

# Family Connection

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“It is through appropriate work and activities that the character of the child is transformed. Work influences his development in the same way that food revives the vigour of a starving man.”

—Maria Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, p. 96

## The Montessori Three-Year Cycle

BY CYNTHIA CONESA



The three-year multi-age Montessori classroom is an implementation of the Montessori “planes of development,” or four distinct periods of growth: 0-6 years; 6-12 years; 12-18 years; and 18-24 years. Dr. Montessori, along with other developmental scientists, observed that most children reach the milestones of a given developmental phase within the associated time frame, but as children do not all develop at the same rate, some will reach specific markers sooner or later than others. This is one important reason why Dr. Montessori grouped children together in three-year spans: all are working toward the same developmental goals, characterized by the sensitive periods of their respective developmental plane.

### First Developmental Plane (0 to 6 years)

Montessori refers to the first-plane child as being endowed with an absorbent mind; that is, they learn spontaneously by absorbing knowledge through their engagement with a carefully designed prepared

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environment. Characteristics you may notice about children in the first developmental plane include:

### **Order**

Children notice and enjoy sorting items that are alike or finding details of differences.

### **Language**

Vocabulary growth is at its peak during this time, seemingly effortlessly learning to communicate with others. Interest in written language also allows for letter recognition and even reading.

### **Refinement of Movement**

Coordination of large and small muscles allow for both coordination of large muscles for walking and running, but later also fine motor skills which enable children to properly grip a pencil or manipulate small objects without frustration.

### **Concentration and Repetition**

Children will often happily repeat the same tasks over and over again, concentrating intensely. You may notice too that they enjoy hearing the same stories or playing the same games.

### **Grace and Courtesy**

Social skills are being developed during this period as children learn the social norms that dictate how we interact with one another.

### **Independence**

While tasks tend to take longer for the child who is learning to do things for themselves, there is great pride that comes from physical autonomy as they seek to emulate the adults and older children around them.



The environment of the Early Childhood classroom fulfills the young child's needs through a series of Sensorial, Language, and Math materials, as well as Practical Life activities, most of which address a combination of the child's emerging sensitivities. To illustrate, many Sensorial and Math materials develop seriation skills while, at the same

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time, requiring concentration, repetition, and refinement of movement toward mastery of a skill. Children also learn a great deal of new vocabulary through their use of all the materials, helping to develop their language skills.



## Second Developmental Plane (6 to 12 years)

Older children, having developed the skills associated with the first plane outlined above, are primed for a new set of proclivities. They are interested in the reasons for things, in big ideas about how things work—from the rules that govern social groups to those that govern the universe. They are in the process of consolidating their knowledge and making connections between the ideas and impressions absorbed during the first plane. Characteristics you may notice about children in the second developmental plane include:

### Abstract Thinking

This is most notable in the child's use of the Elementary math materials—designed to be used in a sequence until the child discovers the algorithms for solving different kinds of math problems.

### Imagination

Lessons are given to elicit wonder and curiosity about a variety of topics from all areas of the curriculum, and to help the child conceptualize such big ideas as the formation of the universe. The imagination is a powerful tool with which the child can grasp abstract concepts that are otherwise beyond the realm of their experience.

### Social Awareness

The Montessori multi-age classroom increases the child's range of sociability within a dynamic peer group. As new lessons come along and individual interests shift, a three-year age range increases the chances that children will find others who share their interests and skill level with whom to work.

### Moral Reasoning

Along with the older child's emerging awareness of social order comes great concern about the rules that govern groups, both in and out of school. Their preoccupation with what is fair and what is not is tied to their emerging sense of moral thinking, which sometimes extends to dietary and other preferences as children ponder "rights" on a grander scale.



# What to do when your child asks "why?"

By Heather White

Children are naturally curious. They ask questions to get answers and to better understand. Especially with young children, "why" might be one of the most common words you hear as a parent.

Although parents wish to fuel their child's developing curiosity and help them find understanding, hearing and responding to repeated "why" questions can sometimes feel overwhelming and even exhausting.



Tips to help you respond to your child's "why's?"

**Become the asker** – Ask your child “what do you think?”

**Admit uncertainty** – It is ok to say, “I don’t know. Let’s see if we can find the answer together.” Then, you can do some research together, reading a book or searching online for answers.

**Respond simply** – Children this age have a hard time understanding abstract concepts, so simple answers are best.

**Be silly** – Sometimes, children might settle for a silly reason and this is a great way to connect with one another, which might be just what your child is looking for through their “why’s?”



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