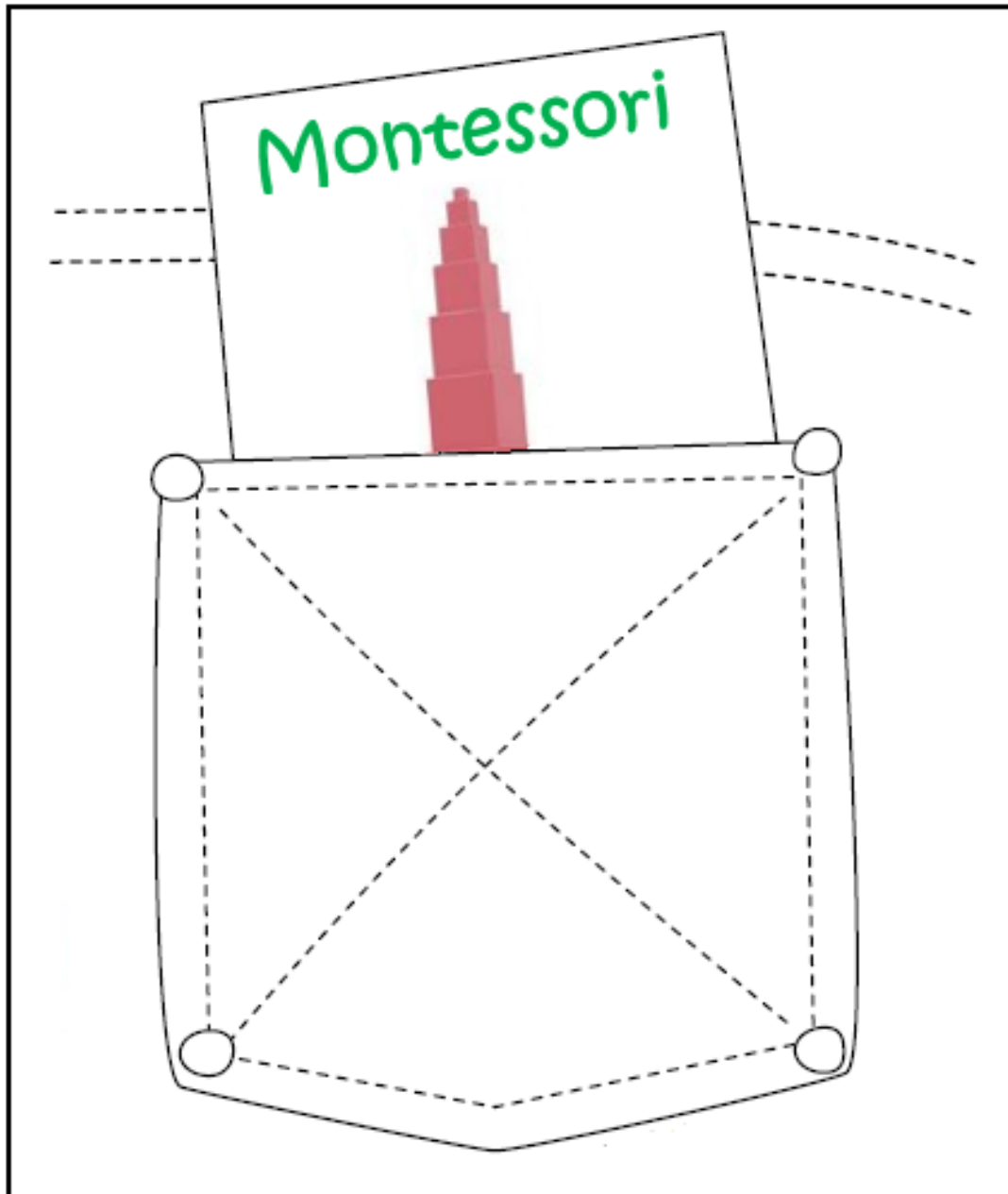


A Parent's Pocket Guide to Montessori



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I.

