

Managing Daily Transitions

"Getting up in the morning, eating breakfast, doing the day's work, preparing dinner, going to bed — all are occasions for adults to step back and see the home through the child's eyes."

—Patricia Oriti, *At Home with Montessori*

The family home, like the Montessori classroom, is a social environment. Children learn to function in the world according to what they experience on a daily basis at home and school. As parents we often forget that the patterns we establish are the foundation for our children's ability to adapt. That's why our routines are so important. And, no matter how much our homes are "child-centered," we, the parents, set the tone.

Consistency is one of the features of a Montessori classroom, and children benefit from consistency at home, as well. Consistency is particularly helpful around transition times - transitions from sleeping to waking, from home to school, from play time to bedtime. Due to busy schedules and competing interests, families often adapt to the pace and needs of adults rather than to those of children. With a predictable schedule and patterns of behavior, we can smooth the way for ourselves and for our children.

Though young children often seem very wise, they are not little adults. They have their own **internal sense of order** and usually give us signals when something is askew. It's important for us to try to understand our children's actions, especially when they do not have the words to explain their behavior. When our children show signs of distress, it's a good time to review our routines at home, making sure they meet the needs of our children for secure, reliable transitions.

From Sleeping to Waking

The morning sets the tone for the day, and no one thrives when rushed and stressed. To experience a calm morning, you might consider:

Preparing the night before: Pack the lunches, help your children pack their backpacks and lay out their clothes; talk about the next day's events.

Waking up: Warm and positive morning greetings and responses help start the day. Rituals such as snuggling together or reading might work in a family where children wake early. Awaken late sleepers gently, allowing plenty of time for them to get ready.

Getting dressed: Adults model by getting themselves dressed, helping children only when needed. Allow ample time for children to be independent.

Breakfast: Plan enough time for a somewhat leisurely breakfast, so it doesn't have to be eaten in the car.

Getting Out the Door

When things don't seem to be working smoothly, it often helps to step back and look at the situation through your child's eyes. Adjust the schedule if more time is needed. If there is a certain task your child is having difficulty with, such as zipping a jacket, practice when you're not about to fly out the door. Offer help with calmness and respect.

Consider the following tips:

Some children respond well to the use of a timer to let them know they have five minutes left before departure. For others, a verbal alert is all they need.

Have children be responsible for putting on coats and gathering their own belongings. Help the youngest children, if necessary.

Give children information about any change in the usual daily plan.

Say your formal goodbyes to one another and to other family members.

The Evening Routine

An organized home simplifies daily routines. If there is a place where children can easily hang up their coats and store their belongings, less time will be spent looking for "lost" items. It also will become automatic after a while (even though children may need reminders from time to time).

Your evening might include the following:

Consider using the first 30 minutes home as "downtime," giving everyone time to decompress.

Have children help with dinner preparations or other tasks, according to their ability. Even a two-year-old can help set the table, one utensil at a time. A three- or four-year-old can help chop vegetables, or feed the dog.

Dinnertime is a perfect time to practice manners and converse about the day. Children learn by example and will soon catch on by asking for food to be passed, or maybe they'll even remind you not to talk with your mouth full!

Time after dinner can include more play. Everyone can help clean up and then have time together to play a game or take a walk.

Transition to quieter activities as bedtime gets closer. (Screen time is very stimulating for children as well as adults, so save computers and television for other times.)

Bedtime

School-aged children need 10 to 12 hours of sleep per day. Toddlers need more. Even though working parents want to extend the time they have with their children, a reasonable bedtime is crucial. This is another way to respect your child's needs. Some other suggestions:

Your presence and attention as children get ready for bed is comforting.

Be committed to maintaining the routine. (Of course there will be occasional exceptions.)

Baths before bed can help quiet the active child.

Help your children participate in the routine by letting them brush their own teeth, choose a book to read or music to listen to, turn down the lights, and arrange their bed.

Children need to learn how to soothe themselves to sleep. If you create a warm, loving routine, it's likely the transition to sleep will be smooth.

Making Life Easier

Being able to internalize even a few regular routines will help children learn, listen, and adapt when new circumstances arise. Once the schedule is learned, there is more room to be flexible and adjust to something unexpected without upset.

"Children thrive when given clear, solid structure, respectful communication and emotional warmth. They fare best when parents set firm guidelines within which their children are allowed freedom."

—Angeline Stoll Lillard, Montessori, *The Science Behind the Genius*