

Parent's Handbook 2010-2011

It will be expected that all caregivers have read, discussed and agreed with these guidelines.

"The child is both a hope and a promise for mankind." - MARIA MONTESSORI

Philosophy and Purpose

"Education is a natural process carried out by the child and is not acquired by listening to words but by experiences in the environment." - MARIA MONTESSORI

Dr. Montessori wrote: "The child becomes a person through work.", "work" being defined as "purposeful movement." She also said that children have the ability within themselves to create a competent, gifted adult. Our job is to remove impediments to that.

She observed that what engages a child in a constructive way is filling a need in the child. She wrote "the hands are the instruments of man's intelligence". In a Montessori classroom, the child is able to move from activity to activity. The "work" that you will see children doing in the classroom may include: making and serving snack, washing dishes and napkins, caring for the animals, helping each other, learning math, language, sensorial differences and similarities and geography with self-teaching materials, observing other children, making or moving to music. Montessori wrote that the teacher's job is to set up the "prepared environment" and to demonstrate ways to explore materials use language and solve problems.

Montessori environments are meant to appeal to the "whole child". "...it is true that we cannot make a genius. We can only give to the individual the chance to fulfill his potential possibilities." Maria Montessori saw that intelligence is universal, although there are many types of intelligence. Children have innate abilities and challenges unique to them, some genetic, some developmental and/or environmental, some temperamental, and the Montessori classroom is designed to invite "stretching" for each child. The verbal child might be challenged to enjoy more large motor play, the active child might be challenged to focus on a task with a series of steps, the shy child might be challenged to "use his words", the cautious child invited to be bold with paint, or movement; to take a risk! Our goal for all children is confidence and independence.

Parenting is very challenging work, which I have explored and am still learning from through 3 children. Many things about the Montessori philosophy are a huge asset to parenting, and I will discuss these in Parent Ed nights throughout the year. I have a personal goal to make parenting easier for each of you, as I can. In order to have more skills available, I became a certified Parent Educator in 2010 with the Positive Discipline network. This gave me a multitude of resources and activities to practically help you in maintaining your relationship with your children in ways that suit your family and your child's needs.

Another goal to make less of a footprint on the earth through my school, by composting; using reusable, not disposable products; and being a responsible user and buyer, as much as possible, of sustainable supplies. This grows out of the Montessori respect for the natural world and fascination with the interplay there that is ecology.

The purpose of Mary's School is to provide a safe place for children and adults to learn from each other, continue in their innate love of learning, and to become: "a generation of triumphant adults."!

Curriculum

I began teaching in 1978, when I taught French in the third grade in the elementary school in Davidson, NC. I have been teaching in Montessori programs since 1992, and received my Early Childhood Certificate from the Center for Montessori Teacher Education /North Carolina near Raleigh in 1995. I did my internship year at Mountain Pathways School, where I taught for an additional 2 years. I started Mary's School in 2002. I have three children, the youngest of whom is 21.

I continue to read about early childhood education in Montessori and other professional journals; regularly reread Montessori's own writings and works about Montessori, keep up communication online with Montessori teachers all over the world, as well as having ongoing discussions about "our" children with the staff. Observing the children in the classroom remains my biggest inspiration.

In the classroom there are a variety of materials for 3 dimensional exploration, an art area with open-ended art activities, books and the introductory Montessori math, language and geography materials.

Science is explored inside and out, in as "hands-on" a way as possible, supplemented by reference books that the children explore.

Social studies is often described in Montessori materials as study of the "sense of self" and includes learning about the world from the child's point of reference (families, pets, our bodies, our senses, emotions).

The "sensorial" materials help the child explore through the senses, rough and smooth, comparison of weight, isolation of sound and color, and other work that includes hammering and sanding wood, sand and

water play, ice, snow. Perception of these differences is part of the child's natural "mathematical mind" (Pascal).

Another part of the curriculum is called "grace and courtesy", when children are taught how to interrupt, how to ask for help, how to say and hear "no", how to ask if you can join a group or a lesson, how to tell someone that you don't like the way you are being treated, how to shake hands, how to greet someone.

Montessori recognized that children needed as much direction for these skills, and time for practice, as they do in doing math, or learning to tie a shoe.

"Practical life" helps the children's confidence and competence. This covers life skills from blowing your own nose and washing hands to pouring without spilling, simple food preparation toileting and dressing/undressing independently. Montessori observed that children could learn many tasks if they were interested and time was taken to teach them the steps required.

