

**Bringing Out the Brilliance in
Your Infant**

Montessori at Home

Workbook

With Tamara Sheesley Balis

Montessori Families, LLC 

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Congratulations on your purchase of the Bringing Out the Brilliance in Your Infant: Montessori at Home DVD! We find that individuals who are truly committed to raising happy, independent and contributing individuals are attracted to using these principles in their homes.

We have created this workbook to be a tool for implementing the principles we cover in the DVD. You can skip around, doing whatever areas are most pertinent to you currently.

We recommend watching the DVD through in its entirety first. Then watch each segment individually, pause and answer the questions in the workbook, jotting down any additional notes. You may wish to only work an hour or so each night, as the DVD contains an immense amount of information and may be absorbed more easily in smaller sections.

We have a community message board on our web site at www.montessorifamilies.com. We'd love to hear your questions, concerns, as well as have you share things that are working in your home.

We also have a resource page for those of you who are looking for supplemental ways to create a Montessori setting. The resource page includes books, catalogs and web sites that support the use of Montessori principles in the home.

We are delighted that the DVD has been so well received, and that parents are able to implement these important principles in the home environment for our youngest members of our families.

In peace,

Tamara

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PHILOSOPHY

Dr. Maria Montessori

Dr. Montessori believed that if we could guide our children to their own best development, they would naturally bring forth the best elements of the human being and the community.

Dr. Montessori's most basic premise: "Follow the child."

The Unconscious Absorbent Mind

We must revere the infants' 'work'. The child may be refining their visual perception, sensory integration, spatial sense, connection with nature, spiritual being, or many of the other fundamental life lessons. As Dr. Montessori explains, children's work is the most important – as they are developing their minds, bodies and spirits.

What language are you providing the unconscious absorbent mind?

What environment is the young mind exposed to?

Is the home you are creating what you want your infant to emulate?
(Verb subject agreement is off. Maybe say; Is the home environment you are creating for your infant age appropriate and visually pleasing?)

Sensitive Periods

Consider that our children's drive to observe, move and learn is really the outer completion of their inner organic growth.

The infants' sensitive periods include language, order, movement with a focus on independence, and the understanding of safety and well-being, or what Dr. Montessori refers to as 'good vs. evil'.

Notes:

Language

The sensitive period for language is during children's first five years.

Do you tell your infant what you are doing before you do it?

Do you use "baby talk" or correct pronunciation and good grammar with your infant?

Are you assuming your child's intelligence when addressing him?

What are some of the ways your infant is communicating with you?

A Sense of Order & Beauty

Infants thrive in a sense of order and beauty that is not only neatly kept, but consistent day to day.

Is the nursery a place you feel safe and peaceful?

Are there fictional characters decorating the nursery?

TASK: Get down on the floor and view the nursery and rest of your home from the infant's perspective.

What do you see from the infant's eye level?

Coordinated Movement

Infants are in the sensitive period for coordination, gross and fine motor skills, and require freedom to develop coordinated movement. When movement is limited, so is the evolution of the thought process.

How much time does your infant spend constrained in a car seat, swing, stroller or other device each day?

How much time does your baby have much time for free movement everyday?

Cultivating Independence

We as adults must design the environment and our lives with the infants' independence as the end result. When children master their environment, they build self-confidence and develop their willingness to take risks.

Does your child have time alone each day?

Do you allow your infant to struggle to complete a task? (Reach a toy, move across the floor, etc.)

The Developing Will

We as adults must be willing to be loving and firm leaders, gently asking infants to collaborate with us.

Are you willing to be a firm and kind leader with your infant?

The Use of the Word 'No'

When we opt to use the word 'no' or other powerful guiding words, we must make sure we are loving, yet firm and reinforce them.

What might you say or say when your infant attempts to put a piece of paper in his mouth?

Do you tell your infant 'no' and then change your mind when he begins to cry?

The Issue of Praise

...Self-confidence for all of us is a result of our genuine achievements, not someone else's assessment of them. Adults cannot give children self-esteem. They must earn it for themselves through their own efforts.

- Paula Polk Lillard & Lynn Lillard Jessen, Montessori from the Start: The Child at Home from Birth to Age Three

For one full day, take note of exactly what you are saying to your infant. Record each phrase of praise below. Be sure to include the reason for the praise, as well. Also, note whether your infant was interrupted from something he was concentrating on. (Examples: 1. Good job. Janey grabbed my finger. No interruption. 2. Good girl. Janey got her diaper changed. Interrupted her from looking out window.)

