



Toddlers' House  
Handbook  
2023-2024

*“All that we ourselves are has been made by the child we were in the first two years of our lives.”~ Maria Montessori*

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## **The Toddlers' House**

In the Toddlers' House the beautiful environment is designed to spark a child's sense of wonder, inspire joyful play, and support development of focused attention. Through observation and engagement with the children, the Montessori guide creates a responsive environment that meets the changing needs of each unique community of children.

The Toddler House environment is designed so that each element is just the right size and shape for the small hands and bodies of very young children. Imagine how wonderful it must feel for a toddler to finally have sinks and toilets that are easy to reach, tables and chairs at just the right height, and tools that don't feel cumbersome in tiny hands.

Toddlers are socially becoming independent human beings. Learning self-care is an integral part of the young child's routine at school. The teachers support independent skill development by scaffolding more complex activities into smaller steps with simple lessons that allows for space and time for the young child to "do it on their own" and become successful.

Young children explore their world through all of their senses; observing, touching, tasting, listening, and smelling as they absorb all the aspects of the world around them. Your young child is also in the sensorimotor stage of development where movement plays a vital role. Children move freely in the classroom from one activity to another. These activities are often open-ended and involve some type of action for motor development.

Children have many opportunities to choose materials from the shelf and work alone or in small groups. The freedom to move about and make choices creates an atmosphere which invites social interaction. In the environment we do not provide one of each item for every child. In fact, scarcity of materials (two sets of markers instead of ten) is an important element in creating a community of children who interact and learn to resolve conflicts together. The adults guide and support this community of children as they discover one another, learn to share space, negotiate conflict, and treat one another with kindness.

The toddler's explosion into language is facilitated through an environment rich with songs, music, stories and conversation. Vocabulary is enhanced through the exploration of objects and an array of naming, matching and sorting activities. Teachers guide children with the words they need to help express themselves. Children are modeled to use kind voices and gentle touches as they learn to communicate with each other.

Children demonstrate readiness for the Children's House environment by showing effective communication skills, social emotional readiness, independence in dressing and toileting, and a strengthening of focused attention.

### **Beginning of the year phase-in approach**

Very young children sometimes experience feelings of fear or anxiety when they first enter new situations or when they are asked to separate from their primary caregivers. When your toddler first begins attending school, we will be asking them to face both of these challenges.

Witnessing their anxiety, tears, or hesitation can be challenging for you as well. It may be helpful to remember that separation anxiety is a sign of a secure attachment and a toddler's growing understanding that they are their own person.

In order to ease this transition for your child, we have developed a phase-in approach to beginning the school year. Please plan that your toddler may not be attending their fully scheduled hours until after the first week of transition. Although this transition period was originally designed with the child in mind, we have found that parents feel more comfortable with the new school environment when they participate in this transition. If your family has some difficulty with following the transition schedule, please let us know and we will work with you to create a transition that will best support everyone.

The first step in the phase-in process is a classroom visit. You and your toddler will have an opportunity to come either when the teachers are alone or during a quiet part of the day. During this brief visit (about ten - fifteen minutes), they can look around, perhaps try out a tiny chair or choose a piece of work. This is also a good time to bring a few things to store in their cubby. You won't be leaving them this first time, but they may notice that you are leaving a few of their things!

The next step of the phase-in is really just a longer visit. Your toddler will come to class at the time your teacher suggests. This may be early or mid-morning. You should plan on your toddler visiting for about an hour. During this time you can plan on running errands or you are welcome to relax in the library that is outside of our classrooms. Even if your child is still happily engaged at the end of the hour, it is better to leave early on a positive note rather than waiting until your child begins to tire.

Your child is then ready to attend the morning by themselves until 11:15. The teacher will suggest that you leave with a quick confident goodbye. It is very important that you say goodbye to your child every time you leave. Although your toddler may experience more tears when you leave, they will grow to trust that you come and go when you say you will. You might say to them, "I am going to do my work now, I will be back soon." Once you tell them you are going, it is important to depart quickly. Once again you are demonstrating to your toddler that you can be trusted to do what you tell them you are going to do and that your departure is not a big event. Children feel reassured when adults seem relaxed and confident during transitions.

This final day of the phase-in will be a full-length day for your child, meaning that if your child stays for our Montessori Enrichment program and Aftercare this will be their first day staying for these programs.

Communication between parents and caregivers is an important part of this transition and throughout the year. As the transition progresses we will be sharing our experiences at school. Occasionally, a toddler needs additional days for the transition. We will make those decisions together as the process unfolds and we work together to observe and meet the needs of your child.

