



Montessori House
Curriculum for Infants and Young Toddlers
Birth through 18 Months

www.MyMontessoriHouse.com

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The First Three Months

We should not look at newborn infants as small, helpless human beings, but as persons who are small in size, but with an immense mental capacity, and many physical abilities that cannot be witnessed unless the environment assists in the expression of life.

—Dr. Silvana Montanaro, MD, long-time Montessori teacher trainer

Respect

When your infant is so young, it can be tempting to swoop in for a quick cuddle whenever you walk by. However, as you begin to observe your infant, you will see that he or she is beginning to concentrate and focus on things. It may be the mobile with butterflies, fingers and toes, the ceiling fan, or a pet, but these early activities need to be treated with respect and care. As you continue observing your infant, you will notice that he or she is happiest when you time your attention with periods when your infant is focusing on you.

Making sure that you as well as friends and family respect your infant's need for focus and quiet will help the developmental process immensely. This means no jiggling items to distract your infant from something he or she is watching, but waiting and watching what your infant watches, so that the two of you are in synch. When you come into the room, announce yourself softly, "Good morning, sweetheart, it's Mommy".

Peace and Quiet

Your infant needs quiet and calm at this time in life. Avoid loud noises, crowded noisy places, bright lights, fast moving objects, cigarette smoke, exposure to television (turn it off when your infant is in the room), and anything else that would overwhelm your infant's tender nerves and senses.

Nursing

A comfortable chair for the mother allows her to relax and focus on her infant nursing. The chair needs to be in a quiet and calm spot in the house. Holding the infant and watching her provides an early bonding experience that serves to reinforce the mother-child connection during this crucial time.

The television, Blackberry, mobile phone, and other distractions should be off. If you really feel the need to surf a bit, try something with a screen that you can manipulate with one hand as you use the other arm to hold your child. If you have an iPhone, for example, you can place it on a table on a towel that allows you to handle it easily. Talking on the phone is really distracting to your child during nursing, however. If you text there will be constant jittery movements as you hit the keys in addition to the noise that a lot of phones make when you type.

The Path to Development

A good attachment is the best preparation for a good detachment.

—Dr. Silvana Montanaro, M.D., a wonderfully renowned Montessori Teacher Trainer

As your newborn transitions to being a young infant and then a mobile infant, this section will provide help with setting up a Montessori setting and emotional environment at home.

The most important facet of curriculum for this age group is human contact and interaction, combined with an environment that allows your infant to experience independent exploration and learning with challenges that are just right for his or her stage of development.

Infants experience the world around them holistically. Language, physical exploration, social interaction, emotion, and intellectual interaction are all combined into each and every interaction they encounter.

Your infant will explore the world through sight, sound, and touch. How you help guide and encourage his or her exploration will be the core of the curriculum for this stage of development.

Due to the physical development of your infant's brain and eyes, you must not expose him or her to television or computer at this age. Save your Baby Einstein and Montessori House DVDs for later.

Environment

- Quiet and calm, safe, touchable, and integrated into the social environment at home or at school. See the section on baby mats in *Creating the Learning Environment* for tips on integrating your baby into the family grouping.
- A sleeping environment should be quiet, dark, and peaceful. Even the tiniest of rooms (or a partition inside a larger room) can be made into a lovely retreat away from a noisy family environment.

Eating

- Infants should be fed when they are hungry, naturally, so keep a close eye on body language and other signs in order to distinguish between signs of hunger and signs of other discontent.
- Check your infant's body position, head support, clothing, and diaper if he or she seems uncomfortable while feeding.

Mobiles: Grasping and Batting to Pulling



Starting around two months of age, your child will have a need for developing focus and hand-eye coordination through tactile contact and motion. Mobiles are an ideal piece of equipment to address these needs for grasping and batting.

Hang the mobile within reach of your child's arm when it is part-way extended. If you use a mobile such as the Gobbi, named after Gianna Gobbi, who worked directly for Dr. Montessori and author of *Listening to God with Children: The Montessori Method Applied to the Catechesis of Children*.

These mobiles can be hard to find, but they are pretty easy to make. The lowest ball should be within easy reach for your child and the highest ball should be just out of reach (unless your child crunches upwards a bit). Embroidery thread in a heavy weight wraps securely around the foam balls to create a silky shiny surface that intrigues children with the gloss and color. Follow a gradation of one color, as shown, instead of using different colors.

Other equipment for grasping and batting practice:

- Felt ball on a ribbon
- Big bell on a rope or strap
- Cotton or woolen shawl with yarn fringes
- Cloth sack with a bell inside tied and dangling off a strap

The next stage involves your child grasping an object and using it to pull him or herself upwards. Eventually, your child will pull up to a sitting and then standing position, but,

for now, the first movements just help strengthen the core and limb muscles needed for pulling upwards.

These materials will assist your child in moving upwards:

- Ring on a strap or rope
- Sturdy rope with a knot on the end
- Hanging bar that is easy for your child to reach (about as low as the lowest Gobbi ball)

Remember that everything hanging down should be much bigger than your child's mouth. If you use a bell, use a really big one. We specify a cotton or woolen shawl so that pieces of polyester fiber will not end up in your child's mouth. Anything such as yarn or rope that is used in the mobile should be secured tightly on the top so that it does not end up falling near your child.

If you check our blog, we have ongoing posts for finding and making a lot of the infant material.

Infant Object Permanence Boxes (Series I)

Object permanence boxes are designed for infants who are just beginning to explore objects with their sense of touch and sight. Are objects permanent? Will they disappear when you cannot see them? This series of exploration, experience, and discovery that objects indeed do not disappear when they are out of sight is a major developmental step.

As you can imagine, the experience of object permanence is the beginning of the realization that if Mommy drives away, she has not disappeared forever, and she will always reliably come back. Those tears are not because you will be gone for the day. They are because, in your infant's mind, you have truly disappeared from the face of the earth.

Putting a small ball into a hole and seeing it reappear is, for an infant, absolute magic. Their sense of discovery and wonder is fostered through the use of these boxes.

As with all the other equipment, the pieces of the equipment are set up so that the holes fit exactly the balls, the drawers have knobs that are right-sized for small hands, and the colors are designed to transition nicely to formal color lessons later in the form of the Colored Tablets.

There are currently four pieces of equipment in this series, starting with the box below and ending with the Box with Sliding Lid, which is the most complex.



The first piece of equipment in this series is the Box with Tray (above). It is the easiest to use because your child only needs to grasp the small ball and insert it into the top hole. The ball reappears automatically on the tray. Present the material, use the three-fingered grasp to drop the ball into the hole, and watch it come out. Hand the ball to your child.

Components to your child's exploration

- Grasping the ball with one or two hands
- Inserting it into the hole on top
- Observing the ball exiting through the cut out in the side (the ball has not completely disappeared, so this is an interim step as your child can observe the ball's progression)

- Trying to insert it through the cut-out in the side
- Flipping the equipment upside down
- Peering inside the box



The Box with Bins (above) is more complicated because the ball (or other object) goes into a bin without any apparent opening as there is with the first box.

When you introduce this box to your child, you can put one object into one bin, open it, and then put the object into the next bin, and repeat. When you open and close the bins or grasp the ball, make sure to use the three-fingered grasp.

Also, you can use three objects and place one object in each bin. Let your child play and explore as he or she likes.

Components to your child's exploration:

- Opening and closing the bins using different grips
- Placing/removing the ball and other objects from the bins
- Moving objects from one bin to another
- Shaking the bins
- Turning the bins upside down to see what happens (if you buy discounted material, do this yourself to make sure the bins do not detach from the holder)