low enough for them to hang things up independently? Do the drawers pull smoothly enough for children to open by themselves? Is the floor clear enough so that a child who wakes up early in the morning can spread a rug out to work and not disturb others? Is there a lamp for reading and settling down before sleep? Get down on your knees and see, from their vantage point, what might help them function independently in their bedroom.

Bathrooms

At home, your child may be used to having you help them go to the toilet or stay with them when they go. While that may be how things were in the past, you may not always be available during this time when children are at home all day.

At school, 3-6-year-old children mostly go to the restroom by themselves. During the first few weeks of school, teachers encourage them and show confidence that each child can be independent. Most often, by three weeks into the year, children are capable. Teachers would not be able to give 24 children individual lessons if they sat with every child who used the restroom! If your child is conditioned to having you there, you can let them know that you trust they can use the bathroom on their own, just like at school. You can always check in on them. A wrap-around stool like a Squatty Potty enables children to sit on the toilet with support under their feet. If children are not used to wiping themselves, they get shown how to get a length of paper, crumple or fold it to fit in their hand, and clean their bodies front to back. When they finish, remind them to wash their hands with soap. They may need a stool at the sink. Instead of saying "good job" when children show independence, say something along the lines of, "I knew you could do it. How does that feel?" or, "Now that's what I call independence!"

If you are looking at any environment and wondering what to change, ask yourself if everything in the room is acceptable for the child to use. If something isn't, could you move it to another space? If adults lived in spaces where they were surrounded by things they couldn't touch, it wouldn't be very comfortable to live there. Of course, children will need to refrain from playing near computers and other large, fragile items that can't be moved. If you have small or medium sized objects set out around the room that might break easily and that you're attached to, it may be better to move them to another space.

Transitions

As we set children up to master their new at-home environments, we want to help them experience smoothly flowing days. Supporting your children through their transitions can be very helpful. Sand timers, egg timers, and oven or microwave timers are superb ways for children to experience time visually. Timers are used in schools throughout your child's day. Some educators will remind children that they have five more minutes left to work. Next, they set a visual timer to 5 minutes and begin the process of cleaning up. Sand timers are superb because children see precisely how much time they have left before it's time to start the next part of the day. If your child's work is spread out all over the space, or your child takes longer to gather everything, then you can offer them a ten-minute reminder. You can also help your child clean up parts of their work. Take care not to clean up all the work; be patient, and understand it might take your children longer to get things done than it would take you. Rather than efficiency, the goal is self-sufficiency.

Movement

Children ages 3-6 are typically in a sensitive period for movement. This means they need to move as much as possible. Giving them as many outdoor experiences in which they can move their big muscles is so helpful. It's part of their work, and it's crucial in these times. If you have outdoor space that invites digging, rock exploration, brick moving, gardening, or sweeping, then engage your children in this significant muscle work. If you live in an apartment, use this time to move furniture and clean using brooms and dustpans and mops - help them use those big muscles!

Sensory Experiences

Children ages 3-6 are sensory learners who need as many sensorial experiences as possible. Here are some ideas for sensory experiences. Going on a sensory walk with a basket that you can fill with as many natural objects is the first part of this experience. Returning to your home, laying out all the objects, and then classifying them according to shape or texture is the next in this sequence. Illustrating these natural treasures with crayons or pencils, or photographing them, could bring a scientific and artistic focus to this adventure. The final part of this journey is gathering all the natural objects and returning them to nature for someone else to discover.

Color exploration and grading walks are similar to the aforementioned sensory walk. The goal of this specific walk is to find as many colorful nature-made objects as you can. Upon returning home, you can lay out a big sheet or towel and grade the colors from lightest to darkest. You can roam around your house and try to find objects from home that match these colors. You can then gather the objects, and the following day, return them to nature.

Sound sensory walks are also invaluable and a lot of fun. Typically these walks are shorter and more intense. The goal is to take silent walks and record everything that you hear. If you cannot get outside, then another option is to sit as quietly as possible for a short amount of time and write the sounds that you hear.

With all three experiences, it's then possible to document the journey from start to finish with your children in whatever way you wish.

Communication

As you become more acclimated to ebbs and flows of this new arrangement, please keep in mind that your children are not on the same developmental plane as you are. Children, much like us, are a work in progress. They are still learning how to navigate their way through social situations. They might not be as present in the same way as we would like them to be. Their brains are still developing. Their attention spans are shorter. Their conversational skills are vastly different. Children are very concrete thinkers who don't have the same intellectual abilities that adults do.

Children need clear limits. They need to know what's acceptable and what is not. When you explain things to them, it's more useful to use concise sentences. You don't need to be verbose or deliver a long sermon. Be direct and know that children need boundaries too. If they are unsafe, you are allowed to tell them to stop. As a matter of fact, you should absolutely tell them to stop anytime they engage in behaviors that you do not like. This won't scar them or send them to therapy; in fact, it will make them feel safe and secure. When communicating with them, quiet tones are the most effective. Instead of yelling or raising your voice at your children, communicate with them by talking with them. Kneel down so that you can see their eyes and speak quietly. Listen to what they have to say, but be firm and unwavering. Most Montessori teachers do not enter into power struggles with children. We do not waiver; we are clear, and our expectations are firm for everyone.