Do not curb your usual tendencies for this exercise. If you run out of space, use an additional piece of paper.

	Phrase	Reason	Interrupted?
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			

How many times did you praise your infant during the day?

How many of the times you praised your child was he doing something innate to his development?

How many times did you interrupt your infant's concentration?

Remember, constant praise throughout infancy conditions children to seek praise. Raising children to value their own inner approval and self-worth begins at the moment of birth.

The Role of the Parent

We are responsible for creating lives filled with peace, love and laughter. There is no better teaching method than your own example. How you speak, walk, laugh, tease, play, fume and everything else you do is uploaded immediately into infants' absorbent minds.

How do you want your child to speak to others once they are able?

What manner would you like them to use at the table?

Are these the manners you are using consistently both with your infant and in his presence?

Honoring Your Infant's Abilities

We must allow infants to explore the environment to the depth that their development allows, challenging and strengthening their abilities without being pushed to move on to the next stage of development.

A few ways to “push” your infant before he is ready:

1. Propping him up with pillows, before he can sit up on his own.
2. Holding his fingers to “help” him walk.

Bringing Home the Baby

Give infants a tour of the home, and explain each of the areas to them. This allows newborns to be at ease more quickly as they have a sense of the space and will soon become comfortable in the new environment.

Do you allow your infant time to get to adjust to new people before allowing him to be held by these individuals?

In Montessori education we emphasize that when adults follow the child, at school or at home, the genius of the child naturally grows – often more brilliantly and powerfully than adults ever imagined.

THE PREPARED ENVIRONMENT

We recommend watching through each segment, and then pausing the DVD to respond to the questions below.

Sense Exploration

We want to create opportunities for infants to explore their senses and then naturally develop their minds and whole beings. The infants' drives for exploration of the environment guides them to earnestly and powerfully learn. –Bringing Out the Brilliance in Your Infant: Montessori at Home DVD

**Activity: Lay down on the ground at your home.
What do you see?**

Is the room designed with your infant in mind?

Objects

Remember that each object in the prepared environment is a potential learning tool, not just a toy or a diversion.

What types of materials do you have available for your infant's exploration?

What are the objects made out of?

Do any of the objects display how their sound is made?

Do you have books readily available to your infant?

Do the books contain real life images?

Presentation of Materials

Toy/Object Choices

Age appropriate object choices

These are a basic outline. We must, however, follow the child and do whatever it is that meets his educational and developmental needs.

The first month

Limited objects

Much time on body of adult

1 – 2 months

Begin enjoying time on well covered floor

Mobiles and things placed strategically for viewing, providing motivation for movement

1 - 3 months

Rattles with small grips

3 months

Hang wooden ring from elastic, allowing infant to bat at ring

4 – 5 months

Soft cloth or fur balls

3 – 6 months

Large of objects with range of sensorial experience

6 – 8 months

Object permanence box

Some large, light objects

6 – 10 months

Objects that open and close

Objects that fit together

9 months

Objects that require the pincer grip (under strict supervision)

10 - 11 months

Posts and rings

Upon standing – a large push toy to support the exploration of walking

Works on the shelves

Does your child have low shelves in every area of the home where he will be spending time?

- ⇒ Nursery
- ⇒ Kitchen
- ⇒ Bathroom
- ⇒ Parent bedroom
- ⇒ Living room/family room
- ⇒ Outdoor environment

Does every “work” (toy/book/object) that is out have its own specific place?

Does every object have a basket?

Creating a Sense of Beauty

Are the colors in your child’s space soothing and peaceful?

Is there beautiful and classic artwork on the walls that you enjoy?

Nursery

Is this a room designed with colors and décor that are soothing, peaceful?

Is this a room designed so that you, as an adult, enjoy spending time in it?

Is this room completely childproofed so that you may rest assured during the infant's alone time?

Four main areas:

Sleeping area

Does the infant have an area for sleeping that allows him to see the entire room completely and encourages movement?

If using a floor bed, is there a "bumper" or cushion around the bed in case of rolling?

Is the infant's area free of clutter?

Is the entire room child-proofed?

Mobiles¹

Rotate about every two weeks.

Most are not currently available for purchase – can be home made!