"We must support as much as possible the child's desire for activity; not wait on him, but educate him to be independent." - MARIA MONTESSORI

We spend the year working toward a goal of a minimum 3 hour work-period in the morning. This is a time when the children choose work and make their own transitions. New lessons are presented at this time. After this, we may have a brief morning meeting and go outside. In the winter, the time outside is somewhat dependent on the weather. Some of the materials can be used outside as well. Back inside, there is work and lunch until pick-up. In the beginning of the year, snack is a group time; after the children are more independent, they will be able to choose when they have snack during the morning.

"Our schools show that children of different ages help one another. There are many things which no teacher can convey to a child of three, but a child of five can do it with ease." - MARIA MONTESSORI

A Montessori classroom has a variety of ages. The older children provide physical and emotional help and support to the younger ones, and the younger children allow the older ones to teach and nurture. This is the most beautiful part of the classroom experience for me. Many of the lessons the children see are those given to other children, providing a lot of levels of learning each day.

Of course you would like to be a "fly on the wall", seeing what and with whom your child is doing and learning. As a parent, I know that, even with older children, the answer to: "what did you do at school?" might be "Nothing.", or, more expansively: "Had snack". To this end, we attempt to give you a glimpse into the classroom with weekly pictures, and occasional nights/days in the classroom.

In addition, there is one scheduled conference time a year, in the spring. We set them up so that you and I can have a period of time while your child is at school. I may request additional conferences if there is a concern about your child. Conferences requested by you will be subject to a \$25 an hour fee.

Everyone has different needs in terms of feedback and questions. Email works well for me (my email address is johgoodrich@skybest.com or you can reach me through the website), but maybe not for you. Please let me know the best way to communicate with you and give you the support you need. Notes in the “tuition basket” will always be read during the morning, if you can’t get a moment with me at drop off.

Regulation

Because my program is half-day I am not required by the State of North Carolina to be licensed, although I am regulated by the Fire Marshall and the North Carolina Building Code for Educational Use. In the summer, we are granted an exception to this for a “summer program”.

The teacher/child ratio is better than minimum standards for early childhood programs in North Carolina. I have had wonderful assistants and interns from ASU, Caldwell Community College and Watauga High School. In the summer I have wonderful younger “junior assistants” who are often former students.

I maintain current First Aid and CPR training through the Red Cross, as do my assistants. Most Montessori programs far exceed average curriculum requirements from the State. The Children’s Council has given guidance and ongoing training and support, including help in writing these procedures.

Inclusion Policy

Montessori environments are flexible and developmentally appropriate, and are therefore suitable for many children. However, they are not therapeutic environments, nor am I trained in special education. Children and families in need of special help will need to get that from professionals, and may not have their needs met in my classroom without some supplemental help.

That said, I believe that there is a range of typical and acceptable abilities, behaviors and needs of children, and I will attempt to accommodate as broad a range of these as I feel is positive to the group.

We will take several weeks’ attendance during which we will observe the adjustment made by your child. If we do not feel that your child is adjusting satisfactorily, you and I will discuss options, which may include recommending that you increase the number of days your child attends or, in an extreme case, that you seek a different placement.

In order to protect the group, I reserve the right to end without notice the contract of any family which repeatedly hampers the safety or well-being of the group, which does not respect the guidelines

outlined in this Handbook, or which has misrepresented themselves or the child. You are expected to read any information I send out; let me know if email is not a good way to communicate with your family. The website www.marysmontessori.com has much information on Montessori education, teaching and parenting. We also encourage you to attend Parent Education nights, offered during the academic year. Your ability to understand and support what we do will greatly impact your child's positive experience at school.

We expect children to begin to learn self-regulation. I will not support temper tantrums at school, directed at us or at you. We are holding each child up to his/her own best self at all times. If you and your child are having a conflict, I may ask that you take it out to the porch.

Because young children adjust best to consistency, a child may do better with more days at school than fewer. Many parents feel that less time away from them is less stressful, but young children find consistency comforting. If a child is having trouble with separation, more days will often help. This may be an option I suggest.

This is often the first "school" experience for children. As such, some concerns (areas outside the norm) are apparent to us, in the group, which are not apparent at home. I will take the opportunity to point these out, as I observe them, and to, perhaps, recommend evaluation. It is very hard to hear concerns about your child, but the sooner a real need is addressed, the better for all.

