

Family Connection

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“I have observed that the child, on condition that he is granted the freedom to work, learns, becomes cultured, absorbs knowledge and gains experiences that become embedded in his spirit.

Like seeds planted in fertile ground, they soon germinate and bear fruit.”

— Maria Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, page 96



Desert Blooms: Raising Children in Nature’s Abundance

BY CASSI MACKEY, M.ED

In crossing an immense stretch of desert in Arizona, it might appear that the desert is not a place to find inspiration or enlightenment. At first glance, the desert may look hot, dry, and lifeless; nevertheless, upon closer inspection, one can see that within the seemingly endless landscape, complex networks of plants, animals, and microorganisms have adapted to survive together. Nature has a way of creating whole systems filled with interconnected relationships, in which resources are shared and balanced across living communities.

Nature teaches us that there is another way of living and working together, one that is not based on scarcity and fear but on abundance and generosity. As healthy ecosystems

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evolve, they become more diverse. This diversity strengthens a community's resilience and allows resources to be used more effectively. Nature depends on diversity and rewards cooperative, interdependent relationships, showing us that diverse systems are often more resilient.



Conservationist Eleanor O'Hanlon reflects on this idea of interdependence:

“Through the generations, they refine their capacity to innovate, adapt, and thrive together as one community, interdependent and whole. To be what they truly are, to live ardently and fully, each one requires the other. This is what's required of us as well, a willingness to observe the patterns of relationship that give shape to the systems we inhabit and perpetuate, alongside the courage to adjust our behavior accordingly in ways that will benefit the whole.”

A look inside Montessori classrooms reveals a similar philosophy in action. Children are encouraged to be their authentic selves and learn in ways that connect to their minds and hearts. Montessori prepared environments are intentionally designed communities where children work independently, collaborate across ages, and learn to respect one another's differences. Montessori education operates from an abundance mindset, opening spaces for everyone, making those spaces stronger, richer, more creative, and more fulfilling.

Where do we begin?

We begin with ourselves. Dr. Montessori wrote that “the real preparation for education is a study of oneself. The training of the teacher who is to help life is something far more than the learning of ideas. It includes the training of character; it is a preparation of the spirit.”

We all have biases. It is our responsibility as adults to examine our biases and understand their origins. The personal biases we carry significantly influence what we teach and what we don't teach our children about valuing differences. If we don't recognize the biases we hold, we may unintentionally pass them on to our children.

Biases are learned. Children begin to absorb both the attitudes and biases attached to aspects of identity from family members and other significant adults in their lives. If we want to pass on lessons that emphasize acceptance and inclusion, we have to be willing to live those values through our words and our actions.

Where do we go from here?

Giving children the opportunity to see the value in difference helps them engage with their world with curiosity, confidence, and love. Research in developmental psychology suggests that children begin noticing visible differences among people during the toddler years, and between ages two and five, they begin forming ideas about social categories. This is a time when parents, guardians, and caregivers have a significant influence on a child's perception and attitude about differences.

Whether you are the parent of a 3-year-old who is curious about why a friend's skin is brown, the parent of a 9-year-old who has been called a slur, or the parent of a 15-year-old who snubs those outside of her social clique at school, it is helpful to have strategies to navigate these situations. Be honest about differences. Welcome curiosity. Model respect through your words and actions. Challenge intolerance when you see it, and highlight moments when children demonstrate empathy.

In Conclusion

Dr. Montessori believed that the key to saving humanity lies within the child. She dreamed of a peaceful, harmonious world filled with kindness, respect, and dignity offered to each human being. “Our salvation is the child. For it is only the child who is still creating [themselves] and therefore capable of affecting true change.”

We are living in a time of a fundamental shift in how we must think about diversity. We need to let go of the notion that diversity is a threat and begin to see the fundamental value and benefit of difference within our communities. Nature has shown that diversity strengthens living systems and helps them endure. It is time to learn from the 3.8-billion-year history of life on Earth, to apply its lessons to our lives, and to model them for our children.



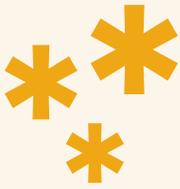
Talking Respectfully to Children

By Jane Jacobs
From Montessori Life Blog

If you have observed a Montessori class, you may have wondered: How does the teacher manage 20 or more children when I have trouble with just one or two? If only I had her skills and patience!

