



Seeing with New Eyes: A Parent's Guide to Montessori Observation

A Journey into Mindful Observation

Have you ever noticed your child giving you that curious look, as if they're discovering something profound about the world from their learning space? Welcome to a journey into the heart of Montessori parenting.

In the nurturing realm of Montessori philosophy, every interaction with a child is viewed as an opportunity for growth and discovery. Doctor Maria Montessori, a visionary in early childhood education, emphasized the profound impact of the environment on a child's natural development. For parents embarking on the wonderful journey of raising children following her principles, Montessori observation emerges as a cornerstone of understanding, connection, and fostering independence.¹

In a world where every moment can be a significant developmental step and every action offers insight into your child's unique mind, this guide will help you understand how thoughtful observation can transform your relationship with your child and support their journey toward joyful self-discovery.

Discovering the Natural Observer Within

Observation lies at the heart of the Montessori philosophy, serving as both a powerful tool for understanding and a path to deeper connection with your child. As Dr. Maria Montessori herself noted, the adult must become "a joyous observer" to truly support a child's development.²

In the Montessori approach, careful observation allows us to witness the natural unfolding of your child's unique potential. By watching without judgment, we gain invaluable insights into how your child engages with the world around them, revealing their interests, capabilities, and needs in authentic moments of discovery.

The Power of Objective Observation

True observation means seeing with fresh eyes, free from assumptions or preconceptions. Being objective means removing our preexisting knowledge, assumptions, and judgments to see our child anew. When we practice observation, we act as scientists studying our children with genuine curiosity.³

Objective observation focuses on what can be directly seen, heard, and measured:

- Descriptions of specific actions and movements
- Direct quotes of a child's language
- Observations of facial expressions and gestures
- Details about creations (like block structures or artwork)
- Patterns in repetition and concentration

This objective approach differs from subjective interpretations that center around our own assumptions or perspectives. For example, an objective statement would note exactly how many times a child repeated an activity, rather than making assumptions about what they like. When we observe objectively, we might describe precisely how a child stacked blocks rather than simply concluding they enjoy building.³

Subjective observation examples:	Objective observation examples:
Eddie is probably upset because Sandy took the dinosaur from him.	Sandy took the dinosaur from Eddie.
Eli loves to color. He was too excited and accidentally broke the brown crayon while coloring the picture	Eli broke the brown crayon while coloring the picture.
Malcolm was frustrated and moved to another table with his workbook.	Malcolm collected his workbook and moved to another table.

Why Observation Transforms the Learning Journey

Thoughtful observation offers numerous benefits for both teachers and parents:

- Reveals authentic interests and abilities:** Discovering what naturally captures your child's attention
- Identifies developmental transitions:** Recognizing when your child is ready for new challenges
- Guides appropriate support:** Understanding when to step in with guidance and when to step back
- Builds deeper connections:** Developing a more profound understanding of your child's unique mind
- Supports independence:** Recognizing opportunities to foster self-directed learning⁴

Observation is a tool for better understanding our children, seeing things through their eyes, and determining how best to support them.

What to Observe: A Parent's Guide

When observing your child, consider these key developmental areas:

Movement & Coordination

How does your child use their hands and fingers? Look for: Precision grip when using pencils, controlled movements when pouring water, careful placement of puzzle pieces

What patterns do you notice in their larger movements? Look for: Walking along a line, carrying objects without dropping them, balanced climbing

How do they maintain balance and posture? Look for: Sitting upright at a table, natural posture during floor work, stability when reaching

Communication

What sounds, words, and sentences does your child use? Look for: Expanding vocabulary, increasing sentence complexity, appropriate voice volume for different contexts

How do they employ gestures and facial expressions? Look for: Pointing to indicate interest, nodding or shaking head with intention, facial expressions matching verbal messages

When and how do they initiate communication? Look for: Approaching others with questions, sharing observations, expressing needs clearly

Cognitive Development

What activities hold your child's focus the longest? Look for: Extended periods with a single material, returning to particular activities across days, deep concentration during specific types of work

How do they approach problem-solving? Look for: Trial and error exploration, pausing to consider options, applying previous learning to new challenges

What patterns of repetition do you notice? Look for: Practicing activities until mastery, repeating successful strategies, gradually increasing challenge level

Social Development

How does your child interact with different people? Look for: Turn-taking, offering help to others, adjusting communication style based on the listener

What social scenarios bring them joy or challenge? Look for: Engagement in group activities, comfort in new social settings, strategies for resolving conflicts

How do they observe and learn from others? Look for: Watching peers before attempting new activities, imitating positive behaviors, asking questions about others' approaches

Emotional Development

What triggers different emotional responses? Look for: Specific circumstances that lead to frustration, activities that consistently bring joy, transitions that may cause anxiety

