

A young boy with dark hair, wearing a white long-sleeved sweater and blue jeans, is sitting on a white mat on a wooden floor. He is focused on stacking a tower of pink rectangular blocks. In the background, there is a wooden shelf with various items, and the head of another child is visible in the foreground. The overall scene is a classroom or play area.

# LEARNING FROM HOME

## A Handbook for Parents

This handbook is not intended to create a contract. The school reserves the right to modify, at any time, any of the policies described or privileges granted.

Stepping Stones Montessori School admits students of any race, color, gender, national or ethnic origin, religion, family structure, sexual orientation or gender identity to all the rights, privileges, programs and activities of the school. It does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender, national or ethnic origin, religion, family structure, sexual orientation or gender identity in the administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs and athletic and other school-administered programs.

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Many Thanks to the Montessori School of Tokyo for their support in the creation of this school resource.

## Learning from A Montessori Perspective

When embarking on a time of learning from home, our aim is to create a Montessori-based framework that serves our students while supporting parents as we all adapt to a different daily routine. It is important to us that the children's activity during this time be enjoyable, thoughtful, challenging, and rewarding.

Replicating what happens in our classrooms is not something we can achieve during this period. Our goal is to work in collaboration with families to keep alive the culture of learning that is unique to Montessori and provide families with support and activities that match the developmental needs and characteristics of each child in our community.

### HOW DO WE ESTABLISH THIS AT HOME?

The Montessori method is all about the process. While completion of work is important, it is our approach that makes all the difference. Learning is most effective when it is within a greater context. When we connect subjects and concepts, we establish meaning which fuels motivation in students. Above all, we want children to feel connected to their learning, not simply "complete assignments" while at home.

Learning together with a sense of exploration, curiosity and discovery results in deeper and more meaningful experiences for children. This instils a great sense of ownership and responsibility for the child.

It is important to us that we maintain a feeling of connectedness through this process. We will be in regular contact in a variety of ways and continued communication between teachers and families throughout the period of closure is assured. The guidelines in this Handbook outline how Stepping Stones Montessori School's faculty, administration, and staff will support all our families throughout this period.



# The Prepared Environment



For our younger students, the learning environment is your home and surroundings. This means finding ways to support independence, engage in meaningful tasks and supplement learning through various activities suggested by teachers.

For our Upper Elementary and Adolescent Program students, this will mean all of the above, plus establishing a quiet space, expectations and routines for any specific assignments shared by teachers. Where age-appropriate you might like to discuss learning from home with your child and include them in some decision-making processes:

- Ask them where to set up their space (if applicable)
- Make a schedule together that works for your family (when to take breaks / have time outdoors etc.)
- Gather ideas for activities and projects
- Organize materials

For our older students, it will be important for them to maintain their routine of handing in work and receiving feedback from their teachers. Overall, we can approach this as an opportunity to be creative and collaborative—we are here to support you through this process.

## Practical Life

Practical life is an important part of experiential learning. It is part of every Montessori classroom and can be mirrored at home. These activities assist students in developing purposeful life skills for their continued growth and development. This includes refining fine motor and movement skills and practicing coordination, planning and problem solving. Practical life activities:

- foster order and sequence.
- develop concentration.
- foster physical independence.
- foster the development of fine motor control; and
- provide opportunities for planning and carrying out tasks.

*The Practical Life area also provides children with opportunities to contribute to family life.* Inherent in these activities is the development of key executive functions: decision making, organization, problem-solving, impulse control, collaboration and communication. These skills form the foundation of a child's academic learning. For example, sequencing a task is a pre-reading skill.

Examples of practical life might include:

- setting the table;
- watering plants;
- tidying and organizing rooms;
- planning an outing;
- taking care of pets;
- preparing a snack/meal;
- helping with shopping lists/budgeting; or
- planting a small urban garden.



Practical life is engaging for children at all stages of development and tasks are designed according to their level of coordination and independence. You can organize a job chart or list of family projects as a way to help guide your child's interests. Planning and gathering resources to complete the tasks is purposeful work. These ideas foster a sense of contribution, responsibility, shared experiences and satisfaction.

