



MMI CONNECT

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ADAPTING TO LIFE: THE PRACTICAL LIFE WAY

"Any child who is self-sufficient, who can tie his shoes, dress or undress himself, reflects in his joy and sense of achievement the image of human dignity, which is derived from a sense of independence."

—Maria Montessori (1956), *The Child in the Family*

As parents or caregivers, we instinctively attend to our children's



every need during their first year of life. We feed them, provide clothing and other self-help skills like bathing just as we were cared for by our parents.

On the contrary, Montessori asserts everything that we do for the child that he can do for himself is an obstacle to his development. She adds, *"Help me to do it myself!"* is the battle cry of every child.

Nevertheless, it is the desire of all parents for their children to achieve and aspire greatness. As parents we want them to become orient to the world where they can gain a conscious, cohesive and purposeful involvement in every day.

Montessori advocates that the most practical way of attaining the desire that we set for our children is by facilitating them to have direct contact with real-life physical objects and activities

Practical Life Exercises

Based on her observation, Dr. Maria Montessori affirms that children are naturally curious and want to participate in the activities of daily life. Hence, Montessori designed Practical Life activities that help children develop life skills that directly enhance their self-worth, intelligence, independence, and become fully functional members of their community.

Practical Life exercises allow children to adapt themselves to their immediate environment. Practical life exercises are formative activities which involve inspiration, repetition, and concentration on precise details.

In other words, Practical Life is any physical activity that helps a child grow in motor skills, cognitive skills, self-confidence and development of his disposition. It helps the child achieve independence and mastery of his environment.

"mind in the making" needs to be fed just as the child's body needs to be fed.

*Dr Elisabeth Caspari (1899- 2002)
The disciple of Maria Montessori*

Sitting up, crawling, walking, grasping a toy are practical life skills for infants. He is preparing himself to become an explorer of his surroundings.

Dressing, brushing teeth, washing face and hands, eating properly and greeting others are practical life skills that prepare him for life. Being able to take care of himself not only enhances his self-confidence but also freedom. Montessori tells us that *"Real freedom is a consequence of development"* (Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*). Practical Life develops the child's senses and teaches real-life skills, It sets the basic foundation for the development of other areas in the future. Perhaps most significant is the development of the pincer grip, which allows the child to correctly grip a pencil for writing. Montessori's Practical Life exercises are distinctively categorized into four areas;



1. Social Grace and Courtesy

Montessori consider it as the most important category of Practical Life exercises. The main aim of the exercises under this category is to develop courteous behaviour in them and self-discipline. *"He does not inherit already established models of behaviour which guarantee him success."* Paula Lillard, *Montessori A Modern approach*

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Hence, children need to be guided on social grace and courtesy. Silence game, greeting and other social activities in this category provides daily opportunities to practice patience, tolerance, and receiving or offering assistance. 'She believes that children attain self-worth in any environments if they have attained social norms.

2. Care of Self

Montessori asserts when the child can exercise care of self-skills, independence is attained. Care of self includes personal hygiene skills such as washing and drying of hands, brushing and combing of hair, cleaning and cutting of nails, blowing one's nose and dressing and undressing.

3. Control of Movement

Montessori includes this category to enhance their fine motor skills, eye-hand coordination and concentration. Exercises includes opening and closing of bottles, boxes; cutting with scissors; screwing and unscrewing of nuts and bolts, sewing, pasting, weaving and plaiting.

4. Care of the Environment

Care of Environment activities such as sweeping, opening and closing and washing a table are designed to make children socially responsible. The activities in this category prepare children indirectly for mathematical concepts such as volume and capacity while they refine their fine motor skills, eye-hand coordination and concentration in carrying out the exercises. Some of the exercises are pouring, transferring, cleaning and polishing.

The Silence Game

Montessori devised the '*Being Silent*' activity for the refinement of children's control of movement. The idea for the game came about when Montessori observed how impressed the children in her class were by the superiority of stillness and delicacy of movement of a sleeping infant who was brought into the classroom in San Lorenzo, Italy.



Montessori advocates that silence refines a child's motor skills, expand his observation of things inside and outside that are not usually perceived, gives him a sense of participation in a communal effort and for some children, an entrance into the realm of spirituality.

Furthermore, Montessori believes being silent suggest to a child intuitively, the significance of his presence in the world. Being silence reaches the edge of a deep metaphysical precipice, from which he can momentarily peer into the bottomless space of non-existence. Tottering there, he affirms in contrast to that emptiness the fullness and tangibility of his own body – heart beating and chest swelling with life.

Montessori believes with an awareness of self-existence, silence lets the outer edges of perception reach in from a far-off distance – bird sounds and rumbles and unidentifiable clicks and cries from the far edges of the world – and the child feels a smallness, but solidness, amid a vast expanse. This relation of the self (as one being) to the whole universe (as all Being) is the essence of spirituality. Hence, Montessori believes being silent will be a mystical experience as well.



Silence Begins with You!

Use your quiet, confident tone of voice when you speak to your child. Besides inculcating internal calmness, your quiet voice has significant implications for encouraging a sense of self-worth in your child.

Every Practical Life exercise that you provide your child brings him closer to mastery of life skills. A little time, space and patience now entrail to a confident, independent and happy child. Nothing quite compares to the pride on his face – and in your heart – when you work and succeed together!



TIPS ON SETTING UP PRACTICAL LIFE AT HOME

Cultural: Practical life activities should reflect your culture. For example, if there are no windows in the environment there should be no window cleaning exercise.

Natural Materials: Natural materials offer more opportunities for multi-sensorial experiences. They are aesthetically pleasing.

Real Materials: The activities need to be based in reality. We wash dirty dishes with real soapy water and cut fruit with a real knife.

Child-Sized: Materials: All furniture and materials in the environment must be child-size so that he can use it successfully.

Functional: All materials should have a clear purpose and function appropriately. All materials must be working and are not broken or damaged. The knife needs to cut. If the utensil does not do its intended task then the child will look for something else to do with it (inappropriate use) or will think that he is unable to do the task that he has seen so many others do.

One of Each: While there is no limit to the number of practical life activities you can offer your child, there should only be one of each activity. This helps your child to learn that he has to wait and life is not always about immediate gratification. As a result of this, the materials become more valued. You can always have spare activities in storage to swap out if one gets broken, but there should only be one on the shelf at a time.

Complete A Work Cycle: The activity needs to be complete. If something needs to be replaced at the end of the activity, you could show him how to re-stock the activity

Sequential: Each activity has a beginning, middle and end. One of the cues for beginning an activity can be placing (unrolling) a mat on the floor or table before carrying out the activity.

Proportional Items: The materials of an activity must be proportional to each other and functional in terms of size. For example, the bucket must be small enough for him to handle but big enough to hold all the water necessary for the exercise.

Self-Contained: The materials are contained in a basket, tray or set out on a stand in a particular space. All materials should be complete, prepared and ready for use. You are responsible to make sure the activity is prepared with everything he will need for successful completion of the activity.

Safety: While materials need to be functional the priority is safety. Use non-toxic materials. Sharp objects need to have rounded ends and corners that are sharp should be sanded or covered.