Enrollment Agreements

Application can happen any time during the year. The process is: observation, a "day out at School" for your (2 and older) child, one or more parent meetings, after which an application may be offered. If an application is returned, it should have with it a non-refundable application fee of \$25.

Enrollment may be based on: the age and sex of your child, how we see that your parenting style and goals for your children align with what we do; previous Montessori experience; siblings of current or former students who have completed the three year cycle at Mary's School; date of application.

If the application is accepted, I require a month's tuition as a deposit. This will be credited towards your last month's tuition unless you leave school before the end of our contract for three year cycle (2-5).

Enrollment for the "school year" (August-May) is separate from enrollment for the summer. Enrollment in one does not guarantee enrollment in the other. Enrollment for the summer will be given preferentially to Mary's School current and former students and siblings. The schedules and fees are also different than those for the school year.

Our options for enrollment for the school year are five days (\$336/month) or 4 days (\$289/month). . Tuition is due by the 5th day of the month (weekly or monthly in the summer). One household must be responsible for the full semester/year's tuition. After the first 2 weeks (Week 1 of the summer) of attendance there will be no adjustment to the tuition for the full term. Tuition for the entire term (week or semester) will continue to be due, whether the child is in school or not. "Make-up days" will not be possible, due to numbers of children per day. Unless special arrangements are made, a "month's" tuition is due for each calendar month, despite the number of days or weeks attended in that month.

It is disruptive for a child to attend sporadically. I will discourage this, for the sake of the child's adjustment.

I am more dependent that other businesses on your children as my "customers"; I literally cannot have a Montessori classroom without a three year age span. A classroom with all 2s, or all 3s, or even all 4s and 5s, would be a completely different place, and not a Montessori one.

Since I have started Mary's School, the state has started Pre-Ks in all the elementary schools. It is hard to compete with the cost, if nothing else. I understand this. However, if you are considering Pre-K for your child at four, please also consider that Mary's School is not for you now. The penalty for taking your child out before the end of the three year cycle is forfeit of your last month's deposit. This is a consideration of the health of our community.

As it is illegal for us to keep more than two children for longer than 4 hours a day (except for "camps", as in the summer), we have a late pick-up policy. The first late pick up (10 minutes after pick up time) will have a \$10 fee. Every other time will be \$25. Fees are due on the same day.

It is an added benefit to you that my wonderful staff are often available and willing to babysit outside of school hours. Unfortunately, having them babysit apparently opens me up to increased liability. Therefore, I cannot allow staff to babysit without my having, on file, a "Hold Harmless" form at the school, signed by you, me and the staff member. This, as the name says, holds me and Mary's School "not liable" for any harm that could occur while a staff member is supervising your child at times when Mary's School is not in operation, or places away from the school. This form will apply for one calendar year. This form is also available on the website.

Discipline

Children feel most secure when they know where the limits are. The limits at school are: you may not hurt other living things, yourself or the materials. Children are expected to get things "ready for the next person". They will not be allowed to interrupt other children who are concentrating. Children are expected to use appropriate words and tone of voice. They are expected to "use their words" and to listen when others use theirs.

Children may be moved from a situation, but strict “time out” is not very successful in a group. We also follow Jane Nelson (Positive Discipline)’s adage that we “can’t expect children to do better when we make them feel worse.” Children are not forced to apologize, as this is best when it comes from genuine empathy, a skill young children are just beginning to learn. We give the child choices, and focus on the consequences of their actions: “See how sad she looks?”

A child may be asked to leave an area or activity. We do not dwell on events once they are over, and try not to “over talk”, as children do not learn much from this, or may find it reinforcing! One phrase I learned in training was, “Water the flowers, not the weeds.”, so we tend to ignore behavior we want to discourage. Continuing issues will be called to the attention of the parents, with a focus on serving the child together. Most other rules are related to safety.

Along with physical independence, Montessori had a goal of emotional independence. Learning to control one’s emotions is perhaps the most valuable skill a person can learn. To this end, we expect children to begin to learn to “self-regulate”, also known as “self-soothing”: if a child is angry, or sad or tired, they generally know what they need to do recover. This is true for the very youngest children, and is a wonderful skill to perfect.