As our children get older, these activities lead naturally to volunteer experiences and beginnings of community work. For our oldest adolescents, many of these practical life experiences are the foundation of their sense of belonging and personal vision.

# The Uninterrupted Work Cycle

Establishing a routine that works for your family is an essential first step to creating a successful learning environment at home. Children are very familiar with this framework from school. In a Montessori classroom, children are given large blocks of time in order to explore their work deeply. This contributes directly to the development of concentration and provides opportunities to collaborate and problem-solve. It is the framework that fosters child-centered as opposed to teacher-directed learning.

## **OWNERSHIP OF TASKS AND SHARING IN LEARNING**

Montessori learning environments are often referred to as “optimal learning environments” because of the inherent skills and outcomes that result from being in a rich and interesting classroom, coupled with the dynamic of interactions amongst peers and teachers.

In order to foster a deep sense of ownership in their learning, we focus on two things: the developmental needs and characteristics of the child and their interests. Here are a few key points that aid in cultivating a child’s self-direction and attention to their work:

- Choice
- Participation in planning and organizing tasks
- Conversation
- Finding good resources
- Sharing of knowledge

You will be receiving regular communications from your child’s classroom teachers in the coming weeks. We encourage parents to follow teacher suggestions and guidance when completing work at home. The more children are involved in developing and detailing their activities, the more they can achieve.

### *A note regarding sharing and presenting work:*

It is a regular occurrence in an Elementary (or older) classroom for children to present their work or projects to one another. This can be replicated at home. Planning a presentation or sharing time at the end of a project is very exciting for young children and gives our older students an opportunity to use their voice. It is an essential part of the learning process as it requires synthesis of learning to describe, explain and express yourself clearly. It feels celebratory as well!

## Responsibility and Contribution to Community

Being in a Montessori school is often described by students as being part of a big family. All of the aspects detailed above result in a feeling of belonging to a community and with that, we learn that there is a responsibility to ourselves, others and the environment. It is our commitment to each child at Stepping Stones Montessori School that they reach their fullest potential and feel that they are a valued part of our community.





## Toddlers

### OWNERSHIP OF TASKS AND SHARING IN LEARNING

Routine and consistency are very important for your toddler.

#### Morning

Wake up and assist in making bed. Use the bathroom, brush teeth. Make breakfast with your child, eat and clean up.

Rotate through activities one at a time for an hour and a half. Have a few choices of activities for children to choose from. Remember to make time for a bathroom break.

#### Mid-Morning

Snack Break: children can set the table, eat, and clean up.

#### Late Morning

Work time (indoor or outdoor) for an hour.  
Read stories, sing songs, listen to music and singalong.

#### Lunch

Set up for lunch and have lunch. Clean up and use the bathroom. Outside play time if the weather is appropriate, for at least 30 minutes.

#### Afternoon

Use the bathroom and take a nap for 2 hours. Wake up and use the bathroom.  
Listen to music and look at books.

It is important to continue toilet independence during this time at home. The teachers will be in touch with you to help guide you with each child's toileting pattern.

# Toddler Program Expectations

## **STUDENTS MAY BE EXPECTED TO:**

- Enjoy family life with developmentally appropriate contributions.

## **PARENTS ARE INVITED TO:**

- Remain mindful and respectful about the growing self-esteem and sense of independence that your child is developing.
- Help your child with the hardest part of a task (not the whole task).
- Initiate verbal communication frequently, ask question, share concerns and observations.
- Be consistent; follow routines and clear sequences for each activity.
- Limit screen time.
- Include your child in household chores.
- Provide opportunities for outdoor activities (gross motor skill development).
- Let go of perfection. What you are experiencing now is not the final goal, it is foundational.
- Enjoy and appreciate time with your child.