Having taught for several years before I had children, I was astonished to discover that my Montessori classroom experience did not prepare me for parenthood. Though Maria Montessori believed in extensive teacher training, few parents receive useful preparation. Fortunately, I found a book that helped me translate Montessori theory into more effective parenting: *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*, by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish.

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The following ideas from this valuable book might be helpful additions to your parenting tool kit. The bonus is that these tools will work for you in any setting—and with everyone, not just children.



Learn to Look and Listen

Montessori stresses the importance of carefully observing a child as he goes about his work. This is one of the ways we can show respect for the child, another major premise of the Montessori philosophy. We often jump to

conclusions and step in without considering what our child might be doing, thinking, or feeling. Put down the phone, turn off the television, watch, and look into your child's eyes when you speak.

- * Practice observing and staying quiet first.
- * Listen to yourself as well as your child—if your immediate inclination is dismay or anger, write down what you would like to say, but don't say it.
- * Try not to fix anything or problem-solve—just be with your child.



Name the Feelings

It's easy to be anxious when your child is upset. As a result, we may minimize children's feelings or attempt to protect them from disappointment. In the long run, it is more productive to help children identify and learn

from their emotions. Just as Montessori materials help children learn concepts and nomenclature, thoughts and feelings can be defined for our children. Adapt the style or phrasing to suit your child's age.

- * Listen to your child as they talk, offering feedback such as: "Oh...", "Mmm...", or "I see."
- * Recognize and name your child's feelings: "You seem upset (or angry, or happy)..."
- * Resist asking and then answering questions that are rhetorical or accusatory: "What were you thinking?" "Who drank the milk?" "How many times have I told you...?"
- * Try to understand from your child's perspective and describe, perhaps with fantasy: "Sounds like you wish you could eat cookies for every meal."
- * Show respect for your child's struggle: "I see that it's hard for you to..."
- * Describe the dilemma your child is facing: "Even though you know..." "The problem is..."



Engage Cooperation

Keeping the family on schedule—and making sure everyone is fed, clothed, bathed, etc.—is no easy task, especially as children often have timetables,

needs, and desires that differ from adults (and often from each other). Montessori believed that children, when given tasks appropriate to their abilities, delight in their accomplishments. Organize your home so children needn't rely on adults for everything, and give them the time and the direction they need so they can become independent and contribute successfully to the family. You may find you don't have to resort to demands or reprimands.

- * Acknowledge feelings first: "You're cozy in your bed this morning."
- * Offer a choice: "Do you want to wear the red shirt or the green shirt?"
- * Be playful: "If you were a magician, you would already be dressed!"
- * Rather than reminding, describe what you see: "This table needs to be set."
- * Say it with information: Use a word or short description, rather than a nagging, repetitive demand: "Shoes, backpack..."
- * Write a note: "I'm hungry" on the dog's collar or "Hang me up!" on the jacket.
- * Take action without insulting: "Let's clean up, put the paints away, and go outside."

Be patient as you learn these new skills; it takes time and practice—and will pay off. As Faber and Mazlish state: "We want to demonstrate the kind of respectful communication that we hope our children will use with us—now, during their adolescent years, and ultimately as our adult friends" (p. 88).

Reference: Faber, A. & Mazlish, E. (1982.) *How to talk so kids will listen and listen so kids will talk*. New York, NY: Avon Books.



You & Your Child's Montessori Education: Early Childhood Course

Designed for parents and guardians of children 2½ – 6 years old who are currently enrolled in Montessori school or are interested in learning about the philosophy

6 weeks of online, live sessions and self-guided study

Time commitment of 1–2 hours per week



Register at
amshq.org/familycourse

We know learning happens both inside and outside the classroom. This early childhood course is designed for families interested in incorporating the Montessori philosophy into their day-to-day lives and parenting approach. By combining live experiences and self-guided study, participants will receive resources to enhance their child's education, deepen their Montessori knowledge, and learn how to apply Montessori principles at home.

AMS Member Schools receive a \$10 discount for their families with promo code: MEMBER10

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