When children are allowed to do this on their own, with adult empathy but not direction, they seem to move through big waves of emotion sooner. We do not try to distract children from their feelings, or minimize them, but neither do we let them control the group. We (teachers and other children) are nearby and available for a lap or conversation when it is wanted, but it is often not! A child may choose to be mad; that is a choice; eventually I expect that they will choose something else. Another phrase we use a lot at school is: “ ‘No’ is also an answer.”

Children are given the right to choose with whom they do work, or to do work alone. “Watching work” is always allowed, however, and a child cannot tell another child where (or where not) to sit, or where, with whom or how to play when outside. Children are not expected to “share”. When something is in use, it is “not available” until it is put back on the shelf. A child is allowed to use a material as long as he/she wishes, except in the case of art projects/lessons that are being demonstrated to everyone.

Again, following the Positive Discipline guidelines, we encourage the children to problem solve as much as possible, so they take ownership of both problems and solutions.

In order to allow this much freedom to children, I must be able to trust them to function within these limits. There are some children (very few, in my experience) who, because of background, maturity or temperament, do not handle this much freedom well, and persist in attempting to hurt others, or disrupt the group. I cannot allow children to do either of these things, or to stay in the environment if either of these types of behaviors persists.

All people experience challenges in life. I believe that allowing your child to begin to trust their

abilities, and to learn skills to deal with challenges in a safe, nurturing place, is one of the best gifts you can give your child. This is a large goal of our school.

Arrival & Departure

School begins at 8:00 and ends at 12:00 (except in the summer, when extended day may be offered). Early drop off may be an option; you can ask us. Children are to be brought to the porch, at least, and released to a teacher. Children do better when they walk in and are not carried, and carry at least some of their belongings.

Separation is a continuing issue, cycling through different developmental levels. I have observed that briefer drop-offs are easier on children; an adult who stays, once information has been given to a teacher and goodbyes have been exchanged, seems to erode confidence. “Mary’s School is a school for children, not adults.” I am not supportive of lingering separations because they do not serve childrens’ independence. It is the adults’ responsibility to acquire enough information about your choice of placement to feel comfortable before your child starts school. If you are confident, your child will know this, and separation will be easier. We will not try to distract him/her from the fact that you are leaving.

Seeing a parent linger in a parking lot can be painful, too. Please do not stay and chat if your child is having trouble separating. If you are concerned about your child, feel free to call and check in (297-5045); if we are on the playground, we will call you back. Children are able to deal with all of their possessions, with help, and this is our first lesson of the day.

When you enter the school at pick up time, you are responsible for supervising your children or any siblings.

Please tell one of the staff when another adult will pick up your child.

Confidentiality

Boone is a small town, and we will often bump into each other around and about. You may even be friends with me or my staff, or at least “Friends” on Facebook. To assure clear communication as much as possible, please come to me with concerns or questions about your child at school, not to other parents or to my staff. Even just an inquiry about your child or another at school can put them in an awkward position. My staff are trained not to answer, which may make you feel uncomfortable. Remember, this is for your child’s protection and safety, as well as that of the other children.

Health Policy

We are only prepared to care for well children. Please keep your child at home if he/she has symptoms of untreated illness. Any child who is not feeling well, has diarrhea, fever, vomiting or cannot go outside, should stay at home. A child's temperature should be normal for 24 hours before returning to school. We reserve the right to send a child home because of symptoms of illness. Please report any communicable or contagious illnesses so that other parents may be informed. In lice infestations, we require treatment with a pesticide product and that the child be "nit free."

Bumps and scrapes sustained and observed at school will be treated with soap, water, Band-aids and ice. We will make every attempt to tell the caregiver who picks up your child about severe bumps, stings, cuts, falls, or suspected illness; Mary cannot be held responsible for information not passed on to a parent! Injuries that seem more serious (falls from heights, injuries that involve long crying) are documented, for my protection and yours.

In case of real emergency, we will notify the Boone Rescue Squad which is less than a mile away.

Please note doctor-documented allergies on the application form.

No medication may be given orally by any teacher to any child. The one exception to this is that we have an Epi-pen in case of severe (life-threatening) allergic reactions.

Clothing/Things From Home

We have paint out, and go outside every day. In our goal to foster exploration and independence, we will not discourage your child from getting wet, muddy and paint-spattered. Shoes without slippery soles (cowboy boots do not work well!) are encouraged. Children are expected to be able to put on and take off all clothing and shoes themselves. This means that you are expected to select clothing for school which the children can handle alone. Specifically, belts, overalls, tights, onsies, buttons, snaps on pants and zippers can make life difficult for young children.

