

FAMILY LIFE

All the activities connected with looking after yourself and your surroundings, such as getting dressed, preparing food, laying the table, wiping the floor, clearing dishes, doing the dusting, etc., are activities belonging to what Dr. Montessori called 'Practical Life,' and are precisely the tasks that adults like least. But between the ages of one and four years, children love these jobs and are delighted to be called on to participate in them.

—Dr. Silvana Montanaro

PARTICIPATING IN FAMILY LIFE

Human beings of all ages want to be able to communicate with others, to challenge themselves, to do important work, and to contribute to society. This is human nature at its best.

This desire is especially strong during the time when the child who has been observing all kinds of important activity going on around her has finally mastered the mental and physical skills to stand up, walk, use her hands, and participate in real work.

A child learns self-control, and develops a healthy self-image if the work is real—washing fruits and vegetables, setting or

clearing a table, washing dishes, watering plants, watering the garden, sorting, folding, and putting away laundry, sweeping, dusting, helping in the garden, any of the daily work of her family.

Family work, known as Practical Life in Montessori schools, is the single most important area of a Montessori education at any age. Allowing the child to participate in the life he sees going on around him is an act of great respect for,



I am wearing an apron.
This is important work.

and confidence in, the child. It helps him to feel important to himself and to those around him. He is needed.

We can empathize if we think of the difference in our feelings for a dinner guest in our home who is completely served and waited on, or for one who is welcomed in our kitchen to talk and to laugh while we prepare the meal together. In the first instance the guest is separate, the relationship formal. In the second we share our life and the relationship is intimate—a true friendship.

THREE AREAS OF FAMILY LIFE

The main areas of *practical life* activities are:

1. The care of the self: dressing, brushing teeth, cooking, and so on.
2. Grace and courtesy and concern for others: moving gracefully, using good manners, offering food, saying "please" and "thank you," etc.
3. Care of the environment: dusting, sweeping, washing, gardening.

Children have always shown us their interest in *practical life* by pretending to cook and clean, taking care of a doll, carrying out adult conversations, etc. But

WORK APRON IN ETHNIC FABRIC

An apron makes the *child's work* special, and ethnic fabric is an introduction to textiles of the world. Putting on and removing an apron marks the beginning and the end the work cycle. In Montessori communities aprons are used for children from age 1-6 for preparing food, setting the table, washing dishes, painting, etc.

The neck band easily slips over the child's head. If it is too large for your child we recommend that you tuck and sew the end of the neck band to make it perfect. There is a waist strap with a Velcro fastener at the end so that children can help each other fasten aprons, and eventually manage it alone. The cotton in beautiful colors, woven in Guatemala (or occasionally, when we can get it, in India of Tibetan or Bhutan patterns). The body of the *tiny apron* (for ages 1-2) is 13-14" long, the *small apron* (for ages 2-3) is 18-19" long.



- CR48 **Tiny Apron** \$13.00
- DR01 **Small Apron** \$14.50



THE BIG BUCKET

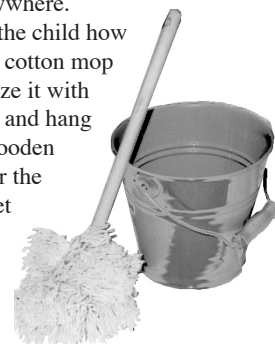
For years this has been the favorite bucket for many, many uses, for washing clothing, mixing potting soil, playing at the beach. We have several in our home, especially for visiting grandchildren (that is grandson Tai in the picture), and use them ourselves regularly. By Rubbermaid.

- (*) DR040 **White Bucket** \$8.00
- (*) DR044 **Blue Bucket** \$8.00

TINY MOP & BUCKET

A small cotton mop and bucket set is among the favorite birthday presents for children of this age. This tiny first mop works perfectly for the one year old to clean up spills in the bathroom, kitchen, anywhere.

Show the child how to clean the cotton mop head, squeeze it with both hands, and hang it, by the wooden handle, over the metal bucket to dry. The mop is 11" long. The bucket is 5.5" tall, metal with a wooden hand grasp, and comes in a choice of three colors.