1. Black & white with geometric shapes
2. Three octahedrons of colored metallic paper in primary colors
3. Five Styrofoam balls covered with embroidery thread in gradation of the same color and hung in ascending order from darkest to lightest
4. Stylized paper figures of light metallic colored paper that move with a slight breeze
5. Stylized wooden figures painted in pastel colors
6. Wooden ring attached to elastic
7. Wooden rattle attached to elastic

Activity area

Is there a shelf that the infant can access even before crawling? (Low to the ground)

Are the items on the shelf relevant to the infant's current abilities?

Does every item (book, rattle, ball, etc.) have a specific place on the shelf?

Are books of real life (animals, modes of transportation, children, etc.) available at the infant's level?

Is there a safe place for the infant to pull himself up?

¹ Montessori From The Start, Paula Polk Lillard & Lynn Jenson

Changing Area

Are the items necessary for changing arranged so that the infant can see them and is encouraged to participate in the changing process?

Are there photos of the infant's loved ones at the child's eye level?

Is there peaceful, interesting and beautiful art hung at the child's eye level?

Closet

Is there a rod hung at the child's height (when standing)?

Are there child-sized drawers with your infant's clothing?

Nursing/Feeding area

Is there a chair provided that is comfortable for both the parent and the infant?

Is there a clock within eyeshot when seated?

Is there a beautiful, soothing picture hung above the nursing chair providing the child an interesting view while on the parent's shoulder?

Kitchen

Eating is an essential part of any child's growth and development, and it is important to give the infant a sense of dignity, exploration and independence in this endeavor.

What space is currently available and prepared for your infant?

What shelf or drawer space could you prepare for your infant?

What are items you currently have in your home that could go in your infant's "naming basket"? (i.e.: baster, garlic press, butter brush**)

***Hint: Use only 2 or 3 objects at one time. Then rotate them every few days.*

Remember to enhance the infant's senses through smell and taste!

Smell

Items with rich and diverse smells are a wonderful sensory experience.

Bathroom

Is there a "potty" at the infant's level to create interest?

Are the washcloths available at the infant's height to encourage future independence?

Are bath toys set neatly at the infant's level for his own choice?

Outdoor Learning Environment

Is there a covered area with interesting, moisture proof items available for the infant?

Are items at the infant's eye level?

Is there an outdoor blanket available to the parent/caregiver to encourage spending time outside?

Family Living Room

What space is currently available and prepared for your infant?

What shelf or drawer space could you prepare for your infant?
(Hint: This may be a fun place to include musical toys such as a shaker or tambourine.)

Is there any open area available for full gross motor development?

Is there open space for pushing a wagon, small chair or sturdy item as the infant learns to walk?

Is there a space for a mirror to either attach to the wall or set up against the wall?

What sturdy items can the infant pull himself up on when he is ready to begin standing?

Are sturdy board books included in the child's area, within the infant's reach?

Use this area to jot down any more ideas for the living room area:

DAILY LIVING

There is within (the infant) a vital impulse, which leads it to perform stupendous acts. Failure to follow out these impulses means that they become helpless and inept. Adults have no direct influence on these different states. But if a child has not been able to act accordingly to the directives of his sensitive period, the opportunity of a natural conquest is lost, and is lost for good.

-Dr. Maria Montessori, The Secret of Childhood

Designing the day for the infant

We must consider if our daily schedules offer unhurried time for our infants' eating, sleeping, discovery and building of relationships.

What are the daily rituals you have/plan to have in place for your infant?

What attributes are adults in your environment modeling? (joy, kindness, love, etc.)

Asking for the Infant's Cooperation

Infants are thinking human beings, and our equals. As such, infants deserve respect and inclusion in the activities of their daily lives.

Do you speak with your infant as an active participant in activities while working with him?

Handling & Holding

What message is the way you hold your infant giving him?

What method do you use for picking up your infant?

Laying him down?

Scheduling

What is your infant's daily schedule?

Note: Newborns will need to nurse during the wee hours of the night. Keep your interactions during these times to a minimum, with the lights low. This helps signal the baby it isn't time to wake up, but just time to eat.

Sample schedule for a newborn

Wake up – good morning!

Change diaper

Nurse/feed

Activity time (could be music time, walking around the house, telling them about the kitchen, etc.)

Wind down: close the curtains, put on music, rock and cuddle

Nap time (newborns should never be awake more than 2 hours)

Wake up

Change diaper

Nurse/feed

Activity time (could be singing, walking around the yard, telling them about the kitchen, etc.)

Change diaper

Wind down: close the curtains, put on music, rock and cuddle

Nap time

Wake up

Change diaper

Nurse/feed

Activity time (could walking around the yard, talking about the kitchen)

Change diaper

Wind down: close the curtains, put on music, rock and cuddle

Nap time

Wake up

Change diaper

Nurse/feed

Activity time (could be singing, walking around the yard...)

