

Keeping Everyone in the Loop

By Jennifer Toledo

A parent recently asked me if I had any ideas on how to relay Montessori tenets to her children's nanny, who, while loving and invested in the children's well-being, often did everything for them, hindering their independence. In a busy world, where parents often must rely on secondary caregivers, ensuring that Montessori principles are consistent throughout their children's day can be a challenge. Whether it be with a babysitter, nanny, au pair, grandparent, or friend, it is worth having a conversation that can help clarify or explain why you do what you do.

Since your children may spend a great deal of time with their caregiver(s), it is important that your "circle" understands your family's values and wishes. While this looks different in every home environment, you must discern which pieces of Montessori's philosophy fit into your family's life. As working parents, my husband and I wrestle with relying on our extended family for before-school and after-school child care for our son. While we feel grateful for the (free!) help, we have had to have some honest, direct, yet uncomfortable conversations when caregiving styles clash with our parenting style. Ultimately, being clear about our wishes has helped to foster more open communication.

Remember that no one you trust with your children is going to intentionally hinder their growth. Sometimes a caregiver is just unaware, or reverts to how they were raised. Including caregivers in conversations, sharing Montessori philosophy with them, and illustrating what Montessori looks like in action can help put everyone at ease and ensure that you're all working toward a common goal: independent, healthy children.

First, make sure that caregivers are included in school conversations. The best way for them to understand Montessori is to witness the method firsthand. If your caregiver will be dropping off/picking up your children, make sure that they have an opportunity to meet teacher(s). And while serious matters that come up at school should be addressed directly to you, the parent (and you can then relay it to the caregiver), make sure that the caregiver hears other feedback from teachers. This could include information on new friendships, toileting progress, or minor emotions/behaviors. Caregivers can then pass that information to you, increasing communication and consistency for the child.

Second, make sure that your caregiver knows who Maria Montessori is! Here's a simple explanation you can use: Maria Montessori was an Italian doctor in the 1900s. She developed her own approach to education based on observing children. Her ultimate goal was that the child develop organization, concentration, coordination, and independence to become a productive and peaceful human. And then you can offer resources—articles, books, webinars. I like to recommend Montessori's *The Secret of Childhood* and Paula Polk Lillard's *Montessori: A Modern Approach* to parents and caregivers, and also refer them to the About Montessori section of the AMS website (amshq.org/About-Montessori).



And finally, offer caregivers examples of what Montessori in action looks like outside of school. Here are just a few starters for children ages 2+:

- Avoid technology, and promote being outside in nature.
- Encourage children to participate in cleaning up after meals, playtime, and activities.
- Let children do things for themselves, and act as an observer. If children ask for help, scaffold and assist a little at a time (e.g., when struggling to put on shoes, offer to put your finger in the heel to help them slide it on rather than doing all of it for them).
- Do not interrupt the child if they are concentrating and focused.
- Resist punishments like time-outs and reprimands. Use natural consequences.
- Use "if-then" logic ("If you want to go outside, then you have to clean up your toys.")
- Be consistent. If you say it, mean it, and follow through.

These ideas can be difficult for caregivers who fear for their job if the child doesn't like them, or for grandparents who want to shower their young charges with love. Remind them that the use of this philosophy will allow the child to grow into their independent self and will not make the child care for them any less. In fact, children crave consistency and routine. Knowing they can rely on and expect certain responses from a caregiver will bring children comfort and peace. And this is what Montessori is all about.

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