- CR06 **Tiny Mop** \$3.50
- DR39 **Green Bucket** \$11.50
- DR38 **Blue Bucket** \$11.50
- DR37 **Red Bucket** \$11.50

NOTE: See other aprons suitable for this work on page 49.

when given the chance, they would much rather be doing the real work of the family and community, instead of pretending.

A child would prefer to remove real dust from a dusty shelf with a real child-sized duster, to help collect the dirty laundry, or to fold it, to take part in preparing real meals, rather than to pretend to do these things with toys.

*... but I know happiness
does not come with things.
It can come from work
and pride in what you do.*

—Gandhi

THE WORK ENVIRONMENT AND CONCENTRATION

One of the most calming activities for a child is concentration. This does not include passive, non-participatory concentration such as watching television or videos. The action must be something that is controlled by the child so she can repeat it as often as necessary, and it must challenge her body as well as her mind.

The choice of activities is not as important as the level of concentration brought forth. Deep concentration can occur while digging in the sand, washing carrots, stringing beads, coloring, and doing a puzzle.

The Montessori Assistant to Infancy gives lessons that are well thought out, logical and clear; she creates an environment which fosters work, and she is always on the lookout for a child beginning to concentrate. When this happens she protects the child from interruption because she understands the place of this experience in creating balance and happiness in the child.

The availability of a special little table kept cleared off and ready for work can help the child focus on her work



This child is using the movable *child's work table/bench* to gently clean all of the leaves of all of the plants in the environment.

and stick to it until she is finished. It is a natural consequence that, if the work is not put away, the space will not be available for the next activity.

An apron, used for cooking, cleaning, woodworking, gardening, etc., sometimes helps the child concentrate by marking the beginning and the end of a task. It also elevates the importance of work in the child's eyes. When a child's work is seen as important to the family, so is the child.

An apron should be made so that the child can put it on and fasten it by himself; then he can work whenever he wants to. A hook for hanging it on the wall keeps it always ready.

The purpose of the apron, at least at this age, is not protection of clothing as much as it is to mark the beginning and end of a task, to help the child focus on the work, and to lend a feeling of respect to this "real" work. This is what counts.

MATERIALS

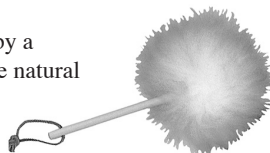
Whenever it is possible and safe, we give beautiful, breakable materials to the child, respectfully sharing with him what the rest of the family uses—pottery, glass, metal, real tools. There is a great increase in the self-respect of the child

WOOL DUSTER

This a real, 8" long, child-sized duster, made by a manufacturer of adult dusters. The lanolin from the natural sheepskin easily picks up dust. It can be shaken out or gently washed in cold water. The wooden handle has a thong tied to it so that a child might hang it up with the other household cleaning materials.

DR33

\$4.75



CHILD'S WORK TABLE/SEAT

This beautiful piece of materials from the Montessori 0-3 training course, is *very important*. It supports the child's work because it can be easily carried to wherever she wants to work, to hold supplies and to delineate the work area. In the Montessori community it holds the equipment for polishing a mirror, cleaning plant leaves, cleaning windows, any number of important tasks. It can even be used as a small and convenient tea table or bench for the child or adult.

The child will enjoy caring for the environment with this beautiful piece of furniture made for us here in California to the highest standards. Polished Baltic birch hardwood plywood, 7" high with a 8" x 12" surface. NOTE: This is not a stool to stand on, but to help the child take his work to any area.

CR49

\$59.00



CHILD'S CARPET SWEEPER

This is not a toy, but the very smallest adult carpet sweeper made. The attractive red, steel, 9" x 7.5" base has gray rubber bumper trim, and the handle comes in four sections. Using all four sections would make it adult size, but using two or three make it perfect for children between the ages of two and twelve.

It is lightweight and easy to empty and can be used on either a carpeted or uncarpeted surface. A little comb to clean the roller comes with it and snaps onto the handle.

DR34

\$27.50

when she is allowed to use our things, instead of being given plastic substitutes. There is also a corresponding respect for, and caring for, the materials when they are beautiful and breakable.

Children and parents can work together on family tasks such as cutting out and hemming aprons and dust cloths. In days past the aprons, cloth napkins, polishing cloths, were decorated with embroidery by teachers and members of the children's family. In the Montessori Assistants to Infancy training, students still do this—adding special touches to the items they make for infants and young children.