It is also helpful to step into situations with a clear head. If you do approach children with anger or high energy, they feed off that energy, and the conditions tend to escalate quickly. Be calm, perhaps even count to ten before you intervene. In calm and peaceful situations, of course, we are patient and calm. We allow children the time and space they need to finish their thoughts.

Think about the world from your child's point of view. Recently they were at school, where they enjoyed a sense of predictability, autonomy, and individuality. They are currently at home in a new set of circumstances. You might have to work from home and cannot give them as much attention as you might like. Navigating your ways through this tenuous situation can be hard. Trying to maneuver through these delicate days with grace and courtesy can be even harder, so try to make things easier for yourself and your children.

It's helpful to give your child as much self-control and ownership of their lives as possible. Allow them opportunities to make as many choices as possible about as many things in their lives as is reasonable. An example could be providing two options that they can choose from for breakfast. The same idea applies with clothing - you can select two options, and then allow them the final choice. "You can eat X or Y. You choose. You are in charge. You get to decide what you want to eat for breakfast!"

Stay at Home Parent

If you are a stay at home parent, your experience will be different from someone working at home while keeping their children. Notice I said different, not easy.

I'd start by thinking about independence. Just because you will be at home with your children does not mean that you should entertain them the whole time, or even most of the time. Chances are this is a marathon, not a sprint. Creating routines where you are the one who makes all the magic happen is unrealistic and unsustainable.

In numerous Montessori classrooms, you will see only one adult in a room with as many as 12 children without an assistant. Still, other classes may only have two adults in the morning. Montessori classrooms are specifically designed to run with very little support or direction from an adult; once the rhythms, routines, and expectations are established, children work primarily on their own. I know you probably think there's no way your children could do that. I'm here to tell you that they can. Just maybe not right away. When school starts each year, there's a settling-in period where children get to know the rules and expectations for existing together in the room. During this period, the adult plays a much more significant role in redirecting behavior, reinforcing ground rules, channeling energy, and being consistent. Hence, children know when we say something, we mean it every time. At school, teachers work with large groups, so being consistent is critical too, not only for the child involved, but also for the children watching an encounter. At home, sometimes parents are tempted for many reasons (like lack of confidence or being tired), to give in "just this once," which can mean that you regularly give in!

If your child is at a Montessori school, I'd email the teacher and ask for the ground rules they use in class. If your child is not, generally the ground rules fall into these three short and simple categories: show respect to yourself, others, and the environment. In your house, when something is happening, and you are unsure about what to do, ask yourself if it follows those guidelines.

Remember that children will need to move. If you are in a situation where you can take children outside, do. They could spend all day there, in all kinds of weather. As stated in the Air section, the AAP recommends *at least* 90-120 minutes per day of outdoor, unstructured playtime. Playtime develops executive functioning skills, problem-solving, safe risk-taking skills, and so much more! You can always feel right about being outside.

However, children running inside can be disruptive and sometimes unsafe, but not always. I'd check myself and say, "Is this unsafe or just loud?" If it is dangerous, you can direct them outside. If the situation or activity is too loud, remind children they can go out to yell, but inside you expect lower voices as not to disrupt others.

Probably the guideline for sharing space in most Montessori schools is keeping work on a rug or table and cleaning things up and putting them away before getting something else out. By implementing that one rule, parents and caregivers eliminate the constant clutter, mess, and visual chaos that results from being inside and playing all the time. We encourage parents to follow the same rule at home as Montessori children use at school.

There is nothing magical about the rug, only that it defines space for work, lets others know the work is being used, and helps children feel safe that no one will take it while it is there.

The last paragraph brings me to sharing. Adults often think that by making children share, they are helping children be less selfish when, in reality, making children share makes them more protective of what they have. Children remain in a heightened state of protective behavior to ensure they do not lose what they have or are using. At first, children may want to be protective of their toys on the rug by not wanting to put them away. You may ask them to put it away, and they might say something along the lines of, "I'm still working on it." To that, I'd reply, "I hear that you want to keep it out, but we get out one thing at a time. When you are not using it any longer, put it away, and you can get it out later." Stay calm and let any words of protest wash over you like a cool breeze. I'd say, "Can you put it away by yourself, or do you need my help?" Then help them if they need help, kindly. They will come to see you are consistent. Children who do this at school can and will learn to do it at home. Not having to share helps other friends at school or siblings at home learn patience and wait. They also see that the rule applies to everyone. Children come to know that whoever has the work out does not have to worry, and they will have a turn later when the material is on the shelf. Stay steady, friend.

Try using a rug for their toys (or "work" if you are a Montessorian) for two weeks, and after two weeks, see how that protective behavior changes.

You'll find fantastic resources online for making simple Montessori materials for your child to use at home; we won't name many here. Places including "*Trillium Montessori*" and "*Montessori for Everyone*" offer free materials and ideas as well as materials for purchase. Otherwise, see the section later in the book for suggestions.

Even if you do set up a mini Montessori school in your house, I wouldn't suggest you have "school" more than 3 hours a day. Relax, play, enjoy each other, engage in

hobbies, read, play, rest, make food together, and you'll have one pretty fabulous education.