### **What To Bring The First Day**

- **Extra Clothes:** Many of our activities involve water and paint; please send two extra complete sets of clothing, including shoes especially if toileting. We suggest crocs as they are easy to clean. **Please label your child's items.**
- **Diapers and Wipes:** We have extra storage so you are welcome to bring a pack of diapers.
- **Cubby Picture:** A horizontal 4x6 picture of your child's family.
- **Backpack/Tote Bag**
- **Water Bottle:** One your child can easily work themselves and that is labeled.
- **Small Plant:** A small plant for the classroom (our plants get watered frequently and well!)
- **Lunch:** If your child stays for lunch, please send a lunch box that is easy for your child to open along with ice packs if needed. We provide milk and water so no drink is needed.
- **Nap Blanket:** If your child stays for enrichment. We will send blankets home on Fridays.

### **Communication**

We feel that communication is one of the most important elements of our program. In order to fully support each child and family, we need to communicate regularly and openly.

During the day teachers will be busy caring for children and often unable to speak on the phone. If you leave a phone message, we will return your calls promptly at the end of the school day. E-mail is also a wonderful way to communicate and we will respond as soon as we are able during school hours.

The arrival time and dismissal times are important transitions for your child. Thus, the attention of the adults should be focused on the child. As tempting as it may be, this is not a good time for a mini parent-teacher conference.

Throughout each month we share either pictures, information on activities your child is engaging in, developmental information, or information in regards to Montessori or the school.

We believe all of this communication is very important. Through our talking frequently we can all gain a more complete picture of your child. This gives us the opportunity to work together to create the most nurturing environment possible for each child and family.

We will hold two conferences during the school year: one in the fall and one in the spring. We have a designated conference day (no school for students) and one evening opportunity for you to choose a conference appointment. All conferences must be scheduled on the designated dates and times.

### **Toddlers' House Routines**

Toddlers love ritual and routine but also need the routines to be flexible enough so that their individual needs can be met. Sometimes we will begin an activity later or earlier than the schedule suggests in order to better support the needs of the children.

#### *Before Care*

**7:20 am:** Families participating in Before Care bring their child directly to the classroom. Before Care children can eat any breakfast food they have brought with them or begin their morning work cycle.

#### *Montessori Morning:*

**8:15 am:** Our Toddlers' House teachers open their doors and greet children at the door. Parents and caregivers may say goodbye at the door, and the teacher will assist children in placing items in their cubbies.

**8:30 am:** Arrival time ends and the door is closed. If you arrive after this time please check in with the office and they will help your child quietly enter our environment.

**9:00 - 10:00 am:** The snack area is open and children choose to have snack as they are hungry and space is available.

**10:30 am:** Children participate in a group time that involves singing, creative movement, finger plays and storytelling.

**10:45 am:** Weather permitting, the children spend time on the outdoor playground.

**11:15 am:** Dismissal time for morning children begins.

**11:30 am:** Dismissal ends. Children who have not been picked up will walk to the office with their teacher.

*Montessori Enrichment:*

**11:30 am:** Children who stay for Montessori Enrichment return indoors and get ready for lunch.

**12:15 pm:** Children begin cleaning up from lunch if they haven't already and choose work in the environment. Diapers are changed again after lunch/before nap.

**12:30 pm:** Everyone has transitioned to nap.

**2:30 pm:** Usually some children have begun to awaken.

**3:15 pm:** Afternoon dismissal begins.

*After Care:*

**3:30 pm:** After Care begins. Children eat snack and when they are finished, they spend time indoors and outside exploring our Toddlers' House environment.

**Snack**

Parents are asked to bring a snack for their child. We have found that children find comfort in eating familiar foods. If your child stays for the afternoon a second snack should be provided. In the Toddlers' House, children experience snack as an opportunity for active participation that goes above and beyond their physical nourishment. Children are guided to wash their hands thoroughly before eating, establishing healthy habits to keep their bodies safe. Toddlers then learn to experience eating as a relaxing, pleasurable time.

By having snack available throughout the morning, and having a snack table that seats six children at a time, there are many opportunities for learning social grace as well as meeting each child's individual need for nourishment. Children eat as they are hungry, coming to the table to verify there is a place available. If all the chairs are full, a friend is guided to wait their turn and look at a book while waiting in the waiting chair.

During snack, children enjoy each other's company and engage in conversation or simply being together. Our goal is to help each child to realize for themselves when they are hungry or full. When done, children bag any uneaten food, and wash their dishes in low bins with water and soap, placing them in the dish rack to be sanitized by adults. Upon finishing these tasks, children are free to return to whichever activity calls to them once again. When it is close to the time that snack will close, children who have not eaten will be invited one last time to come to the snack area if they would like to eat before it is closed for the day.

**Dress**

Every day your child is involved in tasks which can be messy. Have your child wear clothing in which they can work comfortably. We encourage self-care, but young children do not have the skills to keep themselves and their clothing perfectly clean.