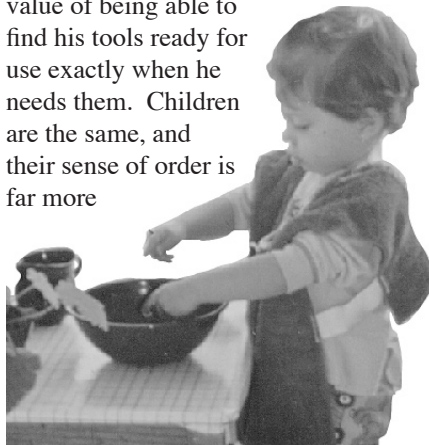
Often in the home we need to think carefully about how to arrange the children's practical life supplies. If the parent is a woodworker, or a gardener, a few good-quality but child-size tools can be kept in a special place near the parent's tools, easily within reach. He can be shown how to use them along with the parent, and how to clean them and put them away when the work is finished.

We can do the same with tools for cleaning, preparing food, cooking, setting the table, any activity. We can either adapt our tools, cutting off the handles of good brooms and mops, or make or buy suitable

ones—a small apron, smaller metal buckets, watering cans, kitchen tools, and so forth. For a child, just a few minutes a day working with parents on important "adult" activities can have a great benefit and begin a new way of communicating and living together.

A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING AND EVERYTHING IN ITS PLACE

Ideally, whenever a toy or tool is brought into a home the family decides exactly where it will be kept. Any great artist, or car mechanic, knows the value of being able to find his tools ready for use exactly when he needs them. Children are the same, and their sense of order is far more



One-year old washing hands for fun in a Montessori Infant Community in Mexico City.

intense at this age because they are constructing themselves through work.

In our home for many years we had to show guests where the dishes were kept because they were all in the low cupboards, within reach of the children. Dangerous cleaning supplies of course were kept out of reach, but everything else in the house was kept within reach of the children.

THE CHILD'S PURPOSE

The child's reasons for, and methods of, working are different from ours. We adults will usually choose to carry out a task in the most efficient and quickest way. A child, on the other hand, is working to master the activity and to practice and perfect her abilities. She may scrub a table for hours, but only when she feels the urge. She may sweep the floor every morning for two weeks and not again for a month—because she will be occupied with mastering something else. If we expected her to keep carrying out every new activity every day, there would be no time for sleep.

There are many physical, emotional and mental values in work. Through these activities the child learns to be independent. There can be no intelligent choice or responsibility at any age without independence in thought and action. She



2-PIECE, STAINLESS STEEL WASHING SET

This stainless steel bowl and pitcher is a practical replica of the handwashing bowls and pitchers used by children and adults before running water was available in homes—and children love it.

The *washing set* is very useful for washing hands before setting the table, after playing outside in the sand or gardening, or inside, permanently set up on a table with a little plate for soap, a towel, and a bucket for emptying the dirty water.

This set is also useful for washing food and other objects. The bowl is 9.5" in diameter, and the 18 ounce pitcher 4.5" tall.

- CR630 Pitcher \$19.00
- CR640 Handwashing Bowl \$6.50
- CR650 Handwashing Set \$25.00



4-PIECE ENAMELWARE WASHING SET

This red or blue (speckled with white), enamelware handwashing set comes with four pieces.

The washbowl is 4" tall and 9.5" in diameter.

The soap bowl is 2.5" tall and 6" in diameter.

The 14 oz. water pitcher is 3.5" tall, 4.5" in diameter.

The bucket, for throwing away the dirty water after washing up, is 7.5" tall and 9" in diameter. These sets are favorites in Montessori Infant Communities and loved at home.

- CR750 Red Washbowl \$10.00
- CR752 Red Soap Bowl \$6.50
- CR754 Red Pitcher \$8.00
- CR756 Red Bucket \$18.00
- CR758 Red Wash Set \$42.00

- (* CR001 Blue Washbowl \$10.00
- (* CR002 Blue Soap Bowl \$6.50
- (* CR003 Blue Pitcher \$8.00
- (* CR004 Blue Bucket \$18.00
- (* CR010 Blue Wash Set \$42.00



learns to concentrate, to control muscles, to focus, to analyze logical steps and complete a cycle of activity.