Work at home parents

For so many of you, working from home while caring for your children will undoubtedly bring challenges.

While I cannot promise it will be more comfortable, I can say that if we focus on modifying some key points, you can manage.

First, if there are two of you at home, then obviously, you have things easier. Not easy, mind you, but easier. Employers understand that staff is pulling double duty and have generally been supportive, or at least tolerant, of the new normal when staff work from home. If possible, plan with your partner to schedule meetings so that one of you stays available to engage with the children while the other devotes attention to work. In the studio, we call this "one up, one down," meaning one person is up and moving around to answer questions and make sure children are safe, while one person is engaged in lessons.

You can take turns. I am not suggesting, nor do Montessori teachers practice, always being the keeper of the key. We are not engaged continuously with children. We give lessons or connect children with materials, and we are in the space should someone have a question no one else (including other children) can answer before we get involved. At school, some teachers have a rule like, "three before me," meaning that the child should try to solve their struggle on their own, then ask three other people before coming to an adult. Often other children can help if a child is unable to do something. We want to be the person of last resort because we know that people learn things more deeply if they figure it out themselves.

But what if you are the only adult? Well, fear not - there are many Montessori schools like that, too!

What we do in both cases is to make sure the environment is prepared so children have the supplies they need available and can access them on their own as their level of independence and ability allows.

We make sure that there is a supply of paper, pencils, and sharpeners, coloring crayons, paper towels or washcloths, etc., so children can be as independent as possible.

We make sure that the shelves are tidy, organized, and all the pieces are there before our day begins.

We have tables and rugs; if you have one child, you'll need one rug. Rugs define a workspace and say to the child that this is their work. It helps them keep work organized and track all the pieces. If you do not have a small rug, you can use a towel. At school, children in 3-6 usually unroll and roll up their rugs. You can have children store them on or near a shelf on the floor. If it makes sense for you, you can also show children how to fold the rug or towel.

As I mentioned in an earlier post, children follow this cycle of activity:

- Get a rug
- Unroll it
- Bring work to it
- Use the work
- Make the work beautiful
- Return it to the shelf
- Roll up the rug

If it is table work:

- Choose a work
- Take it to the table
- Use the work
- Clean up the work
- Tuck in chair
- Return work to the shelf

These are what we call the “cycles of activity”.

When we get something out, we put it away in a condition that makes it ready for the next person. If your child attends Montessori school, then you can and should remind them that just like at school, they can do one thing at a time, and they need to put it away before choosing something else. The cycle of activity will take a little while to learn if your child doesn't attend Montessori school, but they can still do it.

Also, Montessori teachers know that we must be super consistent if the room is going to run smoothly, so we make it a point to remind children of this cycle until they "get it." Being consistent about the process will be so helpful. If children push back against it because they want to test boundaries, I'd say something like, "you can put it away or I can, but if I put it away, it isn't a choice anymore." Then get "busy" doing something else for a little bit. Children may wait for a minute before they decide they want to put it away; if they end up putting it away, great! If they don't, calmly pick it up and put it away in a closet. If they don't ask for it, it doesn't come back out. If they do ask for it, I will let them know, calmly and without snark, that you will get it out for them if they agree to put it away when finished so it is ready for the next person.

In a Montessori class, it will happen that the children will want the attention of the teacher while they are engaged. If a child needs something while the teacher is occupied, the child has to...wait for it...WAIT. Yes, your child can wait IF you are consistent. If you ask a child to wait but then respond if they whine or plead, you teach them that if they complain or beg, you will react. Instead, learning how to be kind but firm will be helpful.

If you are working and a child comes to you while you are finishing some task, you can give them the sign for wait (which you can look up on an ASL website). If they whine or plead, you can ignore them until you finish the task, or you can say, "I will let you know when I finish, and this makes it take longer. I promise to come to you as soon as I'm at a stopping point." Then do that. Once again, if you don't do that, you are teaching them you don't follow-through and that they need to plead to get your help.

It is going to be different for you to work from home with children there, no doubt.

You'll need to adjust to working in perhaps 20-30 minutes increments unless your child is super self-driven. Children have different needs, and one is not better or smarter than the other. Children are different. Don't think of any experience you have as good or bad. Accept the child you have and cherish this time to get to know them in a new and profound way. Know that all behavior is communication. Know that children are getting used to this situation, too, and everyone is doing the best they can.

Because of parent work schedules, it is pretty standard that if you have a single child, when you are with them at night, you are often really engaged with them, whereas children with siblings are more likely to entertain each other to some extent. In this new work-at-home scenario, a child without siblings will need to adjust to you being busy with your work. And, therefore, they will also need to engage with their work without

your constant engagement. You can get there. Have to-the-point and honest conversations about how things are different right now as you all work to adjust to new circumstances. For now, while we have school at home, they will do their work, just like they do at school, and you also have work to do. So sometimes you'll be working with them, but sometimes, you'll have to do your job, and they'll need to wait sometimes to talk to you.

