

What is Montessori?

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the difference between Montessori and conventional education?

Montessori is a developmental approach to education. Its most significant hallmarks are (1) a child-centered orientation and (2) a highly structured, hierarchical curriculum. The balance of freedom and limits represents a major shift in the organization of the classroom and the role of adults in relation to children's learning. It also matches [the way human beings actually learn](#).

For children six and under, Montessori emphasizes learning through all five senses, not just through listening, watching, or reading. Children in Montessori classes learn at their own, individual pace and according to their own choice of activities from hundreds of possibilities. They are not required to sit and listen to a teacher talk to them as a group, but are engaged in individual or group activities of their own, with materials that have been introduced to them 1:1 by the teacher who knows what each child is ready to do. Learning is an exciting process of discovery, leading to concentration, motivation, self-discipline, and a love of learning.

Above age 6 children learn to do independent research, arrange field trips to gather information, interview specialists, create group presentation, dramas, art exhibits, musical productions, science projects, and so forth. There is no limit to what they can create in this kind of intelligently guided freedom. There are no textbooks or adult-directed group lessons and daily schedule. There is great respect for the choices of the children, but they easily keep up with or surpass what they would be doing in a more traditional setting. There is no wasted time and children enjoy their work and study. The children ask each other for lessons and much of the learning comes from sharing and inspiring each other instead of competing with each other.

How important is it to start by age 3?

The years from [birth to age six are a critical period of development](#), one that can be optimally supported in a highly enriched learning environment that features mixed age grouping and adults who are specially trained to support emerging abilities in language, movement, independence, and social/emotional well-being. To make the most of the child's inherent drive to learn and to establish skills and habits that set the child on a positive trajectory, it is essential to start early.

Ideally, Montessori environments are organized to include three age levels: birth-3, 3-6, 6-9, 9-12, and so on. Students remain with their community for three years and benefit intellectually, socially, and emotionally from being both the youngest and the oldest in the class. Likewise, children benefit most when they enter the community at the beginning of a three-year cycle.

How do Montessori schools approach families?

In part because Montessori education begins so early (for children as young as three months), and in part because Montessori is less an approach to school than a way of life, ongoing family engagement is an essential ingredient in successful Montessori programs. The most successful Montessori programs establish strong partnerships that include thorough parent information sessions prior to enrollment, regular parent-teacher conferences, guided observation of Montessori learning environments, and school-home partnership agreements that feature commitments to attend school events, extend Montessori principles to the home, and limit screen time.

Is Montessori good for children with learning disabilities? What about gifted children?

Based in the assumption that children learn at different rates and through different avenues, all Montessori instruction is differentiated to meet the needs of each child in the classroom. For children who experience learning challenges, this means addressing difficulties early. For children who require additional challenges, there is no ceiling to learning. A classroom whose children have varying abilities is a community in which everyone learns from

one another and everyone contributes. Moreover, multi-age grouping allows each child to find his or her own pace without feeling “ahead” or “behind” in relation to peers.

Are Montessori children successful later in life?

[Research studies](#) show that Montessori children are well prepared for later life academically, socially, and emotionally. In addition to scoring well on standardized tests, Montessori children are ranked above average on such criteria as following directions, turning in work on time, listening attentively, using basic skills, showing responsibility, asking provocative questions, showing enthusiasm for learning, and adapting to new situations.

Are Montessori schools religious?

No. Montessori educates children without reference to religious denomination. As a result, our classrooms are extremely diverse, with representation from all peoples, cultures and religions.

Who accredits Montessori schools?

In the United States Montessori is regulated by two primary professional organizations: The American Montessori Society (AMS) and the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI).

If children are free to choose their own work, how do you ensure that they receive a well-rounded education?

Montessori children are free to choose within limits, and have only as much freedom as they can handle with appropriate responsibility. The classroom teacher and assistant ensure that children do not interfere with each other, and that each child is progressing at her appropriate pace in all subjects.

Montessori classrooms don't look like regular classrooms. Where are the rows of desks? Where does the teacher stand?

The different arrangement of a Montessori classroom mirrors the Montessori methods differences from conventional education. Rather than putting the teacher at the center of the class, with children dependent on her for information and activity, the classroom revolves around the needs, interests, and work of the children. Children work at tables or on floor mats where they can spread out their materials, and the teacher circulates about the room, giving lessons or resolving issues as they arise.

Are Montessori schools as academically rigorous as traditional schools?

Yes; Montessori classrooms encourage deep learning of the concepts behind academic skills rather than rote practice of abstract techniques. The success of our students appears in the experiences of our alumni, who compete successfully with traditionally educated students in a variety of high schools and universities.

Since Montessori classrooms emphasize non-competitiveness, how are students adequately prepared for real-life competition later on?

Montessori classrooms emphasize skills and dispositions that have been shown to have [greatest impact on success in later life](#): self-regulation, collaboration, conflict-resolution, and a variety of other executive skills aimed at continuous improvement. Students typically become comfortable with their strengths and learn how to address their weaknesses. In older classes, students commonly participate in competitive activities with clear “winners” (auditions for limited opera roles, the annual spelling bee, etc.) in which students give their best performances while simultaneously encouraging peers to do the same. It is a healthy competition in which all contenders are content that they did their best in an environment with clear and consistent rules.

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