

Family Connection

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“The teacher’s task is not to talk, but to prepare and arrange a series of motives for cultural activity in a special environment made for the child.”

—Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*

Freedom Within Limits

The Art of Balance in Montessori Education

BY HEATHER WHITE

The principle of “freedom within limits” is a fundamental feature of Montessori education. Dr. Maria Montessori understood that children thrive when given the freedom to explore and learn independently, but this freedom must be thoughtfully balanced with appropriate limits and structure. As Maria Montessori noted, “To let the child do as he likes when he has not yet developed any powers of control is to betray the idea of freedom.”

The Freedom to Choose

In a Montessori classroom, children are offered a wide array of choices that empower them to take charge of their learning experience. They can select the work they want to engage in, decide where to work, choose their peers, and move freely within the environment. This autonomy extends to their ability to take breaks or repeat activities as many times as they desire, ensuring they only transition to new tasks when they feel ready.

The Need for Structure

While freedom is a vital component of Montessori education, it is important to recognize that this freedom comes with limits. Children are encouraged to make choices, but they are also taught to do so in a way that demonstrates respect for themselves, others, and the environment.

Respect for Oneself: Children learn to work safely and productively. This includes understanding how to navigate their activities without disrupting their focus or that of their peers.



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Respect for Others: Social skills and good manners are emphasized. Children may choose to work alone or in small groups but must always respect their classmates' space and focus. They are encouraged to collaborate by inviting others to join their activities rather than interrupting.

Respect for the Environment: Proper care for the classroom and its materials is crucial. This includes using materials correctly, cleaning up after themselves, and caring for both living and non-living elements of their environment.



The Role of Limits

Setting clear limits is essential for providing children with a sense of security and stability. Consistent boundaries and routines create predictability in a child's life, helping to reduce anxiety and foster a positive learning atmosphere. As educators, parents, and caregivers, our responsibility is to create an environment where children feel safe and secure. Loving limits allow children to experience the greatest enjoyment and satisfaction in their learning.

Examples of Limits in Montessori Classrooms

In a Montessori setting, limits manifest in various ways:

Prepared Environment: The classroom is thoughtfully organized to promote independence and respectful engagement.

Grace and Courtesy Lessons: These lessons teach children the importance of social interactions, cooperation, and consideration for others.

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Redirection by Teachers: When children exhibit disruptive or unsafe behavior, teachers intervene to guide them back to appropriate actions.

Offering Choices: When children struggle to make decisions, teachers provide two to three suitable options, helping them learn responsible decision-making.

Modeling Behavior: Teachers demonstrate expected behaviors and the proper use of classroom materials, serving as role models for the children.

The balance of freedom and limits in Montessori education fosters a nurturing environment that allows children to explore their independence while cultivating respect and responsibility. By empowering children to make choices within a structured framework, we enable them to develop not only their intellect but also their character, laying the groundwork for lifelong learning and personal growth.



The Power of “Yet”

Helping Children Develop a Growth Mindset

By Heather White

“Yet.”

It is such a small, but powerful word that opens up the possibility for growth.

“I am not able to read... yet.”

“I have not made a three point shot in basketball... yet.”

Encouraging a growth mindset in our children can help them believe in their ability to learn and improve, allowing them to see challenges as opportunities.

A growth mindset, a term created by psychologist Carol Dweck, is the belief that intelligence and skills grow with effort, not something a person is simply born with. Children with this mindset often become more resilient, eager learners who welcome new experiences, stay positive in the face of setbacks, and even feel happier.

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There are many ways parents can nurture this mindset.

Emphasize effort over innate ability—try saying, “I saw how hard you worked on that!” rather than “You’re so smart!”

Model resilience by talking through your own challenges aloud: “This is tough, but I’m taking it one step at a time.”

Reading together can also introduce growth mindset concepts in a fun way. Books like *The Magical Yet* and *Your Fantastic Elastic Brain* show children that mistakes are part of learning.

Be open to sharing your own experiences with your child about times you learned something difficult. When children see us trying and learning, they feel safe to do the same.

Believe in your child’s potential. Research shows that a parent’s mindset significantly impacts their child’s development. By setting high expectations, we can guide our children toward reaching their fullest potential.

Unlock the power of “yet” and empower your child to embrace challenges and persevere.



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