## **TODDLER TEACHERS WILL:**

- Initiate individual support and communications based on each child's needs.
- Provide detailed updates and consultation (as required) regarding toilet learning, sleeping habits, and activities (fine or gross motor).
- Share current class routines and suggest guidance in setting up daily routines at home.
- Share guidelines and suggestions for screen time.
- Share general and individual suggestions for activities for fine and gross motor skills, providing pictures, videos, and materials for parent viewing as appropriate.
- Provide suggestions for books and songs to support language acquisition.
- Provide videos of teachers singing and performing hand actions to well-loved class songs.
- Share suggestions for practical life activities at home such as recipes, food prep, house chores, clothing tips, etc.
- Be responsive to parent questions and available to offer guidance and tips for activities or any other element of support for your child's development.

## Toddler Program Expectations

*“A place for everything and everything in its place” is one of the critical principles of Montessori at home. Having a place for everything, on a child-friendly scale, means that children know where to find what they need, and have a place to put things when they’re done. This is an essential tool in teaching them to be responsible for their belongings. External order gives the children internal order and security. An ordered environment also has fewer distractions, allowing children to focus on the task at hand.*

Have a place in each room for your child’s carefully chosen belongings: by the front door have a stool to sit on and a place to hang coats and keep shoes. In the living room have a place for your child’s books and toys – neatly and attractively organized. Think out the activities and materials for all living spaces and arrange the environment to include your child’s activities.

- Store clothing in low drawers or baskets, as well as move the rod in the closet down to eye-level so your child can reach their clothing.
- Place step stools in both the kitchen and bathroom to enable them to wash their hands and, in the case of the kitchen, help with meal preparation.
- Place toys, games and art supplies on low shelves where your child can easily access them, then separate these toys into various baskets, bins or shelves, so the items stay separate and are easy to find without sifting through piles of other toys.
- Store healthy snacks down low in your refrigerator or pantry so your child can help themselves.
- Keep beverages in small pitchers located on the lower shelf in the fridge, with child-friendly cups nearby. When your child is thirsty, allow them to help themselves — just be sure to keep a sponge/ some rags nearby, so they can clean up any messes they make.
- Don’t put out too many toys and books at one time. Those being used by your child at the moment are sufficient. Rotating is a good idea – taking out those books and toys that have not been chosen lately and removing them to storage for a time. Children grow and change and they need help to keep their environment uncluttered and peaceful.

# Activities for Toddlers at Home

## PRACTICAL LIFE

- Food Preparation
  - Preparing their own snack: cutting half of an apple (cut horizontally) using an apple slicer, squeezing orange juice, spreading cream cheese or jam on half of a bagel or bread.
  - Slicing vegetables and fruit for snack and dinner.
  - Baking: have ingredients pre-measured and in jars.
- Care of Self
  - Dressing and Undressing: give your child enough time to practice dressing and undressing by themselves.
  - Toileting: It's important to continue with the toilet learning process.
- Care of Environment
  - Mopping, sweeping, or use of a dustpan and dust brush.
  - Helping with laundry.
  - Watering plants and leaf washing.
  - Window washing, dusting, and wood polishing of large furniture in the home.
  - Taking care of pets.
  - Loading and unloading dishwasher, dishwashing by hand.

## ART WORK

- Coloring, painting, collage, playdough, sidewalk chalk.

## OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

- It is always fun for children to spend time with their parents in nature. So take some time out of your busy schedule to explore outdoors with your child. I guarantee, you'd enjoy the experience as well as your children would. Here are a few ideas for connecting your child with nature:
- If you have 15 minutes:
  - Watch the clouds and see what animals you can make out of them.
  - Hug some trees and try to find one that your arms fit perfectly around.
  - Turn over a rock and see what is hiding underneath.
- If you have 30 minutes:
  - Do a backyard/nature treasure hunt.
  - Try your hand at rock stacking.
  - Grab some leaves or pieces of bark and race them down a creek.
- If you have an hour:
  - Go for a walk and make note of all the sounds you hear.
  - Find a nature trail and help children make up a game or collect bugs or leaves.
  - Pack some food and have a picnic.

## LANGUAGE

- Naming things in both indoor and outdoor environments.
- Read together: let your child choose the books, talk about how the characters might be feeling and wonder together what will happen next. Reading with your child teaches more than literacy and language skills. He is learning that you value his interests and choices, and that you love him and enjoy being close to him. Studies show that lifelong readers are those who, as children, simply found reading a pleasurable experience.
- Singing songs and do finger- plays
- Narrate what you do as you go through your daily routines.
- This helps your child connect words with objects and actions. "I'm washing the dishes. I'm squeezing the yellow dish soap into the warm water."