Because children want to be close, it may be easier, at least in some cases, to be in the same room than having a place for them in another part of the house. Montessori writes in *The Child in the Family* that children love being with their parents because they love them so much! Adults, who often have so much to do for work, feel torn. They love their children, but they also can't entertain them all the time. In the past, especially if your child was in care full day, they did not get to spend as much time with you during the week for obvious reasons, and so now, they may want to spend lots of time with you! Wouldn't you like to spend every waking minute with the people you love most? You can help children balance this urge by making sure you have time for both. I'd suggest setting time aside, maybe lunch and snack to especially prep food together, and have lots of conversation while you are eating and tidying up after lunch.

Here's a sample conversation

"Mommy, I want you to play with me!"

"Oh, I want to, but I have to work right now. You can work while I work."

"No! I don't want to! I want you!"

Here's where I'd acknowledge their feelings.

"I know you do! I love spending time with you! And I'm happy for the time we get to be together while we do our work. I will be working on things for X amount of time, and then we can have a snack together. After our meal, I will work some before we make lunch together and have a picnic in the yard/on the porch. I'll leave a sticky note on the clock to show you where the long-hand will be when it's snack time." Alternatively, you might say, "I'm going to work for one-half hour, then read a book to you." After a half-hour, if your child is not concentrating, say, "If you're ready, let's read a book together, or play I spy, or play a game of go fish." These are the perfect types of "lessons" you can do.

Montessori believed that it is essential for children to see adults going about the business of everyday life. What we cook, wash, clean, organize, etc. are all lessons.

How we interact with each other is a lesson. Everything is a lesson. Life is a lesson. Language lessons are reading and talking TO your child, playing sound games, labeling things in the house, taking dictation of a story for a child and having them illustrate it, reading to them, reading to them, reading to them. Math lessons include counting silverware for dinner, pairing socks when folding laundry, measuring ingredients in recipes, measuring the laundry soap, counting steps to the mailbox or the garage, counting the windows in each room, and adding all the windows from each room together. You get the idea.

Lessons should be simple and concise. No need to over-explain.

I would be ok with them working on the floor right next to me. After all, at school, they work on rugs next to their friends. If they can't resist talking to you, you can say, "Would it be easier for you to work if you weren't right next to me? You don't have to be. You can work in another area if that would be easier for you to remember that I can talk after I finish typing my work or having a business call."

They may be a little sad or pull a long face; after all, they love you!

But remember, they can do this. They do it every day!

You might invite them to think of what they want to do first: color or cut playdough snakes?

Then about 5 minutes before snack time, you can let them know that you'll be ready for lunch if they want to put their work away from where it goes and roll the rug or clean off the table.

Then after snack, remind them that at 11:45, you can both clean up to get ready for lunch.

If they interrupt you, repeat, "I will come to talk with you when I finish with my work."

Be consistent. At school, teachers often communicate this way. And it's ok. There are so many things the child can work on! They don't have to stand there. They can watch quietly or find something to do.

You may want to write the schedule of the day on a piece of paper, nothing fancy. I'd write in lowercase letters. Write it slowly in front of them, saying it as you write it: "10:00- snack." Say or sound out the word, don't spell it. The schedule can include a large chunk of time that says, "play on your own," or "rest or read quietly after lunch." Writing in front of them helps them connect words with writing; it's a passive lesson.

These are the best kinds! When we slow down and let children observe us, they are learning, and we are teaching.

If you are interested in finding additional support for behavior and discipline, *Positive Discipline* by Jane Nelson is a wonderful book. Even better are interactive classes, where available. Positive Discipline classes are an investment worth making, and parents who do them report marked improvement in their relationships with their children.

Work at home parenting will not look the same for everyone. No worries. There is no road map here. Give yourself grace and the flexibility to do what your family needs to make it work. None of us has the answer, and everyone is doing the best they can. And that, dear friend, is good enough.

"... Does Nature make a difference between work and play or occupation and rest? Watch the unending activity of the flowing stream or the growing tree. See the breakers of the ocean, the unceasing movements of the earth, the planets, the sun and the stars. All creation is life, movement, work. What about our hearts, our lungs, our bloodstream which work continuously from birth till death? Have they asked for some rest? Not even during sleep are they inactive. What about our mind which works without intermission while we are awake or asleep?" (Dr. Maria Montessori, 'What You Should Know About Your Child', Kalakshetra Publications, 138)

Sleep

Most of us never get enough of it. In our hurried lives, we rarely go to bed when we should, nor do we stay in bed as long as we should.

We lament the lack of it and sometimes even wear a lack of sleep as a badge of honor, showing others a kind of humblebrag about our ability to function without it.

Research shows that lack of sleep negatively impacts our memories, ability to function productively, and our physical health.

The American Academy of Pediatrics released new sleep guidelines in 2016 (1), finding that: "Following are the recommended minimum and maximum hours each age group should regularly sleep during 24 hours for optimal health:

- Ages 4-12 months: 12-16 hours (including naps)
- Ages 1-2 years: 11-14 hours (including naps)
- Ages 3-5 years: 10-13 hours (including naps)
- Age 6-12 years: 9-12 hours

- Age 13-18 years: 8-10 hours

The CDC (2) recommends that adults 18-60 years old need 7+ hours of sleep per night.

Now is the perfect time to get on track with sleep! Sleep helps you and your children in so many ways. "Notably, insufficient sleep has been linked to the development and management of a number of chronic diseases and conditions, including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity, and depression." (3)

We reference these numbers to stress to you the importance of sleep, not just for your physical health, but also for your mental health during this time of extraordinary stress.