We have not found pull-ups to be helpful in independent toileting; When you and the child are ready to take on independent toileting, please make sure to communicate clearly to Mary, and send in extra clothing..

"Accidents" do not bother us; my floors are impervious! Children who are independent using the toilet will be expected to be able and willing to toilet independently and/or to change independently. Please give them a lot of opportunity and time to practice dressing at home, from well before aged 2 on. We have seen literally hundreds of 2 year old children who can dress completely; your child can, too, but it can be a long process.

We do not “take” children to the potty”, or “put them” on it; it is always accessible, inside or out, nor do we remind them, unless they seem visibly uncomfortable. What we have observed is that all typically developing children are able and willing to stop being wet/soiled or having to change their clothes several times a day, as there are more interesting things to do in the classroom. We are also committed to avoiding power struggles about toileting. If a child has several accidents in a morning, we may ask them if they would prefer to wear diapers for the rest of the morning, and try again another day.

Re diapers: we only make a point of changing soiled diapers (as detected), not wet ones, during our morning, in an attempt to save resources. If you tell us that there is a rash problem, we will attempt to check during the morning, but, again, we expect children to begin to be independent in letting us know if they need help in this way.

Every child needs at least one change of clothing every day, including socks. For children experiencing “accidents”, extra shoes are also a good idea. As we go outside every day, hats and mittens are a must in winter, although I have extras available. Raingear is a necessity, in Boone. I have found that children do not like hoods, so a ball cap or hat is better in rainy weather.

Toys brought from home are either ignored or cause a problem. Please leave them at home; it is upsetting to take it from a child once they are in school, even to be sent home with a parent.. We are often happy to see books or photographs, or “real” (natural) objects: rocks, snake skins, flowers, and (sometimes, if you check ahead) pets. We cannot promise that what is brought will necessarily be shown (as in “show and tell”), or read, depending on the day.

Costumes do not help in concentration at school. Feel free to tell children that “they are not allowed at school”. After years of trying them, they are best left at home for Halloween as well.

We do not refrigerate juice or milk in sippy cups, so they are better left at home. Water is always available, and the children ask for help when getting it from the child-sized sink. In warm weather we have water outside as well. Food brought from home will be shared with the whole group.

Special Events

It is always fine to send snack, although it is not required. It is fine for birthdays, as well. I suggest you ask your child what they would like for their birthday snack; it is often something very simple, something perhaps that we can make. We share the birthday snack with everyone during the regular snack time.

It is good to check for allergies ahead of time. Occasional cookies are alright, but candy is really never welcome; it creates lots of concerns for children and parents, even when “left in a cubbie for later.” Please do not send candy, even for holidays like Halloween and Valentine’s Day.

You may think you are sending a small amount, but if three people do it...

Children like to give things, but a card is preferred.

Near birthday times, we have a “Montessori” celebration that involves a caregiver coming a telling the child’s story: some things about the child’s birth/adoption, and a story or two about each year of life. This can include pictures. The children all enjoy this, and your child will feel special. A special snack is not shared as part of this celebration, which usually happens right before pick-up (around 12 o’clock). We have found that the special snack at this time detracts from attention paid to the child. Schedule this, if you like, with Mary.

Weather

If weather conditions are iffy, check posted cancellations on the Ray’s weather site: <http://ncweatherclosings.com/>. By 7:45, someone is usually at school (297-5045). We generally are open, except in cases when driving is considered (by me) hazardous.

Snacks

At least one snack is provided each morning, including a non-meat protein and some fruit or bread. It is often made/prepared by the children. Water is always available. I will not limit your child’s snack choices, except in cases of documented (medical emergency) allergies (as opposed to food preferences). Please discuss this with me before your child begins school.

Tax ID Number

My federal tax ID number is #52-2368303.

Please remember that this is available in this document (always on line).

From Bottom Line Magazine, “be sure to claim child tax credits when preparing your taxes. You may be eligible for thousands of dollars of tax credits and/or refunds. The federal Child and Dependent Care Credit can be worth \$1000 per child per year. Families earning less than \$35,458 annually also may be eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit. This credit is worth up to \$4,300 this year (2005). For more Information and to find free tax preparation assistance, call 800-TAX-1040.” (From the National Women’s Law Center)