



## MAINTAINING A POSITIVE TONE

On the first day, one homeschooler's schedule will not be the same as that in every other Montessori homeschooling program. Some parents do not start and end with circle time, and some might not have the children go outdoors on the first day. Each homeschooler will need to take the time to work out a plan — and keep the plan flexible to allow for the unexpected.

One element that most Montessori homeschooling programs will have in common is that the homeschoolers strive to set a positive tone on the first day and maintain a positive tone throughout the year. To accomplish this goal, homeschoolers often use these two effective communication strategies:

- **Active listening** means more than listening to what a child says, then repeating it out loud. It also means helping the child identify and name the feelings inside. By using active listening, an adult makes sure a child feels heard. However, the homeschooler does not

try to solve the child's problem or tell the child what to do. For example, three-year-old Roberta has trouble doing up her shoes. She throws them at the wall, yelling, "I hate these shoes!" Using active listening, the homeschooler simply says quietly, "Roberta, it sounds as though you are feeling frustrated because you cannot do up your shoes." In this way, the homeschooler gives Roberta a chance to identify and talk about her feelings and think about how to solve her problem.

- **Positive interaction** can consist of simple statements that let a child know that he/she has been noticed and acknowledged in a busy learning environment. For example, the homeschooler might say, "I watched you digging in the sand today, Allison. Are you making something special?" or "Peter, it was kind of you to help Allison move that table."

## ESTABLISHING RULES AND ROUTINES

As discussed earlier, orientation activities introduce children to many aspects of the program and are most often presented at the very start of the year to individual children. These activities are designed to help children adapt quickly to the routines in the environment, learn about expectations for respect as well as manners and courtesy, develop some independence, and become familiar with the learning environment, accessory spaces, and materials.

The Montessori environment represents a new world for the children, with fascinating things to do and new rules to follow. Most children



3–6 want to become more independent, yet have social interactions of some kind with each other. They are more comfortable with consistency in their surroundings and find it hard to understand and adjust to inconsistent adult behavior. Children of this age tend to learn quickly when rules and routines are presented and applied consistently, especially when such rules and routines allow the children to expand their independence and social skills.

Here are examples of activities that many homeschooling parents present at the start of the year, when the children are so ready to absorb them:

- carrying trays without tipping the contents
- returning activities to their place when finished
- rolling out and returning work mats
- walking, not running inside
- moving tables and chairs carefully and safely
- walking around work in progress on the floor
- washing hands after toileting and always before eating or handling food
- using certain towels after washing hands in the bathroom
- sitting down on and getting up carefully and safely from a chair or floor
- speaking with an inside voice
- opening and closing doors quietly
- tucking chairs in after getting up from a table



- raising a hand to speak (in a group situation if more than one child is present)
- using a tissue to blow the nose, then discarding the used tissue in a wastebasket
- respecting choices that other people make
- getting the homeschooler's attention respectfully
- handling a book respectfully
- taking one book at a time from the library
- pouring a glass of water
- preparing a simple snack independently

The homeschooling parent will choose several new orientation activities to present each day in the first weeks of the year. Over these weeks, the homeschooler will continue to role-play these rules and routines and give presentations on them as needed. It is important though, that children never feel that role-playing rules and routines is either a negative experience or a consequence for negative behavior.

Some of the activities presented in the first weeks will be retained quickly by the children. Other orientation activities presented in the first weeks lay the foundation for the rules of the environment that will be followed and reviewed as needed throughout the year. In most Montessori programs, these rules focus on safety, order, and courtesy:

- Safety rules involve safe ways of moving throughout the inside environment and outside area, such as always walking when inside.
- Rules about order involve using materials in an organized and careful way and returning materials to their proper places after working with them.
- Rules about courtesy involve treating others with politeness and respect.

Here are some examples of rules in a typical Montessori program. Only one rule is introduced at a time. This way, each rule can be reviewed before a new one is added.





## Safety

- Always walk inside. Running is only for outside.
- Carry scissors in a basket and pass them safely as demonstrated by the homeschooler.
- Ask an adult for permission before leaving the learning room.
- Wash hands after going to the bathroom.
- Wash hands before preparing or eating snacks.
- Always wear inside or outside shoes.

## Order

- If another child is using an activity, wait until that child has returned the activity to the shelf before using it.
- Return each material or activity to its proper place before you choose another.
- Clean up your own work and work area before you start another activity.

## Courtesy

- When inside always use an “inside voice.”
- To get another child’s attention, walk over to that person and speak to him/her quietly.
- Treat everyone with kindness.
- To get the homeschooler’s attention when she/he is busy with a presentation, place your hand gently on his/her shoulder. Do not interrupt the homeschooler by talking. Wait until she/he is ready to speak to you.

- Do not interrupt others when they are talking.
- Do not touch someone else’s work unless they give you permission.
- Watch quietly after asking a child’s permission to watch his/her work.
- Show respect for everyone and everything.

Generally, rules are not posted permanently in a Montessori environment. Some homeschoolers prepare a chart of rules and bring it out if needed for review. Even though most of the children cannot yet read the rules, seeing them reminds the children that the rules are important. Having the rules on a small chart in a discreet place in the environment also often relieves a homeschooler from having to explain a rule again. Homeschooling parents find that as the rules are reviewed over time, many of the children take pride in memorizing the rules and repeating them aloud — and at times reminding children and adults when they have not followed the rules.

## FOCUSING ON NORMALIZATION

In the first weeks, in order that the children become more familiar with their environment and its contents, the homeschooler continues to review with the children where certain materials can be found in the environment. For example, each day in the first week or two, a homeschooler may play a finding game with the children she is homeschooling. She asks a child to go and stand by a certain part of the environment or a certain item, such as the