

Family Connection

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“Our work is not to teach, but to help the absorbent mind in its work of development. How marvelous it would be if by our help, if by an intelligent treatment of the child, if by understanding the needs of his physical life and by feeding his intellect, we could prolong the period of functioning of the absorbent mind!”

—Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*

THE ABSORBENT MIND

BY HEATHER WHITE

Young children learn to speak their native language with such ease. Typically, no one teaches them the vocabulary, the grammar, or the syntax; it just happens organically.

Anyone who has tried to learn a second language later in life knows it is no easy feat, yet so many young children do it effortlessly. How? Through the absorbent mind.

What is the absorbent mind?

From birth through approximately age six, the young child experiences a period of intense mental activity that allows them to “absorb” learning from their environment quickly and easily without conscious effort. Maria Montessori referred to this ability as the absorbent mind.

Children not only absorb language during these first few years of life but also the traits and customs of their families and communities. They learn how to behave in certain situations and how and what to eat. The entire world is new and fascinating for them, and every moment is an opportunity for learning.

The child is growing not only physically but also spiritually. They are working to become a human being. It is now that a child forms the basis of their personality.

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THE ABSORBENT MIND IS DIVIDED INTO TWO STAGES:

THE UNCONSCIOUS STAGE 0-3 years of age

During this stage, the young child absorbs information unknowingly. They learn to sit, stand, walk, and speak without conscious effort. A child during this period often mimics what they see and hear.

THE CONSCIOUS STAGE 3-6 years of age

Around the age of 3, consciousness begins to emerge. The young child still has a sponge-like mind that easily absorbs information, but now they will seek out certain experiences. They are drawn to order, sequencing, music, numbers, and letter sounds, laying the foundation for later math, reading, and writing skills. The child begins to demonstrate a strong desire to be independent at this time.

How does the absorbent mind fit into the Montessori Method?

The concept of the absorbent mind emphasizes that young children learn through experiencing the world and interacting with objects. Based on this premise, Montessori classrooms are created as prepared environments within which carefully curated materials are arranged in such a way as to invite exploration and interaction.

Supporting the child with an absorbent mind

There is often a lot of pressure placed on parents and caregivers in helping their children succeed. This often leads to purchasing more materials, enrolling children in more extracurricular activities, and attending more events. Although there is nothing wrong with these things, it can sometimes cause parents to feel guilty and overwhelmed that they are not doing enough with and for their child.

In these moments, remember the absorbent mind. A young child learns in each and every moment of every day. Whether they are attending a local festival, reading a book at the library, or just splashing in a puddle in the backyard, they are learning and growing. As Dr. Montessori reminds us, “The only thing the absorbent mind needs is the life of the individual; give him life and an environment and he will absorb all that is in it.” So, focus on spending time with the child and being present because their absorbent mind is soaking up each and every moment, too!

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KIDS IN THE KITCHEN:

8 Tips for Cooking with Your Child

By Heather White

Cooking is one of the best sensorial experiences for young children. It also helps develop fine and gross motor skills, enhances language and math skills, and encourages healthy eating habits. For young children, though, getting involved in the kitchen just looks like fun!

While it may take a little more time to prepare and a bit more flexibility on the adult's part, allowing children to help out in the kitchen is so worth it! With the right expectations, this time spent together can create memories to last a lifetime.

Here are 8 helpful tips for cooking with a young child:

Involve them in the planning process

Look at a cookbook together and let the child choose a recipe they would like to make. Then ask them to help write a shopping list of necessary ingredients.

Take them grocery shopping

Ask the child to help find the items on the grocery list. This active involvement will make children more likely to want to eat the food they helped select.

Encourage and support their independence

Find activities that the child can do completely on their own. Even very young children can help with things like washing fruits and vegetables, sprinkling cheese on

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a pizza, or using a cookie cutter to cut shapes into rolled dough. As a child’s fine motor skills and attention span continues to develop, progress to activities like cracking eggs, squeezing lemons, and grating cheese.

Keep things simple

Children can become easily distracted, so it is helpful to plan simple 5 to 10 minute cooking activities that are fun and engaging.

Model for the child

Before allowing the child to try an activity on their own, model how to do it for them, allowing them to learn by watching.

Take time to prepare the environment

Introduce child-sized utensils and make sure the child is able to reach the cooking surface with either the support of a stool or a learning tower.

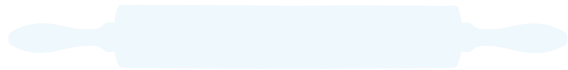
Involve them in the clean-up process

Model for the child how to wash and dry the dishes. Load and unload the dishwasher, and invite them to be involved in this part of the cooking process as well.

Allow messes and spills to become teachable moments

Have towels nearby to help clean up spills. Model this process for the child, and invite them to help.

Perhaps most importantly, have fun! The times spent cooking together will surely create memories that will last a lifetime.



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