

Montessori and the Home Environment

Elementary

"I never teach my pupils; I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn."
--Einstein

Organizing the Environment

The environment is extremely important at any level of the development of the child.

To show respect for the developing sense of beauty, to aid the growing independence, and to inspire the child to activity, we choose the best of everything for the environment. Furniture is functional, but attractive, preferably made from wood. Pictures on the walls can be framed art prints, or simple posters.

Organization is important for the elementary child. In the classroom there is a place for everything and everything in its place. At home, the child should also have a place in which to put all her belongings. There should be book shelves for books, cabinets and shelves for games, puzzles, etc., and clothes storage in closets and dressers.

At the elementary age, the child needs a place to keep ongoing projects. This is a place where he can do homework or be creative. It is "his" space for his work time at home.

Once the child begins in the elementary, she needs a place to read and study; somewhere quiet where she can concentrate. In her study area, pencils, scissors, paper, tape, etc. need to be available for her to do her work.

Environments in the Home

Elementary age children can now confine most of their belongings to their bedrooms. In fact if there are younger siblings, they will want to keep their things where little hands cannot get to them. It is still nice for them to have a special place to hang up coats, jackets, and the like. It is helpful to have a "gathering" place where your child can put anything that needs to be returned to school. This could be by the front door so he sees it each morning as he is leaving.

Elementary children feel happier when they have some control over their world. In the classroom the children have certain expectations about completing their work. The children have the choice in which order they are going to do their work or how long they will spend doing their work. At home if they know they have certain expectations about chores, participating in home activities, or helping keep the house neat and orderly, yet some leeway in when and how it gets done, they will be more likely to cooperate.

It is unrealistic to expect our children to be organized and keep their belongings ordered if our home is not organized. Children follow our example. If we keep our environment neat and orderly, our children will, too.

Care of Each Other and the Environment

The elementary child is now leaving the sensorial stage of development. Instead of delighting in washing dishes in soapy water, they do not want to get wet. Instead of enjoying the process of water play and dish washing, they want to hurry up and get the job done. Sometimes this leads to the child not doing a very thorough job. The older child is more into the product (getting the job done) than in the process (doing the job).

At this age, the children still need to be shown how to take care of their environment, especially as their responsibilities in the family grow. Once they have been shown what to do and how to do it, they can be left on their own to do the job, with only a check by a parent at the completion of the job. If the job is not completed well, have the child repeat the same job the next day. Demonstrate again what is necessary for the completion of that job. Keep repeating the process until the child can complete the job well.

The six to twelve year old child can complete many chores around the house. They can help planning, shopping, cooking, serving, and cleaning up for meals. They can care for plants, inside and out. They can care for pets. They can vacuum, sweep, dust, clean windows, do laundry, most of what any adult can do.

Children work best when they feel like they are part of the family team. When we work alongside our children, they learn the value of work and enjoy the pleasure of our company. Children need to do chores around the house because they are part of our family. An allowance can be paid, but not tied to chores. However, if our children would like to earn more money, they can do extra chores for extra pay.

The Child's Room

Two former juvenile probation officers completed a study about juvenile offenders. One significant finding was that children who were required to keep their rooms clean were less likely to break the law. No reasons were given, but it seems that if children learn to follow the rules of the house and to have expectations at home that are met, these children learn that life is more enjoyable, that they have an impact on their own lives, and have more self-esteem because of their accomplishments.

Our Home as a Peaceful Haven

Most of all, we want our children to find a warm, peaceful environment when they walk in the door. They can get rested and recharged at home. They can then take this peaceful attitude out into the world and share it with everyone!