

101 Things Parents Can Do to Help Children

by Barbara Hacker

1. Read about Montessori education and philosophy and how it applies to your child.

2. Purchase a copy of The Michael Olaf Catalog(s). These wonderful publications are a clear introduction to Montessori for parents as well as a source book of ideal toys, materials, books, etc. for the home. (<http://www.michaelolaf.com>)

3. Take the time to stand back and observe your child carefully and note the characteristics he/she is displaying.

4. Analyze your child's wardrobe and build a wardrobe aimed at freedom of movement, independence, and freedom from distraction.

5. Make sure your child gets sufficient sleep.

6. Make both going to bed and getting up a calm and pleasant ritual.

7. Teach grace and courtesy in the home. Model it. Use courtesy with your child and help your child to demonstrate it.

8. Refrain from physical punishment and learn

ways of positive discipline.

9. Have a special shelf where your child's books are kept and replaced after careful use.

10. Make regular trips to the public library, and become familiar with the librarians and how the library works and enjoy books together. Borrow books and help your child learn the responsibility for caring for them and returning them.

11. Read together daily. With younger children stick to books with realistic themes.

12. See that your child gets to school on time.

13. Allow sufficient time for your child to dress himself/herself.

14. Allow your child to collaborate with food preparation and encourage your Extended Day child to take at least some responsibility for preparing his or her own lunch.

15. If possible allow your child a plot of land or at least a flower pot in which to experience growing things.

16. Take walks together at the child's pace, pausing to notice things and talk about them.

17. Help your child be in a calm and prepared

mood to begin school rather than over-stimulated and carrying toys or food.

18. Eliminate or strictly limit TV watching and replace with activity oriented things which involve the child rather than his/her being a passive observer. When the child does watch TV, watch it with him/her and discuss what is being seen.

19. From the earliest age give your child the responsibility to pick up after himself/herself, i.e., return toys to place, put dirty clothes in laundry basket, clear dishes to appropriate place, clean off sink after use, etc. This necessitates preparing the environment so children know where things go.

20. Hug regularly but don't impose affection. Recognize the difference.

21. Assign regular household tasks that need to be done to maintain the household to your child as age appropriate. (Perhaps setting silverware and napkins on the table, sorting, recycling, dusting, watering plants, etc.)

22. Attend school parent education functions.

23. Arrange time for both parents to attend parent-teacher conferences. Speak together in preparation for the conference and write down questions to ask.

24. Talk to your child clearly without talking down. Communicate with respect and give the child the gift of language, new words and expressions.

25. When talking to your child, physically get on his/her level, be still, and make eye contact.

26. Sing! Voice quality does not matter. Sing together regularly. Build a repertoire of family favorites.

27. Refrain from over-structuring your child's time with formal classes and activities. Leave time to "just be," to play, explore, create.

28. Teach your child safety precautions. (Deal with matches, plugs, chemicals, stairs, the street, how to dial 911, etc.)

29. Teach your child his/her address, phone number, and parents' names.

30. Count! Utilize natural opportunities that arise.

31. Tell and re-tell family based stories. For example, "On the day you were born..."

32. Look at family pictures together. Help your child be aware of his/her extended family, names, and relationships.

33. Construct your child's biography, the story of

his/her life. A notebook is ideal so that it can be added to each year. Sharing one's story can become a much loved ritual. It can be shared with the child's class at birthday time.

34. Assist your child to be aware of his/her feelings, to have vocabulary for emotions and be able to express them.

35. Play games together. Through much repetition children learn to take turns, to win and lose.

36. Together, do things to help others. For example, take food to an invalid neighbor, contribute blankets to a homeless shelter, give toys to those who have none, etc.

37. Speak the language of the virtues. Talk about patience, cooperativeness, courage, ingenuity, cheerfulness, helpfulness, kindness, etc. and point out those virtues when you see them demonstrated. (Virtues Project resource information available in the school office.)

38. Refrain from giving your child too much "stuff." If there is already too much, give some away or store and rotate.

39. Memorize poetry and teach it to your child and recite it together.

40. Put up a bird feeder. Let your child have

responsibility for filling it. Together learn to be good watchers and learn about the birds you see.

41. Whenever you go somewhere with your child, prepare him/her for what is going to happen and what will be expected of him/her at the store, restaurant, doctor's office, etc.

42. Express appreciation to your child and others and help your child to do the same. Send thank you notes for gifts. Young children can dictate or send a picture. Older children can write their own. What is key is learning the importance of expressing appreciation.

43. Help your child to learn to like healthful foods. Never force a child to eat something he/she does not like, but also don't offer unlimited alternatives! Make trying new things fun. Talk about foods and how they look or describe the taste. Introduce the word "savor" and teach how to do it. Engage children in food preparation.

44. When food shopping, talk to your child about what you see -- from kumquats to lobsters. Talk about where food items come from. Talk about the people who help us by growing, picking, transporting, and displaying food.

45. Provide your child with appropriate sized furniture: his/her own table and chair to work at; perhaps a rocker in the living room to be with you;

a bed that can easily be made by a child; a stool for climbing up to sink or counter.

