

Helping Your Child Start the Homeschool Day

In the Montessori classroom, there is a balance of freedom and responsibility. Children who have more responsibility on a given day also have more freedom. This is not a quantifiable constant for any child! It fluctuates from day to day, week to week, and sometimes hour to hour. Similarly, the children differ from each other for a variety of reasons, both seen and unseen.

Because the Montessori approach acknowledges that choice and productive work are both important parts of children's development, Montessori teachers are always considering how to give children as many choices as they can handle *but no more*, and also how much direction the children need to get engaged in work.

At home with your children, you are the adult making these determinations each day. It is not easy! The trained Directors are here to help you figure out how to guide your children, striking the balance between choices and leading them to work when they need your guidance.

When you have your weekly phone call with your child's Director, she will point out several activities from the available documents on the website, and perhaps some more specific ideas. Equipped with these activities, you can have a meeting with your child.

"I spoke to your teacher today. She misses you! She would like to see you do some interesting work this week. Here is the work you can do this week. You may also choose to do *other* productive work, but let's talk about it before you choose it to make sure it's good homeschool work. You do not need to finish every activity every day, but it is important that the children in our home are concentrating on work every morning."

There are some children who will not need more guidance than this. They will choose some or all of the suggestions to complete during the week and also will come up with their own productive work.

Some children will need more guidance, however. And many children will be very independent on some days but need more guidance on others. Others will be fine for part of the morning and need more guidance for the other part of the morning. This is all normal!

For these moments, you can add structure and limit their choices. You can start with the same script, but then add limitations.

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productive work, but let's talk about it before you choose it to make sure it's good homeschool work. You do not need to finish every activity, but it is important that the children in our home are concentrating on work every morning."

Then you will add:

"Today, you can choose between these two activities first thing in the morning." (*Note: It does not matter which two activities you choose! The point here is to connect them to an activity that will engage them.*)

You can give your child time to make the choice. They can sit right next to you while they are deciding, but they cannot choose to do other things. Their next activity will be to make a choice and do one of those suggestions for work. If they cannot make any choice at all, then you can choose for them.

After they make a choice and spend time with the work and clean it up and put it away, you can determine if they are ready to make a choice on their own. Perhaps now they will choose something else from the list, or they will choose to read, or they will choose another productive or engaging activity appropriate for homeschool (rake the yard, do a puzzle, bake cookies, name countries in an atlas). If they cannot, then you can help them balance their morning with gross motor, reflective, or practical life work, depending on what they chose before.

The next day, you will observe your child again. Does it seem like they can choose productive and peaceful work on their own? If they can, then let them start with their own self-direction. If they cannot, then choose two activities from the list of suggestions for them to choose between and repeat the process from the earlier day.

We do not want to take away a child's ability to self-direct with choice. This is why we are not prescribing a weekly curriculum for children at home. If we take away their choices, then we inhibit their drive, curiosity, and developing self-regulation. They need to work on what interests them and they need to live with the consequences of their choices.

However, work, in all of its forms, is also an important part of the Montessori curriculum. And this balance between choice and work is a constant and fluctuating one throughout the day. If your child is struggling to find work, then you can guide them more directly. But if your child is choosing to work on their own, then they do not need additional structure.

Please keep asking questions and communicating your specific issues to us. We are striving to meet the individual needs of each of your special and unique families!