How does your child express various emotions? Look for: Verbal naming of feelings, body language that indicates emotional states, ability to communicate needs when upset

What self-regulation strategies are emerging? Look for: Taking deep breaths when frustrated, seeking quiet space when overwhelmed, using words instead of physical reactions

Independence

Which tasks does your child tackle without assistance? Look for: Self-dressing, preparing simple foods, gathering materials for an activity

How do they respond when facing challenges? Look for: Persistence with difficult tasks, asking for specific help rather than giving up, showing satisfaction after overcoming obstacles

What self-care abilities are developing? Look for: Hand-washing routines, organizing personal belongings, recognizing and meeting bodily needs⁵

Becoming a Skilled Observer: Practical Wisdom**Create Space for Observation**

- Set aside regular time for undistracted observation
- Position yourself where you can see without interfering
- Resist the urge to direct or interrupt natural exploration

Find a cozy, distraction-free space for watching your child and stay fully present in the moment. Observe at different times throughout the day, as children's behavior naturally varies.⁶

Practice Objective Noting

- Focus on describing rather than interpreting
- Record specific details rather than general impressions
- Notice patterns across multiple observation sessions

Writing down your observations helps maintain focus and creates a record you can revisit over time. Consider keeping a simple journal to document your child's development journey.³

Partner with Your Child's Teachers

- Share observations between home and school
- Collaborate on understanding developmental patterns
- Use shared observations to create consistent support

This partnership creates a more complete picture of your child's development. Montessori guides use observation to learn about their students, gain insight into developmental phases, inform decision-making, and assess children's mastery of skills.⁷

Observation at Home: Strengthening Family Bonds

Bringing observation practice into your home creates powerful opportunities for deeper connection:

Building Understanding: Through careful observation, you'll develop insight into your child's unique learning style, interests, and needs, allowing you to offer precisely the right support at the right moment.⁶

Creating Responsive Environments: Your observations will reveal which materials and activities most engage your child, helping you prepare spaces that invite exploration and discovery.⁸

Celebrating Growth: By observing objectively, you'll notice subtle developments that might otherwise go unrecognized, allowing you to acknowledge and celebrate your child's ongoing journey.⁶

Fostering Trust: When children feel truly seen and understood, they develop deeper trust and security, strengthening your connection and creating space for authentic self-expression.⁹

From Observation to Guidance: The Montessori Approach

In Montessori environments, careful observation forms the foundation for thoughtful guidance:

The Observer's Stance

- Watch with genuine curiosity and wonder
- Resist the impulse to interrupt concentration
- Notice without judgment or expectation

The Guide's Response

- Offer support based on observed needs
- Present new challenges at the right developmental moment
- Step back to allow independent mastery

The vital role of the adult is to provide and gently guide the child through a setting filled with enriched language and movement opportunities. As Dr. Maria Montessori noted, "The greatest sign of success for a teacher is to be able to say, 'The children are now working as if I did not exist.'"¹⁰



Resources for Your Family's Journey

Online Resources:

[The Montessori Notebook](#)

[Montessori Edited](#)

[Guide and Grow](#)

Books:

The Montessori Toddler by Simone Davies

The Child in the Family by Maria Montessori

Montessori from the Start by Paula Polk Lillard and Lynn Lillard Jessen



By embracing the practice of observation, you're not only supporting your child's natural development but also deepening your connection and understanding of their unique learning journey. Through this practice, we honor Maria Montessori's vision of education as "a natural process spontaneously carried out by the human individual...not acquired by listening to words but by experiences upon the environment."

Citations

1. Montessori Edited. (2023). *How Montessori Observation Builds Strong Foundations: A Guide for Parents*.
2. Montessori, M. (1949). *The Absorbent Mind*. Adyar, Madras: The Theosophical Publishing House.
3. The Montessori Notebook. (2023). *Everything you need to know about Montessori observation and why it's helpful*.
4. Guide and Grow. (2022). *How and Why to Observe Your Child: Back to the Montessori Basics*.
5. Montessori Guide. (2020). *The Child's Work*.
6. Montessori Edited. (2024). *Montessori Observation*.
7. Hollis Montessori School. (2019). *Montessori Basics: Observation*.
8. The Montessori Family. (2019). *How to observe your child the Montessori way + free handout*.
9. Montessori Parenting. (2021). *Observation*.
10. Montessori, M. (1948). *The Discovery of the Child*. Madras, India: Kalakshetra Publications.
11. Guide and Grow. (2022). *How and Why to Observe Your Child: Back to the Montessori Basics*.
12. Montessori, M. (1946). *Education for a New World*. Madras, India: Kalakshetra Publications.