So, maybe you need to adjust your routine. Some people have treated closures and children being home as a snow day and have let bedtime routines slide. I want to encourage you to return to a new pattern if you haven't already.

Whenever I introduced something new to my children, something that they might not be excited about, I started with what I learned and referenced other people, experts, if possible.

I'd say something like, "I have been learning more about what we should do while we are all at home together. A special group of scientists and doctors who look at how the body works made guidelines about sleep. Getting enough sleep will help keep us healthy. We are going to make some changes to make getting better sleep easier for us."

So, how do you do that exactly?

Two things are essential: setting and routine.

Spaces designed to support sleep have certain aspects in common. One is light. Sleep happens more efficiently in a dark room.

Start well before bedtime.

I started getting ready for bed after dinner.

My children helped clean up after dinner, maybe played for a little while. Then they had a warm bath, put on PJs, and picked out three books. One of the books was usually *Goodnight Moon*.

Our routine was that we would get a little drink of water and go to the toilet before we read books. We did this because it seemed to stop the, "But I need

water or a drink" conversation that tended to happen when it was time to turn off the lights.

We turned off the lights and turned on a small lamp beside the bed with a soft glow. If we were traveling and the lamplight was too bright, we'd block it with a book or set it in a different part of the room, so no need to buy something if you don't have a soft-light bulb.

We'd read all the books.

Then if your child is a child who falls asleep a little easier, you can turn off the light by the bed. If not, curate a little basket of books beside the bed, and for 15 minutes, they can read or look at books quietly before lights out.

It is important not to get into a conversation with your children around any of the common topics children use to keep you engaged at bedtime. These include:

- how much they love you,
- if they are thirsty,
- if they are not tired,
- if they want you to stay there,
- if they would rather sleep with you, "just for tonight"
- or anything just one more time or one more minute, not even if they use the word "please," which some well-meaning adult told them is magic in other contexts.

You get the picture.

If a child comes out of the room, I would quietly and lovingly walk them back to their bed—every time. If you struggle to be consistent on this point, children will show you because they will continue to come out of the room. It is vital that unless you don't mind them sleeping with you (and many families and cultures do not care, and that is ok!), you should walk with them back to the room and quietly and calmly help them to bed. If they are crying, I would say, "I know it is hard to stay in bed. I love you, I know you love me, and I will see you in the morning." And that is all I would say. Some children will grow up to be wealthy litigators because we see that as children, they can argue pretty amazing points. Do not discuss with tiny lawyers who will bill unlimited hours! Also, understand that this new routine may take several nights. In fact, at school we know that adjusting to new expectations can take from two to six weeks, so do not think you are failing if children don't adapt right away. Stay the course.

If you stick with it, I promise it will work. I promise.

Since we know the CDC recommends 10-13 hours for children this age, 8 pm is a reasonable bedtime. Some children get up early, like, very early. In that case, I believe it is fair to ask them to play in their rooms until 6 am. They can have unique toys for that time; they may color, sing, any number of things as long as they stay in their rooms. You can set the alarm for them. You have a morning alarm and they will too, only theirs will tell them when they can move about the house, in order to allow others to sleep. Asking them to follow this rule is fair and a considerable part of grace and courtesy.

Now we can work on you. If your children are getting 10-13 hours of sleep, and the CDC says you need 7+ hours, then you'll have the difference of between 3-6 hours in the house for adults - imagine!

Those 7 hours have to happen for you to function at your best. Your room should be dark. It should also be free of electronics. Gasp! It's true. You may want a fan or maybe listen to brown noise like this:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=38&v=GrwTSN2Saak&feature=emb_logo

While you might filter the light from electronics by using special glasses, all those little vibrations, lights, and dings are inescapable and designed to draw your attention. The minimum distance our phones should be from us is 3 feet, if we hope to stop glancing at them. An even better solution is to leave your phone off and in the living room when you go to bed. Anyway, the choice is yours, of course. These are suggestions.

In the remaining hours, you have time for indulging in virtual happy hours with friends or loved ones, binging on lousy TV, sitting in the backyard looking at the moon, or spending alone time with your partner.

By making sure the children are sleeping, or at least in their rooms resting, you will have some time to recharge.

As an aside, many countries all over the world take afternoon naps. If people don't sleep, they still rest. Taking an hour to rest during the day, or at least for the children to nap or rest, will give you a break. I highly recommend it. Children who don't sleep can look at books or color in their rooms.

In summary, you all need sleep, and sleep routines help sleeping happen more predictably. Try it.

1. <https://www.aappublications.org/news/2016/06/13/Sleep061316>
2. https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/how_much_sleep.html
3. https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/chronic_disease.html

Air

Different types of air are essential. The most critical, of course, is breathing! When we are stressed, humans revert to shallow breathing.

In the days of early man, shallow breathing diverted breath from organs and muscles so we could escape from predators—a good effect in the short term. Shallow breathing and the release of the hormone cortisol can be beneficial in short bursts. However, over a long period, shallow breathing weakens the body systems, and the constant wash of cortisol weakens our immune systems. Research shows deep breathing helps our bodies return to a more neutral state and will improve our overall health.