It is precisely because of the valuable work in *practical life* that children in Montessori homes and schools are able to concentrate, make intelligent decisions and master the beginnings of other areas of study such as math, language, the arts and the sciences. But the purpose of this work is the inner satisfaction, and the support of the optimum development.

Following a successful, complete cycle of family work, a child becomes calm and satisfied and, because of this inner peace, full of love for the environment and for others.

UNDRESSING, DRESSING

Undressing is easier than dressing and is learned first—sometimes much to the consternation of the parents. Clothing that is easy to remove and to put on oneself enables the child to practice these skills. These are things to consider when picking out any clothing, from shoes to pajamas, to coats, for young children.

A child's efforts at picking out her own clothes and dressing herself are satisfied if the parents hang up, within

the child's reach, just two outfits, letting the child decide between them when she dresses in the morning. This is enough of a decision in the beginning. Eventually she will be able to select everything from drawers, hangers, and shelves.

EXPRESSING EMOTIONS

Children also read the adult's mind and emotion and will carry out research to find out exactly what the parent is trying to communicate when they give double messages—for example when an angry parent is trying to appear cheerful.

A child needs to know that it is all right to feel and express anger and

frustration. He needs models to learn *how*—walking, scrubbing a floor, hitting a pillow or pounding clay—and *not* hitting another person (spanking included). If an adult goes for a walk or pounds clay, so will the child. If the adult hits the child, the child learns that it is okay to hit to express emotion.

THE NEEDS OF THE PARENTS

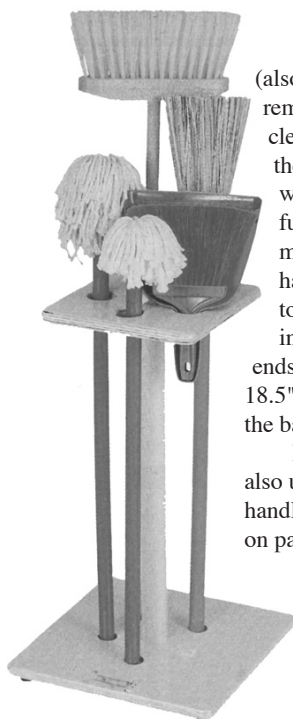
The working parent does not always have the time to include the child in everything and should not feel bad about this. We must be easy on ourselves in the home and plan a time when we will really enjoy working together.

Success in learning to "follow the child" comes slowly. It is helpful to begin with one thing, perhaps putting the napkins on the table for a meal, and gradually add to the tasks in which the child can participate, and little by little take over.

Soon we will begin to learn from the child how to bring our whole selves, mental, physical, and spiritual, to the task of the moment, to focus on each thing we do, and to enjoy each moment of life. Thus the child becomes the teacher of the adult. The needs of the adult are met at the same time as the needs of the child.



A two-year-old girl teaching a one-year-old how to sweep, in an infant community in Mexico City.



BROOM/MOP STAND

This broom and mop (also garden tool) stand reminds children to put their cleaning tools away when they are finished with their work, and makes it more fun to do so. The stand is made of birch plywood. It has four 1.25" holes in the top and four indentations in the bottom to keep the ends of the tools secure. It is 18.5" tall, and 11.5" x 9.5" at the base.

NOTE: This stand is also used for the long-handled garden tools found on page 53.

CR200 \$46.00

BROOMS, MOP, BRUSH

These brooms, mops, and the brush—just like mother's or father's—are probably the favorite items for children who want to do real work at this age instead of pretending. Our brooms and mops are real tools, not toys.

They are made by a manufacturer of adult brooms and we cut off the ends here at Michael Olaf so they are exactly the correct size. The *small broom* is 33" long and the *tiny broom* is 27" long. The *small string mop* is 22" long. The oval (yellow bristles) *scrub brush* is 2.5" long and has a wooden handle. It can also be used as a vegetable brush.

- CR07 Broom, Small \$7.00**
- CR10 Broom, Tiny \$7.00**
- CR08 Mop, Small \$7.00**
- CR606 Scrub Brush \$3.00**