10 Facts about Dr. Maria Montessori

1. She was the first woman in Italy to earn a medical degree.
2. A scientist by trade, she applied a “scientific approach” to education. Her pedagogical methodology was deeply inspired by her background in pediatrics as well as her psychological, anthropological, and philosophical research.
3. She began her work with “mentally deficient” children. These children learned to read and write while in her care.
4. She started her first school, Casa dei Bambini (Children’s House), in 1907 at the age of 36. The school was located in one of Rome’s worst slum districts.
5. Her method of teaching stressed independence, freedom, respect and tolerance.
6. She did not refer to her approach to education as The Montessori Method.
7. Exiled by Mussolini, she was forced to flee Italy for refusing to allow her students to be made into soldiers.
8. She established the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) in 1929.
9. She worked cooperatively with Albert Nienhuis to produce Montessori classroom materials. *Nienhuis Montessori* is currently one of the largest manufacturers of Montessori materials in world.
10. She was a three-time nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize (1949, 1950, and 1951).

II.

Principles & Philosophy

The Montessori Method is built upon the fundamental principles of independence, observation, a prepared environment, individual liberty (freedom), and the absorbent mind.

Independence- The ultimate goal of Montessori is the formation of an autonomous, self-regulating, free individual. Children naturally strive to be independent, which is evident particularly during the early years. Therefore, they should be supported in achieving higher and higher levels of independence. The old adage “Give a man a fish; you have fed him for today. Teach a man to fish; and you have fed him for a lifetime” aptly applies to this vital Montessori principle.

Observation- Dr. Montessori often said, “I studied my children, they taught me how to teach them.” The key role of the directress is that of observing children. Observations are our method of gathering the necessary information to assess a child’s progress in key areas of growth and development. We also learn about each child’s strengths, weaknesses, likes and dislikes- all of which are important when planning lessons and preparing the environment.

Prepared Environment- A prepared environment offers the essential elements for optimal development. The key components are the children, adults, physical surroundings and educational materials. Though the children are responsible for caring for and maintaining the environment while in school, the adults must make certain to ensure it meets the needs of each individual child.

Individual Liberty- “Liberty” is synonymous with “freedom”. In the Montessori classroom individual liberty is most evident in (1) the child’s freedom to choose his own activities (including when to eat snack, interact with peers, and which work to choose); (2) the directress’s demonstration of respect for each individual child; and (3) the spontaneous development of self-discipline. This freedom, which allows the child to follow his interests, is balanced with responsibility. In other words, the child’s freedom to choose falls within the limits set by the adult (referred to in Montessori as “freedom within limits”). For example, individual

snack may consist of apples, crackers and cheese. A child may choose to eat only the apples, he may choose to eat a bit of each, or he may choose to eat nothing. The child is free to eat or not eat. The choice of snack is the adult's.

Absorbent Mind- From birth and age six the child has a unique ability to learn by absorbing information from his surroundings. He does this effortlessly and unconsciously. In Montessori's words, "The child *absorbs* these impressions not with his mind but with his life itself. [...] By absorbing what he finds about him, he forms his own personality. [...] He constructs his mind step by step till he becomes possessed of memory, the power to understand, the ability to think." Simply stated, the child learns just by being. The absorbent mind is sensitive and impressive; and we, the adults, must greatly consider those things we place in the child's environment.

Philosophy

The Montessori philosophy of education can be summarized in three words- "follow the child." Dr. Montessori developed her method by following children's natural tendencies and providing them with the means of educating themselves. By adhering to the fundamental principles referenced above, we empower each child to take the leading role in his own education.



As parents, we have some idea about how we want our children to be educated. Whether we prefer a particular class size, a highly academic program or a program that stresses the arts, we have- on some level- formulated a personal philosophy about education. Therefore, it is important to choose an educational program that fits into your family's lifestyle and reflects (to some degree) your family's values.

What, in your opinion, should be the overall goal of an early childhood education?

What are your personal ideals about education?

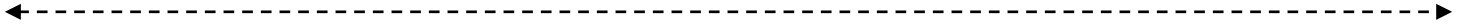
Regarding your child's education, what do you feel is most important?

What is your role in your child's education?

In your opinion, what makes a good educator? What qualities should a good educator have? What is the role of the educator? What is the role of the student? What adjectives best describe your teaching style?

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