All these activities will help limit screen time.



# Preschool

## SUGGESTED DAILY SCHEDULE FOR PRESCHOOL

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <b>Early Morning</b> | Set up and clean up breakfast, load dishwasher.<br>Basic chores: collect dirty clothes, sort laundry, help load washing machine. Prepare morning snack (place in accessible area to be eaten later), clean up. |
| <b>Mid-Morning</b>   | Uninterrupted work cycle. Children should engage in activities to practice skills for practical life, sensorial work, language, or math.   |
| <b>Lunch</b>         | Prepare (set up, clean up) lunch.<br>Quiet Time: this may include nap, reading books, handwork, reflective time. No screen time.   |
| <b>Afternoon</b>     | Afternoon work time. Include time for care of the environment and preparation for the next day's work.   |

Preparations for the next day and chores can be performed throughout the day. Activities can be modified according to child's readiness and developmental needs.

# Preschool Program **Expectations**

## **STUDENTS MAY BE EXPECTED TO:**

- Enjoy family life with developmentally appropriate contributions.

## **PARENTS ARE INVITED TO:**

- Remain mindful about your child's stress or worries during this time of change.
- Monitor communication about your child from your teachers.
- Initiate communication with teachers about questions, ideas, concerns, or feedback.
- Support your child's independence in daily life activities.
- Be mindful of and allow children to continue periods of concentration.
- Establish daily routines and expectations.
- Limit screen time.
- Provide opportunities for daily physical activity.

## **PRESCHOOL TEACHERS WILL:**

- Initiate individual communications based on student needs.
- Give guidance in setting up a daily routine.
- Make suggestions for appropriate house chores.
- Offer guidelines and suggestions for screen time.
- Provide both general and individual suggestions for activities developing fine motor skills, gross motor skills, language, and math.
- Be prompt in replying to your emails if you need additional guidance and support.

## **PROGRAM-SPECIFIC NEEDS AND CHARACTERISTICS**

- Children aged 3 to 6 thrive in environments that promote repetition, routine and the mastery of purposeful movement.
- Allow your child to choose activities and give the opportunity for periods of time without distractions.
- The key to a successful learning environment is order, access to tactile resources, space to explore and meaningful activity. For the Primary child, work and play should be interchangeable—a natural, fun and exciting part of life.

## PRACTICAL LIFE

- Ages 3 to 4:
  - Meal or Snack Preparation: slicing vegetables, fruit, cheese, etc.
  - Baking: measuring and mixing ingredients.
  - Kitchen Care: loading and unloading the dishwasher, washing dishes by hand, sweeping floors.
  - Pet Care: walking, playing with, and grooming.
  - Dusting: the leaves of plants with a soft cloth or furniture around the house.
  - Nature walks in the yard or about the neighborhood with a list of things to find.
  - Walking on the Line: make a masking tape line throughout the house and walk carefully on the line.
  - Art: coloring, painting, collage, sidewalk chalk.
  - Cutting and gluing - for example find and cut all the plants in a magazine, glue into a collage.
  - Sewing shapes/pictures onto napkins, hand/kitchen towels, etc.
- Ages 5 to 6 — Any of the above plus:
  - Cutting (advance searches: mammals, birds, amphibians, etc.)
  - Baking: reading, measuring and mixing simple recipes.
  - Handwork: crocheting, finger knitting, or sewing words, initials, or pictures on napkins, hand towels, etc.
  - Origami

## SENSORIAL

- Ages 3 to 4:
  - Exploring the home for 2 dimensional shapes (rectangles, squares, circles, etc.).
  - Exploring the home for 3 dimensional shapes (spheres, cylinders, cones, cubes, prisms).
  - Explore the home for textures that are rough or smooth.
  - Exploring sound by tapping on different objects (pot, glass, wooden cutting board, etc.) with different objects as well (tap with a metal spoon, then a wooden spoon).
- Ages 5 to 6:
  - Exploring spices and attempting to recognize them by scent.
  - Comparing the various shapes of leaves found amongst the house plants.
  - Drawing a picture that includes certain shapes i.e., 1 circle and 3 rectangles, or 1 square and 4 triangles).



