



the
garden
MONTESSORI & ARTS LEARNING CENTER

Guidelines for Observing in a Montessori Classroom

Thank you for taking the time to visit The Garden. We hope that observing our classroom during our normal daily routine will give you a good look at what a child's day is like in our Toddler Community.

The classroom environment is the most crucial part of the children's learning here at The Garden, we view it as the "first teacher" and we view the child's play as their "work." As such, the toddler guides take great care during their work period not to interrupt any concentration and focus that takes place. Should a child greet you and engage in conversation, please try to keep your discussion brief so that s/he may return to working and you may continue your observation. Below are some guidelines to assist you in ensuring that your observation experience is as valuable and authentic as possible, and also does not detract from the children's classroom experience. We have also included a space for questions or notes for your own use while observing the classroom. Please feel free to contact us by phone or email afterwards to discuss any questions that come up during observation. We ask that you do not discuss your questions with the teachers during school hours, as they must be engaged with the supervision of the children at all times during school hours and will not be available to answer questions during the observation time, but are happy to do so at another time.

Enjoy your visit!

Classroom Atmosphere:

A great deal of effort and thought is devoted to what we refer to as the "prepared environment" which is the Montessori classroom. Each piece of material that has been placed on the shelf is there to help the children independently develop a particular skill.

The Montessori environment also offers a mixed-age grouping. Children of different ages are intermingled so that they might help and learn from one another. Older children can become leaders and strengthen their skills by teaching others while younger children can observe work they will do in the future to build confidence and understanding of the more advanced materials.

Degree of Self-Direction:

Notice that the children learn in different ways. With some types of materials you will see groups of children working cooperatively, side by side or you will find an individual child working intently. Still other children may be walking through the classroom seemingly not engaged in any direct activity - very often, these children are the ones observing and absorbing the other children's work and considering the materials available to them. We value their observation nearly as much as their work, as we know children learn through watching others AND by doing it themselves.

Role of the Teachers:

The teacher, or, "guide" (as we often refer to our teachers in a Montessori classroom) is a facilitator of the children's autonomous learning processes. S/he prepares the environment and gives children the tools needed to utilize the materials. Sometimes the teacher provides direct encouragement or indirect appreciation, and at other times, judicious absence. There is a basic respect for each individual child's particular style of learning in the Montessori classroom. You may also notice a direct "lesson" being given to a child regarding how to use a particular material, or even just how to walk in the classroom, or how to treat a peer. In a toddler community, these "lessons" are most often given when a child is displaying a need that the teacher has observed and then prepared an exercise to meet that need. Most often in a toddler environment, the children will explore the materials independently without a lesson, depending on the age of the child, the purpose of the material and the necessity for direct instruction. Sometimes the teachers will give lessons indirectly, by modeling the use of a material or will model behaviors they would like to see present in the children. In this environment, the teachers follow the children's lead, remain flexible with their plans for the day and adjust their expectations around the children's needs and abilities. Teachers offer redirection, gentle guidance and conflict resolution techniques to teach discipline; rewards and punishments have no place in a Montessori classroom, where we are seeking to teach children to be intrinsically motivated.

Sociability:

Watch the ways in which the children offer assistance to one another – with the materials and with everyday tasks. Note how the younger children absorb the older children's work simply by being near them and how, conversely, the older children will assist the younger ones with work that they have already mastered. The child's natural desire to form friends and be a part of an ongoing community is ever present in the Montessori classroom, however, younger toddlers tend to engage in parallel play (playing alongside but not directly with another child) rather than directly engaging. Our aim is to provide the children with a loving, respectful and supportive environment in which they will blossom into human beings who...

- *have a good self-concept
- *have respect for themselves and for the world around them
- *initiate tasks with interest and enthusiasm
- *are self-motivated
- *can complete the tasks they initiate
- *can love and live in peace with their fellow man

Questions/Notes: