

discipline

Taking Montessori Discipline Home

Montessori children are noted for having above average discipline so how do you continue and support this at home? First, we need to understand that this discipline does not directly come from the outside – “Do this! Do that!” but arises when the child is engaged. This engagement takes many forms: interest, training, cooperation, self-direction and self-control. There are many steps to discipline but ultimately, we mean self-discipline.

If we define discipline to mean “Doing what is best when it needs to be done – to completion” we are developing a life-skill with tremendous rewards. “Discipline” is not punishment but the marshalling of all powers needed to produce a positive result.

The first step of Montessori discipline is for the child to understand clearly what is being asked. This is a simple first step but often overlooked.

Second, cooperation is gained if the child is presented with a choice. “Do you want one spoonful of green beans or two?”(Not, “Do you want green beans?” and then we deliver green beans without listening to the answer.) “I don’t want any.” Says the child. “Oh, that wasn’t the choice.” Montessori children understand both choice and cooperation.

Third, further choice in the cooperation of discipline comes in extending time lines for action. “Do you want to brush your teeth now or in fifteen minutes when you get ready for bed?” “Do you want to do this first or last?”

Fourth, questions are a great form to bring about discipline and cooperation. “Is the table totally cleared?” is better than “You didn’t clear the whole table.”

Fifth, an occasional “How do you feel about your actions?” may elicit a host of hidden icebergs – everything from “It’s not fair. I don’t know how to do it” to “I am afraid.” (Children’s fears are real to them and “There is nothing to be afraid of.” Does not really help.) Adult sensitivity, patience and cooperation moves the action to completion. This completion is another step on the way to self-directed obedience.

Sixth, helping the child articulate the behaviors needed gives the child ownership of the process. “How would you like to handle this?”

Seventh, the ultimate parent command (which occasionally is necessary) “because I said so” might give way to a more subtle approach “How does your teacher handle this at school?” A mother of Montessori twins was counting to ten to get her twins cooperation when one of them said “Mr. Leming at school doesn’t count.” “How does your teacher handle this?” can be a strategic tool to continue this transformation to self-discipline which is practiced daily in the Montessori environment.