

Family Connection

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“The grace and dignity of their behaviour and the ease of their movements are the corollaries to what they have gained through their own patient and laborious efforts. In a word they are “self-controlled,” and to the extent that they are thus controlled they are free from the control of others.”

—Maria Montessori, *The Discovery of the Child*, p. 94

GRACE & COURTESY

Helping Children Learn Social Graces

By Heather White



Around 2½-years-old, a child enters a sensitive period for social skills or manners. Maria Montessori referred to these skills as Grace and Courtesy. At this time, the child has an interest in exploring social skills and a heightened ability to master these new behaviors quickly and with ease and will learn them from parents, caregivers, and teachers. They will carry the manners they absorb and establish at a young age with them throughout their life.

Grace and Courtesy is a hallmark of the Montessori Method and can be applied both in the classroom and in everyday life. It is also important to note that it is a multifaceted concept, one that is demonstrated in many diverse ways. In the classroom, explicit Grace and Courtesy lessons are introduced to children and these skills are woven naturally into each interaction. Teachers are

encouraged to incorporate lessons that reflect the cultural norms and practices of people globally. Concepts as simple as learning to put away an activity when they are finished, so another student can use it, help a child to understand social norms. The classroom teachers regularly model mindful behaviors that students should replicate, such as holding the door open for someone or saying hello.

Experiences in Grace and Courtesy allow the child in Early Childhood to explore managing oneself and establishing when and where certain behaviors are appropriate; the Elementary child to understand how to manage their developing relationships with others; and the adolescent to establish a sense of social self and control by encouraging self-governing.

TODDLERHOOD AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

Around the time a child turns two, they will begin to enjoy playing with other children, rather than working alongside them. As with any other skill, however, they will need to learn how to do

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so with grace and courtesy. Providing opportunities for young children to spend time with other kids their age will allow them to practice these new skills. Modeling manners and courtesies for the child in the home, in daily life, and with others will allow them to absorb these behaviors naturally.

Children at this age can practice:

- * How to handle coughing and sneezing mindfully
- * How to follow directions
- * How to greet others
- * How to interrupt mindfully

ELEMENTARY

The elementary-aged child is a social being by nature. They love spending time engaging with their peers. At this stage, children are developing their place in groups and society and beginning to understand the impact of their actions on others. Lessons in Grace and Courtesy are not simply lessons in being polite. These lessons should be grounded in healthy perspective-taking to help the Elementary child learn to think of and advocate for others and act in ways that are in service to their peers and community.

Children at this age can practice:

- * How to introduce oneself
- * How to wait for one's turn
- * How to give and receive compliments
- * How to navigate humor appropriately

SECONDARY

During adolescence, children are motivated to understand their civic duty and to consider the direct consequences of their actions, empowering them to make positive choices. This phase is full of insecurities and a social community with established grace and courtesy expectations grounded in equity, will help an adolescent safely work through these feelings before becoming a part of the adult world.

Children at this age can practice:

- * How to hold a conversation about a sensitive topic
- * How to express an opinion confidently while being mindful of bias
- * How to overcome negative comments and peer pressure
- * How to develop an understanding of differing cultural norms



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Tips for Preparing Students After Holiday Breaks

By Kat St. Pierre

Children like routine and so the return from a school break can be difficult for some.

Model your own self-awareness and emotional regulation skills by fostering a meaningful conversation about breaks and returning to school. As simple as it sounds, having direct and honest conversations can do wonders for connecting with your learner. Here are a couple of models of ways to have conversations about the return to school.

Share Your Struggles

"I am struggling with _____, and I need _____."

This is your chance to model naming and normalizing struggles and helpful ways to cope with those struggles. You can share how you feel about returning to work and how to make it easier for



yourself. You can share struggles that you faced as a student when returning from breaks, how you coped then, and what you would choose now.

Use a Chart to Label Emotions

"I am... excited, nervous, happy, pleased, confused, frustrated, disappointed, worried, missing, pondering, distracted, ashamed, grieving, joyous, grateful... for/by/about _____."

Add as many feeling words as you can to build your household's emotional vocabulary. The responses can relate to school, break, or anything coming up in the future. Working through this model allows for compassion, genuine listening, and active emotional regulation skills.

Practical Ways Children Demonstrate Empathy & Respect

By Heather White



A Montessori classroom is carefully developed as a microcosm of society, a community within which children learn to peacefully coexist with others different from themselves, demonstrating kindness and respect. This care for others is taught to children and modeled for them; these experiences in Grace and Courtesy are a foundational component of the Montessori Practical Life curriculum.

Early Childhood

Many of the experiences in caring for others that take place at the Early Childhood level revolve around classroom guides showing respect to the children. When a guide stops what they are doing to really listen to a child, when they are talking by making eye contact and acknowledging their thoughts and feelings, it helps the child

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feel respected. This validation will instill in a child the importance of showing respect to others.

Similarly, the avoidance of praise and the focus on what is appreciated will help young children begin to understand how even the smallest action can benefit others. For instance, giving feedback such as, “You put all of the Brown Stairs back on the shelf so they are ready for the next person” allows a child to recognize the impact of their behaviors so that they might take care when considering the influence of their actions on others.

Elementary

Elementary-aged students are very concerned with developing and maintaining peer relationships. Given their interest in developing social relationships with their classmates, students in first through sixth grades often naturally show concern for others. Some common ways Elementary children

can care for others include:

- › Helping a classmate with a challenging lesson
- › Being inclusive and inviting a friend to play who may feel left out
- › Making a handmade card for a classmate or a neighborhood friend—this could be a thank you card, a get well card, or just a friendly way for the child to let them know they are thinking about the other person
- › Doing household chores

Secondary

As adolescence begins, the child’s world expands. No longer do Practical Life experiences focus simply on their involvement in just the home and classroom settings, now they become active participants in social action and their community. Some of the natural extensions that provide adolescents with opportunities to care for others include:

- › Learning about the needs of local organizations (animal shelters, libraries, food banks), why the needs exist, and supporting them through volunteerism and advocacy
- › Service learning opportunities where students learn about inequities and organize fundraisers and business opportunities (bake sales and lemonade stands, lawn maintenance, dog walking, or car washing services) in order to address social justice issues
- › Learning about and advocating for climate change and environmental justice



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