Our respiratory system, unlike other body systems like the endocrine system, can be voluntarily controlled. You can alter your respiratory patterns and impact your physical and mental health in beneficial ways. (5)

Breathing practices are easy to adopt. Find a comfortable spot, close your eyes (after you read all of the instructions, of course). Inhale with your diaphragm, the organ that controls breathing. Draw in as much air as you can slowly, over the count of four. Hold your breath inside your lungs for the count of four. Then exhale over the count of four, pushing all the air out of your body. Hold for the count of four and repeat for one minute. If you haven't practiced deep breathing, it is easy to set a timer and begin. While one minute is great, 3 minutes is even better! Surprisingly, many folks will struggle to attend to their breathing for three minutes. No worries; you can work up to three minutes, or even more. Apps like Calm and Headspace both offer breathing and relaxation exercises. Calm offers meditation for kids, as well as free services to teachers.

You can practice breathing exercises anywhere anytime, even if there is chaos around you. You don't have to close your eyes! You can do it alone or with your family. You can do it in a meeting, the dinner table, while cooking, even on the toilet.

For your health, incorporate a few minutes of deep breathing once or twice a day.

Outside: the other kind of air. While we are adjusting to our new normal, it may seem like you have to stay inside. However, unless a doctor has directed you otherwise, quarantine does not mean isolation. When possible, go outside each day, even for a few as 10 minutes; there are measurable benefits to your blood pressure and overall health.

You may remember a reference to the American Academy of Pediatrics' recommendation of 90-120 minutes per day of outdoor, unstructured playtime for children. The AAP's guidelines also list many benefits to social, emotional, and physical growth when children spend time outside; free play inside is just as important if they can't go out.

Not surprisingly, the outdoors offers similar benefits to adults, as well. A systematic review of studies shows that as little as 10 minutes a day in nature, walking, or watching while sitting has a beneficial effect on mental health. (7)

You are not taking a short-cut by setting everything down and going outside or taking your child out during the day. If you don't have a yard, going for a walk or creating a space with plants near a sunny window, adding a bird or hummingbird feeder, or maybe even a small fishbowl (think goldfish or beta) couldn't hurt. No seeds or houseplants? You can use fresh produce to grow potatoes, sweet potatoes, lettuce, garlic, and you may be able to sprout some of the dried seeds, like coriander, in your spice kitchen cabinet. Experiment! See what sprouts!

Slowing down, breathing, observing the world where the sun rises and sets every day, and making time to play helps us settle ourselves.

Go outside or open a window and get some fresh air.

(5) <https://www.npr.org/2010/12/06/131734718/just-breathe-body-has-a-built-in-stress-reliever>

(6) Pediatrics Sep 2018, 142 (3) e20182058; DOI: 10.1542/peds.2018-2058

(7) <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02942>

Water

We know how critical water is for life. It is the most essential nutrient we ingest. As mentioned in a meta-study from the National Institute of Health, water is the only nutrient that, if absent, would cause death within a matter of days (4).

Water helps maintain your physical and mental health. Water supports concentration, reduces the severity and length of headaches, and increases health outcomes among a variety of health-related illnesses.

Drinking more water will help everyone fare better in times of stress.

It may be tempting to drink other liquids when you are spending so much time around the house, especially for children. Keeping water intake high, instead of other fluids, contributes to everyone's overall health.

When we set up environments at home so that children can be more independent, they will drink more, simply because they have the freedom to serve themselves. We recommend having a pitcher of water in the fridge on a low shelf available for children. For added interests and variation, you might want to add a few slices of cucumber, strawberry, lemon, watermelon, pineapple, or other fruit to the pitcher.

Now, for the less scientific part. Montessori teachers know that children love water. They will wash their hands all day long, and isn't it the perfect time for that! You can easily set up a little handwashing work for them by using a small table, end table, stool, or any number of other items; you can even convert an IKEA kitchen or other toy kitchen for the task. All you need is a bowl, a small bar of soap (hotel-sized or you can slice a bar into child-sized pieces), a small pitcher or medium-sized cup to carry water, and a washcloth or hand towel for drying hands.

If you'd rather not set up a special place, of course, the bathroom or kitchen sink will also work. In the bathroom, I would turn the water down under the sink so that only a small stream comes out. That way, if the water is on longer than you expect, it is controlled. You will probably need a little stool. Another thing children love doing in Montessori classrooms is washing dishes. Pull a chair or stool up to the kitchen sink, add an inch or so of sudsy water, and let them clean. Outside, if you have dirt, you can add water, and children will love playing in the mud. When they finish, wash them off with the hose.

When things go sideways, you can add water, and everything gets better.

For some children, working with water can be very soothing. The sounds, the textures, and the quality of the water on one's skin can be calming and grounding. Giving children who crave such input time to work with water is something that families can consider. To create such an experience, you can use anything from a smallish rectangular tub to a large plastic container that might typically get used to store clothes under the bed. It's not necessary to fill the container with a lot of water. The container can be on the floor in the bathroom with a towel or two under it for safety, or it can be outside if you have an outdoor space. Children are mesmerized by a water station and can work at this space for many hours. This work can be a lifesaver when you have a last-minute project that's due, provided of course that you can keep them in your line of vision, and that you don't mind a bit of a mess. This activity resembles a water table or a sensory table. It can be extended each day by adding materials such as measuring cups, funnels, sieves, basters, squirting bottles, paintbrushes, sponges, and anything else you think your children would love. Some people add soap, but then it can become even more slippery. Also, be sure to dress your children appropriately because you know how much children love to get wet! Once you are done, you can use the water to do plant watering, hand washing, and even preliminary dish washing.