Also, appropriate clothing can be a wonderful tool to help encourage your child's independence resulting in higher self-esteem. Please do not send your child to school in blue jeans, overalls, tights, or belts. Acceptable clothing is loose fitting, soft fabric which the child can pull down quickly. Elastic waist pants and shirts with wide collars allow the child to dress and undress more independently.

These guidelines are also important for children still in diapers, because these children will now begin practicing dressing skills that will later make toileting more successful.

Most toddlers really love their shoes. Please send shoes that facilitate active play such as velcro tennis shoes, cros, or sandals that cover the toes and have a strap behind the heel.

Although our winter months are cold and snowy, we go outside throughout the year. Please be sure to send snow boots, snow pants, a warm coat, mittens and a hat during the winter months. We stay inside if the wind chill drops below 20 degrees.

## **PLEASE LABEL ALL OF YOUR CHILD'S CLOTHING WITH THEIR NAME.**

### **Diapering and Toileting**

The procedures and rituals used in diapering and toileting are designed to create positive experiences for your child, as they become aware of natural bodily functions. A calm, positive attitude is of utmost importance in diapering and toileting.

Much of what is done in diapering is out of respect for the child's growing need for independence. The child is invited to get a diaper from their bin and bring it to where we change diapers. The child stands as the teacher changes the diaper because this encourages greater participation in manipulating his or her clothing. At each diaper change, the teacher invites the child to sit on the toilet. This gives the child an opportunity to practice all of the skills involved in toileting. Often the children are very interested in using the toilet when they see other children using it, but sometimes they are not at all interested! This invitation is simply an early introduction and is never forced.

There are a number of signs of readiness to use the toilet: being aware of wetness versus dryness, being consistently troubled by a wet diaper, being dry for long periods of time, requesting underpants, and occasionally having successful attempts in the toilet. When your child is showing these signs of readiness, we will consult with you about changing to underwear. When you communicate to us that you are ready to have your child start toileting at home and at school we will be happy to help with this transition. It is of the utmost importance that we are on the same page and are consistent with keeping your child in underpants once we all agree to do so.



Keep in mind that this is a transition and that your child may need to continue wearing a diaper during nap, at night, or at other times. Remember loose fitting clothing is best for children to manipulate on their own and be successful as well as rubber shoes that can be easily wiped down. An adequate supply of clothing changes should be sent to school during this time. Soiled clothing will be sent home daily. Please return the same number of clothing changes the next day.

It is important to remember that this is a child led process. Toileting is a complicated skill that requires time, practice, and patience. Sometimes patience on the part of the adults might be our most important part of the process! Children in this age group are very interested in making their own choices. If we as caregivers allow the process to unfold at the child's pace, the child will feel a greater sense of autonomy, and ultimately be pleased to take responsibility for toileting.

### **Nap**

Children who stay for Montessori Enrichment will be napping at school. It is important before starting to nap at school that your child is down to one nap a day right around 12:30, they are able to sleep in places other than just their crib, they are able to fall asleep without being rocked, and they are able to sleep in a room that has some light from windows.

If your child will be napping at school, please send a warm blanket that is large enough to cover them completely. At the end of each week we will send your child's blanket home to be washed. It is important that you return them promptly on Monday so that your child will have a blanket. Some children use pacifiers during nap time. If your child still uses one to rest, please send one for nap time that we can keep here at school.

The children awaken on their own time schedules and we change them or they use the toilet. They then are ready to begin to choose works or get ready to go outside for dismissal.

### **Illness**

Please refer to the 'Family Handbook'

If your child is on any medications please let us know. We want to keep the children in school and there are many side effects from antibiotics that would cause us to have to send them home if we aren't aware that they were on these. Also, if your child is needing medication throughout the day please fill out a medication form and send it with your child so they can feel comfortable throughout the entire day.

## **Toys**

To reduce the risk of loss or breakage, we prefer that your child's toys and other belongings remain at home. We recognize that a toddler may occasionally need a familiar item from home to feel more secure in the transition between home and school. Please suggest to your child that they leave items at home or in the car at the beginning of the day. As an alternative, a flower or rock from home may be a simple way to help your child feel this sense of connection. The family photo on your child's cubby is another link to home.

## **Celebrations**

Children's birthdays are a time for celebration. Parents are invited to send a special snack for their child's celebration. We ask that you send something that is low in sugar; think muffin rather than cupcake. To celebrate each birthday we gather at tables in our dining area. We light a candle and sing Happy Birthday. Next, the birthday child uses our candle snuffer to snuff the candle. Since our toddlers' house community changes throughout the year, please check with your child's teacher about possible allergies.

Ideas for birthday treats:

1. Fruit (cut fruit is a favorite in the toddler environment)
2. Muffins
3. Rice Krispy treats (already cut)
4. Animal Crackers
5. Teddy Grahams