## LANGUAGE

- Ages 3 to 4:
  - Sound Games/I-spy: Something that begins with the sound /s/.
  - Question Game: Have a conversation using who/what/when/where/why questions.
  - Singing new songs (different languages).
  - Tracing shapes, letters in flour (pour flour in a cookie sheet).
- Ages 5 to 6:
  - Write a letter to a friend or family member to mail.
  - Assist in writing list of things to do for a day or a week.
  - Write a story or a play and read aloud or act out when finished.

## MATHEMATICS

- Ages 3 to 4:
  - Scavenger hunt/counting objects collected.
  - Counting objects (beans, pennies, etc.).
  - Sorting laundry.
  - Sorting silverware.
- Ages 5 to 6:
  - Hopscotch math—all operations can be done, just make your hopscotch go higher than 10.
  - Math facts with dice.



## Resources for Families

### Arts and Craft Activities

- Easy Peasy and Fun
- Left Brain Craft Brain

### Podcasts for Children

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| • The Big Life Kids Podcast   | • Sparkle Stories                               |
| • Wow in the World  | • Earth Rangers                                 |
| • Forever Ago   | • Myths and Legends                             |
| • But Why: A podcast for curious kids                               | • Peace Out                                     |
| • Pants on Fire   | • Story Time                                    |
| • Tumble  | • What if World                                 |
| • Circle Round  | • Brains On!                                    |
| • Reading Bug Adventures  | • Short & Curly                                 |
| • Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls                                | • Classic Kids                                  |
| • The Purple Rocket Podcast   | • The Alien Adventures of Finn Caspian          |
| • Fierce Girls  | • The Unexplainable Disappearance of Mars Patel |
| • The Past and The Curious: A History Podcast for Kids and Families | • News Time                                     |

# Frequently Asked Questions

## ***When and how can I reach my child's teacher?***

Email remains the best way to contact a teacher. If you wish to speak to a teacher, please use email to set up a time for a phone call. Be aware that teachers calling from their personal cell phones have been asked to block their number for privacy.

## ***When can I expect a response?***

In most cases, you can expect a response to emails within 24 hours, excluding weekends and planned school breaks.

## ***How much communication can I expect from the school?***

The administration office will communicate with you directly should there be any updates on the COVID-19 situation that might have a direct impact on school operations. The frequency of communication from your child's teacher will vary depending on each program.

## ***Can teachers tutor students individually online?***

In most cases, no. Teachers will be connecting with families on a class level, and sharing suggestions, feedback, and expectations on an individualized or small group level where necessary. Some video conferencing may be utilized for our older students.

## ***How much technology will be used?***

This will vary greatly depending on the age of the students. Teachers will share information with families via email. Staff may utilize online video conferencing in certain circumstances. Your classroom teachers will share more information with you in due course.

## ***How will the school keep me informed on the closure?***

All closure updates and plans to reopen will be communicated via email (Mailchimp).

## ***Will we get a reimbursement of tuition fees?***

Stepping Stones Montessori School is operating in accordance with recommendations made by government officials given these exceptional circumstances. As such, there will be no reimbursement of tuition fees offered. Teachers continue to work both onsite and remotely to support families and offer the best education services we can under these challenging circumstances.

## ***What support will be provided to children whose parents both work full-time?***

It would be unrealistic and counter-productive in the circumstances for Stepping Stones Montessori School to provide childcare for all working families. We understand that a sudden school closure is an inconvenience for all. If any Stepping Stones Montessori School family finds themselves in an emergency or in truly exceptional circumstances, please contact us. We may be able to help or connect you with other families who would be willing to do so.

*“We discovered that education is not something which the **TEACHER** does, but that it is A natural process which develops spontaneously in the **HUMAN** being.”*

- Dr Maria Montessori

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