

# Family Connection

FEBRUARY 2026

“At some given moment it happens that the child becomes deeply interested in a piece of work; we see it in the expression on his face, his intense concentration, the devotion to the exercise.”

— Maria Montessori, *The Discovery of the Child*



## Maria Montessori: A Pioneer of Education and Human Rights

BY HEATHER WHITE

Maria Montessori was a pioneer whose life and work transformed our understanding of childhood and education. Born in 1870, she became one of Italy's first female doctors, a significant achievement that was only the beginning of her lifelong commitment to advancing both human rights and education. Her insights and innovations in these areas have had a lasting impact worldwide, shaping how we think about child development and social responsibility.

*Continued on next page*

## Breaking Barriers as One of Italy's First Female Doctors

As a medical doctor, Dr. Montessori's early work focused on children with disabilities, particularly those from marginalized communities. She was deeply invested in observing their behaviors, responses, and interactions. In doing so, she began to see how adapting the environment to better meet their needs could have a profound effect on their growth and development. Maria Montessori's observations and the knowledge she gained through her work with these children became the foundation for her educational philosophy—a pedagogy that emphasized respect, independence, and the prepared environment to support each child's individual potential.

## Championing Social Reform and Women's and Children's Rights

Montessori's advocacy extended far beyond education. She was also a passionate activist for social reform and women's and children's rights. She believed strongly in equality, including equal pay for equal work, and was vocal about the need for societal shifts in how we nurture and support children. At a time when women were largely relegated to the domestic sphere, Maria Montessori spoke out for the shared responsibility of child-rearing and caregiving, arguing that these vital roles should not rest solely on mothers but on society as a whole. Her ideas were both radical and forward-thinking, as they called for a broader sense of responsibility and collective care within communities.

Central to Montessori's vision was her dedication to children's rights. She was adamant that all children, including those with disabilities, should be nurtured and educated rather than isolated or dismissed. Her belief in the importance of inclusive education stemmed from her conviction that every child possesses unique abilities and potential. This

revolutionary perspective underscored her belief that society has an obligation to understand and support all children, advocating for environments that cater to children's developmental needs to foster engagement and learning. Maria Montessori's approach was groundbreaking, suggesting that education should be tailored to the child rather than expecting the child to conform to rigid, one-size-fits-all methods.

## Redefining the Role of the Teacher as a Guide

Maria Montessori's contributions extended into her philosophy of teaching as well. She believed that the teacher's role should be to guide, observe, and support the child's exploration rather than act as a controlling authority. This view redefined traditional roles in education, empowering children to become active participants in their own learning. Her ideas on self-directed learning, hands-on engagement, and fostering independence have become cornerstones of Montessori education and continue to influence classrooms worldwide.



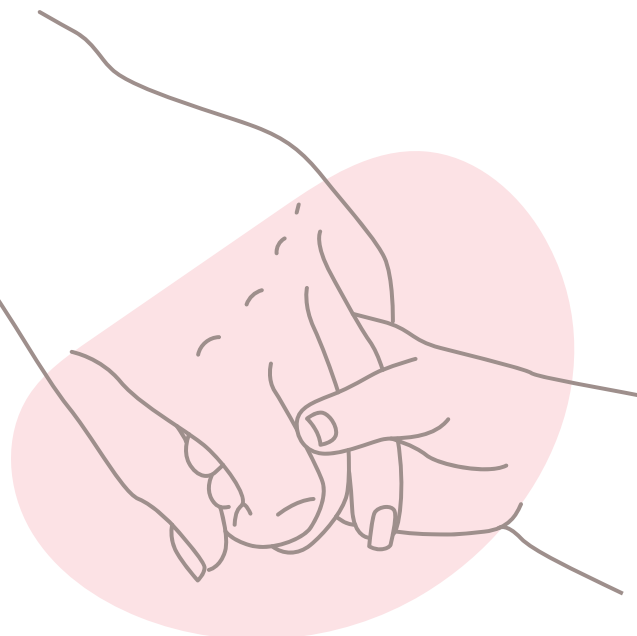
## Maria Montessori's Lasting Legacy

Maria Montessori's commitment to peace and social justice was recognized globally. She was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize three times, a testament to her vision of education as a pathway to a more peaceful and compassionate world. Throughout her life, she traveled extensively, establishing schools, training teachers, and spreading her philosophy of respect, independence, and social responsibility. Her belief that education could serve as a powerful tool for change has inspired countless educators, and her legacy endures as a beacon of hope and possibility, with schools worldwide embracing her methods to create environments that celebrate individuality, foster creativity, and nurture the potential of every child.

# Love, Order, and Limits

## Showing Love to Young Children

By Gabrielle Holt



From the moment children enter this world, they are full of love for the adults and the environment around them. Sometimes we measure this love as children's preferences or actions. If a child always uses the blue cup, they must love the color blue. In reality, a child's love is deeper than their favorite things. In *The Secret of Childhood*, Dr. Montessori described love as "not simply an emotional reaction, but an intellectual desire", which we see through their drive to explore, understand, and belong (p. 103). When children touch, move, repeat, and investigate, they are expressing this love through curiosity and engagement with their environment.



One way we see this intelligent love appear in young children is through a strong need for order. We often describe this as a sensitive period for order, a time in a child's life when they have deep needs for consistency and predictability in their routines, the layout of spaces, and the people in their lives. When children know what to expect, they feel safe to learn and explore.

In Montessori environments, we show love by offering children the freedom to explore and make choices while also providing clear, gentle limits. While it may feel loving to allow children to do whatever they want, too much flexibility can actually feel overwhelming. Boundaries help children make sense of their world and feel held within it.

The people the child loves most in the world are the adults who care for them! Dr. Montessori noticed this as well, noting that children look to us as they learn to speak, interact, and live. When we are inconsistent or too flexible with children, this impacts their understanding of the world and what it means to be human. They can become confused and dysregulated when expectations are unclear. We can think of the limits and boundaries we set as a way of showing love. When we are consistent, calm, and clear, we show children what it means to live respectfully with others.

At home, this means setting limits with love by sharing your expectations with your child, and redirecting by telling them the desired behavior. When we offer consistency, thoughtful routines, and calm boundaries, we are responding to a child's deepest desire to understand how the world works and how they belong within it. By holding loving limits, we give children the security they need to grow with confidence and joy. In this way, order and boundaries are not restrictions but one of the most powerful ways we show children just how deeply they are loved.