All of this water table work, while keeping your children focused, also helps to strengthen your children's pincer grip, hand-eye coordination, core strength, and forearm strength as they pour, transfer, squeeze, tweeze, fill, drip and splash the water with all their favorite tools.

(4) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2908954/>

The clean-up from this material is also very soothing and satisfying because it's a workout for all those large muscles. If you have any plants that need watering, you can fill pails with water, carry them over to the plants and water them. Sponges are also a great way to absorb water. Once the sponges are full, children have to use their muscles to squeeze the water out of the sponge. They are required to repeat the experience again and again until the spills are dry. From there, the towels can be dropped off into the laundry hamper, loaded into the washing machine, transferred to the dryer, and then folded. These practical, real-life applications are Montessori work in action. Dr. Montessori would be very proud of you for adding this to your daily living!

Other practical life materials that can be incorporated into your daily life with your child are: (though not necessarily in this order)

- sponge squeezing,
- washcloth twisting and squeezing
- baking, which involves scooping, spooning, measuring, whisking, basting, sifting, and mixing all ingredients. While the product is baking, children can illustrate and write the recipe (in their own unique way using their own way of writing and sounding out and sequencing the process.) You can even venture so far as to create your own recipe book!
- pouring (of wet and dry objects) with or without a funnel or a sieve
- opening and closing
- dressing, which incorporates folding, buttoning, zipping, and pulling on of socks, gloves, hats, jackets, pants, t shirts, shoes, and other items of clothing
- tying and clasping
- hand washing
- foot washing
- dishwashing
- table washing and scrubbing
- plant washing
- nail scrubbing
- nose blowing
- hair brushing
- sweeping
- mastering using tools such as hammers, screwdrivers, wrenches, nuts, and bolts, and any other daily living tools.

Your sous chefs can help you prepare the daily meals as long as you make sure that they have a surface they can reach. As always, please make sure that everything is child-sized and child-accessible.

Make sure that all the tools your children use are safe and clean and developmentally appropriate. Butter knives make spreading and cutting much easier for your child. Your children use peelers, corers, orange juice squeezers, and a variety of other tools in their classrooms.

Before the meal, your children can help you clean the table and set the table.

After the meal, your littles can help you clean the table, sweep the floor, and clean the chairs using a tiny broom and a washcloth and or a sponge.

Learning how to carry tools such as crayons, pencils, scissors, and larger items such as stools, chairs, and step stools can also be incorporated into your daily lives together.

Allowing your children the gift of helping out with the family's daily tasks helps them feel valued, respected, and accomplished. Their sense of confidence, along with their sense of responsibility, will help boost their self-esteem and their feelings of self-worth. All of this practical life activity might require some patience on your part, but it's so worth it.

All of these experiences help develop the pincer grip (the muscles in the fingers and the hand) as well as the muscles in the forearm and the core. Children have more tangible experiences with order, concentration, coordination and independence as they experience these materials.

Incorporating math and science into your everyday life

As you navigate your way through your home, take the time to notice all of the physical attributes that make up your home.

Use all of your senses to:

- observe the shapes, the colors, the hues
- feel the textures, the roughs and the smooths
- listen to sounds that you hear, the dynamics of the volume (the quietest and loudest), the layers of sounds (sounds from the distance, the middle ground, and the foreground), the tempo (speed) of what you are listening to, the rhythm (the pattern of the sound, speech, and repetition) the textures or layers of what you are hearing, (many people speaking at the same time, a garbage truck going by as a siren wails while a bird sings and a dog barks)
- observe each space and notice the prevailing smells, what you think they are linked to, and the associations they have for you
- take the time to taste the sweets, the sour, the salties, the bitters and the astringents.
- notice the differences in size, shape, height, weight and quantity
- observe and build patterns
- reflect out loud about what you observe

Focus on classifying the various physical attributes in your home, and as you do this classification, you are helping to refine your child's sense of order, their sense of observation, and believe it or not, you are helping to build their mathematical foundation. (Who knew this could be so easy?)

As you verbally explore what you are experiencing in your environment, you are also expanding your child's vocabulary and stretching their expressive and receptive skills.

Illustrate your scintillating sensory situations in a journal and write about them too, adding a literary and artistic focus on this fun work.

Incorporating literacy into your everyday life is really easy and fun.

Start by losing your memory (for some of us that's already happened and isn't that far fetched), and forget everything you need to do or get. Have pieces of paper and crayons and pens available, and ask your children to write down the things that you need from the grocery store, the pharmacy, and anything else that you might need to remember.

Unless your children are proficient spellers, you should not worry about spelling. (This is not a spelling bee, it's a fun and lighthearted way to incorporate and encourage literacy.) You can sound out the words if your children are younger or not expert spellers. For example, you might say, "We need more milk, can you write the word milk on your list?" Your child might write "mlk." Lemons might be "lemns," and eggs might be sounded out as "agz." All of these ways of sounding out and writing the words are perfectly acceptable and should be encouraged, not corrected.

