

Helping your child at home

Encouraging Independence



Parents whose children start at nursery will often say that the first thing they notice is that their child is becoming more independent. They seem *determined* to want to do things on their own; such as putting their own shoes on, wiping a table, 'sweeping' up some litter (even if it becomes more widely distributed!). This sudden desire to do things themselves is often difficult to manage – especially if you are in a hurry! It is an adult's natural response to take over and do it quickly.

It is worth taking a moment to consider why they are doing these things. Whereas adults do a task to complete it; children will do it for its own sake. They may even deliberately create a task, such as spill something, just so that they can clear it up! They want to do a *real* task and if that means making a mess to start; then so be it! For the young child, these activities are important steps to becoming more skilled and competent. They learn skills; further their overall development, which feeds their confidence, self esteem and prepares them for later learning.

As adults, we have two choices when faced with a toddler who wants to do a task for its own sake (it will always be much quicker and efficient for us to take over). We can EITHER support and encourage them to have a go OR we can unwittingly suppress their faltering steps towards independence. At nursery, we try to encourage and follow children's steps to independence. We will show the children *how* to do a simple task and then give them the freedom to repeat and practise their developing skills. Montessori practitioners understand and appreciate the value of these steps to independently learning the tasks that we see as routine chores. We see children daily motivated to do them and we try to provide opportunities for them to do many more tasks independently.

Some ideas you might reproduce at home are:

- Leave a dustpan and brush / a cloth / sponge accessible for their use.
- Ask them to find / put on / put away their own shoes.
- Invite them to help you sort out the washing.
- Give children a set of cutlery so they can replicate a table setting you have just laid.
- Put their drink in a small jug, so they can pour their own drink
- You will be able to think up many more...

All these seemingly mundane tasks have links to their further development and later learning:

- Sorting (washing) and sequencing tasks are helpful pre-maths skills.
- Matching (laying the table) help develop important observation skills which develop concentration.
- They are learning to *choose* a constructive occupation that satisfies their desire to do real activities. This is a vital step to growing self discipline.
- They are learning how to problem solve. (How can I get all the rubbish into the dustpan?)
- They are learning how to co-ordinate their movements (refining important hand-eye movements).
- Independence builds their self-esteem (they are proud of their own accomplishments, are able to do up a younger child's buttons etc.)

Real activities help them to settle when they are upset as children who begin to use their hands to do a task will focus their eyes on what their hands are doing. If a child is holding onto a toy or comforter, they will find it longer to settle. Perhaps, 'teddy' could go back home and help you sort the washing!

Supporting your child in these ways both at nursery and at home really makes a huge difference to their inclinations to progress onto later learning. It is important to recognise that these methods really are supporting your child's early all-round development. And you might also be supporting the development of a helpful teenager, sometime in the future!