

Montessori At Home: Activities To Enrich Your Child's Learning

One of the most common questions that Montessori teachers hear from parents is, "What can we do at home to support what you do here at school?" The answer is, "A lot!" But it's not what you might think. Instead of recommending flash cards or purchasing your own set of Montessori materials, the activities that you can do at home with your child seem simple, but make a big impact.

Baking

Baking is a wonderful activity at any age, but as your child gets older it can be a great opportunity to practice reading as well as a little math. Show your child a simple recipe, and help him read it. Talk about quantities (like tablespoon, cup, etc), and show your child measuring cups so they can see the difference between a whole cup, a half cup, and so on. Let them measure out the ingredients, mix up the batter, and prepare the treat to go into the oven. Then set a timer, and when it rings help your child take your creation out of the oven, cut it up, and serve it to the family.

After you are all finished, make sure you have your child help you clean up. The clean up process is part of the work cycle in the classroom, meaning your work isn't done until you've put it back on the shelf like you found it. The same is true at home! Have your child help you wash the dishes, load the dishwasher, and put things back in order.

Language games

There are many language games that you can play at home. A favorite for all ages is "I Spy" using sounds instead of describing the object. For example, "I spy with my little eye something that starts with the sound 't'. A tree!" If your child needs a clue then you can add in some extra hints. "It's tall and it has green leaves." At school your child will be learning the sounds letters make, not their names, so it's important to stick with the sounds, and keep them as short and pure as possible. "T", not "tuh". If you need a quick tutorial, talk to your child's teacher.

Another language activity to try at home is keeping a journal. This can be a journal of pictures, or pictures and words- let your child decide. If something occurs during the day that your child would like to write about, or if there's a story that your child enjoys telling, get out her journal and suggest she write it down. Encourage her to sound out words for herself, and don't correct her spelling. If your child is not a storyteller, you could keep a journal of all the animals you see out your kitchen window, or interesting things you saw on your way to school. Follow your child's lead.

It's also important to have books available for reading. Make a little reading nook with a comfortable chair and a selection of books that your child is free to pick up and read at any time.

Switch out the books occasionally to keep things fresh. You could even choose topics for books based on the time of the year- holiday books in the winter, books about flowers or frogs in the spring- it's really about what captures your child's imagination.

Focus and observation games

Concentration is an extremely important skill at any age, so why not work on it at home as well as at school?

Pick three objects, cover them with a cloth, then take one away and ask your child, "What's missing?" Repeat as long as it holds her interest. Beyond increasing her attention span, this is also a good opportunity to expand your child's vocabulary. In the classroom, for example, this game is often used to teach the names of the geometric solids (which include a cube, cylinder, sphere, etc). Choose objects that your child might not readily know the name for (kitchen tools would be a great place to start), and then teach her the names through the game.

Another fun game to play is the Secret Number Game. To start, have your child hide a basket of small objects like pebbles or little shaped erasers somewhere in the house. Then write a number (typically one through ten) on a little slip of paper and give it to your child. Have them retrieve that number of pebbles and bring them back to you. This requires your child to focus their attention, keep the number in their mind, and ignore the distractions that may be present as they walk to the hidden basket and back.

Science experiments

Simple science experiments are a great activity, since your child is becoming more and more curious about the world around him. Drops of water on a penny- give your child a penny, an eye dropper and a small bowl of water. Before he begins, have him guess how many drops of water he will be able to fit on the penny and have him write his answer down. Then show him how to slowly drip water from the eyedropper onto the penny and count the number of drops. Body control and focus are very important for this activity! After he has finished, follow his lead for extensions- you could try drops of water on a quarter or dime, try salt water, compare a dirty penny with a clean penny- there are so many variations!

Another fun activity is growing a plant from a lima bean. Place a couple of lima beans on a damp paper towel and seal them in a plastic bag. Tape the plastic bag to a window where your child can easily see it. Keep the paper towel damp, and in a week or so you should see a plant begin to sprout. Once the plant has sprouted, plant it in a pot. This is a wonderful activity for the spring, and seeing the bean sprout into a plant is very exciting!

We hope that this article has inspired you to extend your child's learning from the classroom into your home. The important thing to remember is that you should observe your child and see what interests them, then find ways to capitalize on those interests. As Maria Montessori once said,

“The goal of early childhood education should be to activate the child’s own natural desire to learn.” When parents work hand in hand with teachers to allow children to pursue their own individual interests, the possibilities for what your child can achieve are endless.