



## AMERICAN MONTESSORI SOCIETY®

### Children at the Early Childhood Level (Ages 2 ½ – 6)

This handout will give you a general idea of the characteristics of children ages 2½ – 6 and their “sensitive periods,” along with thoughts about what you, as a parent, can do to support them at home.

Sensitive periods are the times during human development when children are biologically ready and receptive to acquiring a specific skill or ability, and are therefore particularly sensitive to stimuli that promote the development of that skill. A Montessori teacher prepares the environment to meet the developmental needs of each sensitive period.

Main Characteristic/Sensitive Period	Implications for Home
<b>Movement</b> - Perfecting control of their bodies and stamina for gross-motor development.	<b>Do:</b> Integrate daily outdoor play that includes walking, running, hopping, skipping, and climbing. Varied surfaces help young children understand balance and control. <b>Don't:</b> Stay indoors all day! Find ways to move outside in all weather.
<b>Language</b> - The ability to pick up on vocabulary, sentence patterns, and inflections of language simply by listening to others around them.	<b>Do:</b> Include your child in family conversations; it is helpful for them to hear language and vocabulary of all kinds. <b>Don't:</b> Talk in baby talk to your child. It is okay to slow down and simplify at times, but your child enjoys, and will benefit from, adult conversations.
<b>Order</b> - A desire for consistency and repetition.	<b>Do:</b> Develop a daily routine, even if held loosely (you can find variety in the structure). Children need predictability.

	<p><b>Don't:</b> Change things up every day. It may get old to you, but your child will thrive when they know what to expect.</p>
<p><b>Curiosity for Small Objects</b> - A curiosity for the tiniest of objects helps young children develop fine-motor skills and concentration.</p>	<p><b>Do:</b> Follow your child on this one. They see so many things we miss as they focus in on the tiniest of objects. Collecting small objects in nature and around their house will pique their curiosity!</p> <p><b>Don't:</b> Rush through walks and activities. Your child can be mesmerized by small things. Try to enjoy the wonder with them.</p>
<p><b>Refinement of Senses</b> - Uses the 5 senses to experience the world around them and help them distinguish and categorize.</p>	<p><b>Do:</b> Touch, feel, smell, taste, visually examine, and enjoy as many things in a day as possible. Help your child understand their senses by naming sensations.</p> <p><b>Don't:</b> Share your own judgments before the child has a chance to form their own reaction. Your tastes may differ, and that is fine.</p>
<p><b>Reading</b> - Starts by associating the sounds of letters with the shape of letters.</p>	<p><b>Do:</b> As your child notices letters in the world around them, practice sounds and finding other objects in the environment with the same sound.</p> <p><b>Don't:</b> Quiz your child or do drills. Learning should be fun and exciting, not dreadful.</p>
<p><b>Writing</b> - Starts by doing exercises that strengthen the pincer grip and includes tracing shapes.</p>	<p><b>Do:</b> Explore art. Many of the fine-motor skills used with chalk paint brushes, play dough, and cutting help to strengthen your child's hand for writing. When they start making letters on their own, show them how to form lowercase letters and let them practice tracing them in a variety of mediums (sand, rice, shaving cream, etc.).</p> <p><b>Don't:</b> Force your child to write before they are ready; skill often emerges in the 5-year old.</p>

<p><b>Spatial Relationships</b> - Forms impressions about relationships in space. Includes the design of familiar places, ability to find the way around the neighborhood, and increasingly ability to do complex puzzles.</p>	<p><b>Do:</b> Break out your maps or make your own of the spaces that you love the most: the house or apartment, the park, and the neighborhood. Build with any material you have handy, from blocks to Legos to objects found in nature.</p> <p><b>Don't:</b> Underestimate your child's ability to locate themselves in time and space or to see unique patterns and relationships between objects and design elements. For example, children may notice that a stick or a plant looks similar to a letter or number they have recently been working with.</p>
<p><b>Social Skills</b> - Imitation of polite and considerate behavior leads to an internalization of these qualities into the personality.</p>	<p><b>Do:</b> Incorporate polite manners of speaking into everyday routines. Model and expect your child to use manners in the little ritual of everyday life and they will develop good habits of consideration with all people</p> <p><b>Don't:</b> Scold your child into compliance; simply correct and give them appropriate options as alternatives.</p>
<p><b>Mathematics</b> - Begins to understand the idea of quantity.</p>	<p><b>Do:</b> Count everything! Hunt for numbers in the world around you, play games adding and subtracting with everyday problems, and incorporate a daily math challenge to your day, much like reading a book every night at bedtime.</p> <p><b>Don't:</b> If you have bias about math, don't pass them on to your child. Math and numbers get a bad rap in our culture. Let's change that and make them fun.</p>