Change diaper

Wind down: close the curtains, put on music, rock and cuddle

Bedtime

Sample schedule for a 3 – 12 month old:

wake up – good morning!

change diaper

time to eat!

get dressed

play time

clean up

check diaper

wind down: read stories, snuggle & prepare for nap

put down in her own bed

wakes up, give a few min. alone to wake up & greet

change diaper

time to eat!

play time outside with mom

check diaper

alone time

snack time

read stories, snuggle & prepare for nap

put down in her own bed

wakes up, give a few min. alone to wake up & greet

change diaper

time to eat!

long walk

play time

bath time

pajamas

listen to soft music, play in room

story time, snuggle & prepare for bed (nurse)

put in bed for the night

Diapering

Consider that most infants will have their diapers changed five to seven thousand times before learning to use the toilet.

What do you speak with your infant about while diapering?

Dressing

What is your purpose in the clothes you choose for your infant?

Nursing

Do you honor your child's mealtime as you would yours?

The Weaning Table

Dr. Montessori reminds us that nothing can move into the brain without first going through the exploration of the hands.

The introduction to solid foods begins with a tiny bit of soft food on the tip of your finger.

Is meal time a time for exploration and sensation as well as eating?

Are you always giving the older infant pieces of food to develop the pincer grip?

Decide what your policy for "wandering infants" will be at the table.

A few table hints:

- Set and clear the table slowly, giving infants an opportunity to watch each movement.
- Wipe the table from left to right, top to bottom, giving infants their first introduction to the pattern of the English language.
- Use meals as a time to enrich infant's language, as well as senses.

Playtime

Self-confidence...is an internal feeling of being able to rely on one's own resources, which comes from the experience of active work done in the environment using free movement.

–Dr. Silvana Quattrocchi Montanaro, MD

Uninterrupted Work Time

How much uninterrupted work time does your child have every day?

Self-Education

Infants will play regardless of whatever parenting methods, toys or learning tools you choose to use. The only real choice left is how can we maximize the educational benefits of playtime?

How often do you allow your child to lead you in play?

What are you learning from your infant?

Time to Clean Up

Learning about order is a primary sensitive period opening for the infants in the first years.

What is your child learning about order from your environment?

If your child cleans up in the same manner as you do, will this work for you?

Outside Time

We like to think of time spent in Nature as the perfect time with the infant. Nature presents uninterrupted time for babies' concentration.

How much time do you spend outside in nature each day?

Do you go outside in all types of weather?

Does your infant have time to explore nature?



Time for Reflection

Alone time is a time for all people to reflect and listen to themselves uninterrupted by the world. Infants need this time as much as adults do.

How much time does your infant spend alone each day?

How much time is your infant exposed to a television or radio that is on?

Bath Time

Are you sharing with your infant what will happen next?

How often does your infant startle when you are working with him?

Story Time

What are the images your infant is exposed to in books? Are the images factual or fiction?

Sleep Time

Is your infant getting enough sleep?

Does your infant go to sleep on his own?

The Parent as the Observer

We are instructed to talk with, bond with, connect with, diaper, feed, sooth and love our infants. But one of the most important gifts parents can give their children is observation.

How much time do you spend a day observing your infant (while not doing anything else)?

Here is a list of questions for a 20 minute observation of your infant:

What does objects does your infant focus on?

What sounds attract your infant's attention?

Does your infant favor her right or left hand?

What interrupts your infant from concentrating?

About how long does your infant spend focused on one object?

How often does your infant seek your eye contact?

What skills is your infant working to master?

What materials/toys will your infant be ready for next?

How can you modify the environment to best serve your infant?

CONCLUSION

So how will you know if you are doing it "right"?

The infants' spontaneous curiosity, concentration and self-discipline will prove you are "doing it right". As infants grow, you can build on these core building blocks. As they will begin to cooperate in daily activities such as dressing, diapering, and eating, they will want to complete activities on their own. When they are stuck, they will seek their own solutions, and only ask for help when it's really needed.

We find that parents using these methods thoroughly enjoy their infants. They give up the standard of life being how it was pre-baby, and embrace the role of guiding their infants to their own unique brilliance. Parents then have time to observe and appreciate their babies, and the infants sense this, and flourish! This way of life takes adjustment and commitment, and leaves parents and infants deeply satisfied.