Other children might not be able to form the shapes of letters, but they can help by writing lines and dots and dashes, and then they can read you their lists. Any way that you can encourage your children to write would be so helpful for your child's literacy development.

You can never read too many books. It's also normal and healthy for children to want to read the same book again and again. It might be repetitive to you, but it's all part of strengthening and building literacy skills, so be patient and get to reading!

After you have read the book, bring it to life by writing your own version of the book and then illustrating it. Act it out, sing it, dance it, and turn it into a performance which you can force your child's grandparents to watch via zoom.

Encourage conversations around the book. Questions like

"What do you think will happen next?

What would you do?

Remind me what happened at the start of the story?

Oh, you know I'm forgetful, who are the characters in the story?

What was your favorite part of the story, and why?"

Reading books can be some of the most comforting bonding experiences that can encourage a lifetime of reading. We want children to associate reading with love. If we quiz them or make reading into a test or performance of what they know or can identify, they will likely not enjoy reading. Reading to children not only develops their literacy skills, it becomes a time for bonding, love, and relationship building.

Incorporating art into your life

We all need so much more creativity, ingenuity, and FUN in our lives. Creativity and imagination cannot be taught, but it can be nurtured and nourished. Montessori wrote that imagination is the basis of intelligence. There is so much involved in creating a single piece of art. First, we have to think about what we want to make, and then we have to find the tools we are going to use, find a space to work, and transfer the ideas from our heads onto the paper. Once we have completed our masterpieces, we have to clean everything up and reflect on our work.

Art is not just art for art's sake. Art is intense; it's a conglomeration of so many skills. So while your children are problem-solving, focusing, and building muscles in their hands, they are also creating new neural pathways. They are also developing their eye-hand coordination, self-esteem, autonomy, individuality, and self-confidence.

Art is not just creating; art incorporates math, science, sensorial, geography, language, and so much more. Art is jam-packed full of intellectual goodness, so give them space and freedom to explore, create, make a mess, and then clean it up.

You don't need a lot of space to create an art studio for your child. You need a flat surface that your children can reach. If you are worried about a mess, tape down a garbage bag and throw an old sheet or towel down so that your children don't feel your frustration when they do make a mess.

Each child's safety is incredibly important.

Do not put dangerous tools into a child's hand too soon. Begin with basic supplies. Make sure every material is clean and can be used, (pencils are sharpened, scissors are clean and sharp).

You can help your children work on the following skills

- drawing
- cutting
- gluing
- painting - easel painting, watercolor painting
- sculpture - play dough, clay, found art
- weaving - paper, basket, cardboard.
- sewing
- collage

and anything else your heart desires.

Whenever you are demonstrating a new tool to a child, remember to go slowly and position yourself so the child can see exactly what you are doing. Children in Montessori classrooms regularly use scissors, serrated spreaders, choppers, butter knives, needles and myriad other tools. We make sure to demonstrate proper care and go slowly. You'll be amazed at what your child is capable of when you give them slow careful lessons and opportunities to practice.

You don't need to go out and order much or spend a lot of money; you can use one or two of the following each week:

- white paper
- colored paper of all size and weight
- paints
- various brushes
- various stamps
- scissors
- glue
- colored pencils
- chalk
- stapler/ remover
- various hole punches
- paper plates
- crepe paper
- straws

Art activities should be simple, non-threatening, and open-ended. In Montessori Land, we create art for the process, not for the product. Let your children marinate in their process; let them revisit their art for as long as they want, without telling them what to do.

- "How did you make that?"
- "What did you do first?"
- "Did you know what you were going to do before you started it?"
- "Tell me the story about your picture?"
- "Does this have a title?"
- "What were you thinking when you made this?"
- "What is the first thing that grabs your attention?"
- "What do you notice about the colors?"
- "How are lines and shapes used in this composition?"
- "Can you explain what the theme is, in each work?"
- "Would you describe these paintings as realistic or abstract?"

Fall Back Plans

We've given you a lot of ideas. Remember, though, that children who eat with loved ones, enjoy free play, and have people who read to them have excellent academic, social, and emotional outcomes. You can't go wrong by doing those three things.

Moving Forward

The topics in this section on 3-6-year-old children cover the beginning of a journey. As you develop confidence and a routine, you may want to provide additional academic experiences. There are numerous resources available to you when that time comes.

Spending time with children this age is humbling, inspiring, sometimes challenging, but always worth it. Children are learning from us how to be humans and exist as essential members of the community where they live. Right now, that community is in your home. Each interaction you have with them, planned and unplanned, is a lesson. Children love us unconditionally, even when we make mistakes. The current situation we face will require us to be our best, to show the best of humanity under challenging circumstances. It will not be easy some of the time. Nevertheless, now is the most important time in your life, and theirs.

Remember, this new normal will take a while to settle into - for you and them. You've lost so much, but so have your children. It is traumatic for everyone. We know, however, that if a child has one adult who loves and supports them, they can recover from much trauma. *You* are that adult for your child. They are lucky to have you. And you, dear human, are fortunate to have them.