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46. While driving, point things out and discuss -- construction work, interesting buildings, vehicles, bridges, animals.

47. Teach the language of courtesy. Don't let your child interrupt. Teach how to wait after saying, "Excuse me, please."

48. Analyze any annoying behavior of your child and teach from the positive. For example: door slamming -- teach how to close a door; running in the house -- teach how to walk; runny nose -- teach how to use a tissue.

49. Spend quality time with people of different ages.

50. Teach your child about your religion and make them feel a part of it.

51. Help your child to have positive connections with people of diverse ethnicities, language, and beliefs.

52. Laugh a lot. Play with words. Tell jokes. Help your child to develop a sense of humor.

53. Share your profession or occupation with your child. Have him/her visit at work and have some appreciation of work done in the world.

54. See that your child learns to swim -- the younger the better.

55. Have a globe or atlas in the house, and whenever names of places come up locate them with the child.

56. Make sure your child has the tools he/she needs -- child size broom, mop, dust pan, whisk broom, duster, etc., to help maintain the cleanliness of the household.

57. Learn to say, "No," without anger, and with firmness and conviction. Not everything children want is appropriate.

58. Arrange environments and options so that you end up saying yes more than no.

59. Refrain from laughing at your child.

60. Alert children to upcoming events so they can mentally prepare, e.g., "In ten minutes, it will be time for bed."

61. Help children to maintain a calendar, becoming familiar with days and months, or counting down to special events. Talk about it regularly.

62. Get a pet and guide your child to take responsibility for its care.

63. Refrain from replacing everything that gets broken. Help children to learn the value of money, and, the consequences of actions.

64. Take a nighttime walk -- listen to sounds, observe the moon, smell the air.

65. Take a rain walk. Wear coats and boots to be protected, but then fully enjoy the rain.

66. Allow your Primary-aged child to use his/her whole body and mind for active doing. Save computers for the Elementary years and later when they become a useful tool of the conscious mind.

67. If you must travel without your child, leave notes behind for him/her to open each day you are gone.

68. Expose your child to all sorts of music.

69. Talk about art, visit statue gardens, and make short visits to museums and look at a couple of pictures. Make it meaningful and enjoyable. Don't overdue.

70. Help them learn to sort: the laundry, silverware, etc.

71. Help them become aware of sounds in words. Play games: what starts with "mmmm?" "What ends with 't'?"

72. Organize the child's things in appropriate containers and on low shelves.

73. Aid the child in absorbing a sense of beauty: expose him/her to flowers, woods, and natural materials, and avoid plastic.

74. Help your child start a collection of something interesting.

75. Talk about the colors (don't forget shades), textures, and shapes you see around you.

76. Provide art materials, paper, appropriate aprons, and mats to define the work space. Provide tools for cleaning up.

77. Evaluate each of your child's toys.

Does it help him/her learn something?

Does the child use it?

Does it "work," and are all pieces present?

Is it safe?

78. Refrain from doing for a child what he/she can do for himself/herself.

79. Provide opportunities for physical activity -- running, hopping, skipping, climbing. Teach them how. Go to a playground if necessary.

80. Teach children how to be still and make "silence." Do it together. Children love to be in a meditative space if given the opportunity.

81. Teach your child his/her birthday.

82. Read the notes that are sent home from school.

83. Alert the teacher to anything that may be affecting your child -- lack of sleep, exposure to a fight, moving, relative visiting in home, parent out of town, etc.

84. Provide a place to just dig. Allow your child to get totally dirty sometimes without inhibitions.

85. Refrain from offering material rewards or even excessive praise. Let the experience of accomplishment be its own reward.

86. Don't speak for your child to others. Give the space for the child to speak for himself/herself, and if he/she doesn't it's okay.

87. Apologize to your child when you've made a

mistake.

88. Understand what Montessori meant by sensitive periods. Know when your child is in one and utilize it.

89. Learn to wait. Some things people want to give their children or do with them are more appropriate at a later age. Be patient, the optimal time will come. Stay focused on where they are right now.

90. Play ball together: moms and dads, boys and girls.

91. Tell them what you value in them. Let them hear you express what you value in others.

92. Always tell the truth.

93. Go to the beach and play in the sand.

94. Ride the bus; take a train -- at least once.

95. Watch a sunrise. Watch a sunset.

96. Share appropriate "news" from the newspaper: new dinosaur was discovered; a baby elephant born at the zoo; a child honored for bravery; the weather forecast.

97. Evaluate your child's hairstyle. Is it neat and not a distraction or is it always in the child's eyes,

falling out of headbands, etc?

98. Let your child help you wash the car and learn the vocabulary of the parts of the car. With this and other tasks take time to focus on the process for the child more than the end product.

99. Talk about right, left, straight, turn, north, south, east, west, in a natural way so your child develops a sense of direction and the means to talk about it.

100. Place a small pitcher of water or juice on a low refrigerator shelf and a glass in a low place so your child can be independent in getting a drink.

101. If your child is attached to things like pacifiers, start a weaning process.

Enjoy life together!

Barabara Hacker is an Early Childhood Montessori Guide at the Post Oak School in Belleaire, Texas.