

Designing a Montessori Home

December 03, 2009

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The Bedroom

"We must give the child an environment that he can utilize by himself: a little washstand of his own, a bureau with drawers he can open, objects of common use that he can operate, a small bed in which he can sleep at night under an attractive blanket he can fold and spread by himself. We must give him an environment in which he can live and play; then we will see him work all day with his hands and wait impatiently to undress himself and lay himself down on his own bed."

Maria Montessori

Children's bedrooms should clearly reflect their personalities and current interests. Even though on their own they may tend to create chaos, young children have a tremendous need and love for an orderly environment. Everything should have its own place and the environment should be organized to make it easy for the child to maintain a neat, well organized atmosphere.

- Ideally, the young child's bed should be low to the floor, making it easy for toddlers to get in and out on their own. Rather than a crib, Montessori urged parents to modify the bedroom to facilitate both the child's safety and his early independence. Consider a Japanese futon or a mattress without the bed frame.
- By age five, you may wish to allow your child to use a sleeping bag on his bed instead of sheets and blankets. This will make it easy for him to make his own bed in the morning.
- Mount a nice little coat and hat rack low on one wall where your child can reach them easily.
- Decorate the walls with high quality art prints of children or animals hung at the child's eye level.
- Mount a wall clock at the child's level. Select one with a large easily read face.
- Modify your light switches with extenders to allow the young child to turn his lights on and off independently.
- Hang a bulletin board on the wall at your child's eye level on which he can hang art work school papers.
- Don't use a toy box. Imagine the chaos in your kitchen or workshop if you threw your tools and utensils together in a chest. Instead use low shelves

to display books and toys Try to duplicate the look of your child's classroom.

- Notice how Montessori teachers avoid clutter. Place toys with many pieces in appropriate containers, such as tupperware "boxes" with lids, basket, or in a sturdy plastic bag.
- Use a sturdy wooden crate to hold your child's building blocks.
- You may want to create a model town or farm on piece of heavy plywood. Paint it green and sprinkle model railroad "grass" on it to simulate a meadow. Placed on a low table, your child can create wonderful displays with model buildings made of wood or plastic. Add little trees and people from a model railroad set. You could set up a doll house this way as well.
- Store Lego blocks in a large, colorful and sturdy canvas bag with handles. Sew on strips of velcro to fasten the bag closed. In your child's bedroom the bag will serve as a sack to contain his Legos. When you travel it is very easy to pick the bag up to come along.
- Make sure that your child's clothes chest has drawers that are the right height for him or her to open and look inside. Label the drawers: underwear, socks, etc.
- Flower vases: Encourage your child to collect flowers from the fields or garden for his room.
- Provide some shelf space for a small nature museum in your child's room. Here he can display rocks that he finds, interesting seeds, and (in small cages) interesting 'critters.'
- Music should be an important part of every child's life. Set some space aside for a simple stereo system and collection of recordings.

The Bathroom

- The bathroom must be prepared for your child. He should be able to reach the sink, turn on the water, and reach his toothbrush and toothpaste without help.
- There should be a special place where he can reach for his towel and washcloth.
- Most parents provide bathroom stools, but small wobbly stools often do not provide enough secure, comfortable space for bathroom tasks.
- Build wooden platforms 6-8 inches high that actually fit around toilets and sinks.

An Art and Crafts Area

- Set up an art area with an easel and a spacious art table for drawing, craft work and clay. Cover the table with a washable tablecloth.
- Children's art supplies can be neatly stored in separate tupperware containers. Depending on your child's age, the art supplies that you prepare might include washable magic markers, crayons, paste, paper, fabric scraps and recycled household articles for making collages You can

keep tempera paint fresh by mixing it in Tupperware containers that are divided into three or more inner compartments.

The Kitchen

- Make room in your kitchen for a child-sized work table for young cooks.
- Set aside the bottom shelf in your refrigerator for your children. Here you can store small drink pitchers, fruit, and the ingredients for making sandwiches and snacks. Use non-breakable Tupperware containers to hold peanut butter, jams, lunch meats, and spreads. A child of two can open the refrigerator and get her own prepared snack or cold drink stored in a little cup. A slightly older child can pour her own juice and make her own lunch.
- Use a bottom drawer to hold forks, knives and spoons.
- Mount a low shelf on a wall for plates, cups, and napkins.

Children can help around the house

If presented correctly, children from age two to six take delight in caring for their environment, dusting, mopping, scrubbing, cleaning and polishing, and they should be able to do so as easily at home as at school. It is perfectly reasonable to ask older children to straighten up their rooms and help with simple household chore.

- Give your child his own little broom or dust buster.
- Hang a feather duster on a hook.
- Provide a hamper for your child's dirty clothes. Ask him to carry them to the laundry room on a regular basis.
- The bathroom should have a small bucket with a bathtub scrub brush and a sponge.
- Folding towels and napkins is a good activity to teach the young child.