The Walden School
Montessori-based, Preschool–Grade 5

Montessori Primary Philosophical FAQ's

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1. How do you encourage independence?

Care of Self:

Walden children develop initiative, independence, and persistence. This is a process over time, and it is helpful to be patient with children. When children show that they are capable, it is important to let them do things on their own. The following information includes skills that we encourage for all children and tips for parents to assist the process.

Self-Help Skills:

Children wash and dry their hands many times throughout the day, and it is important that they get all the germs off before they touch food or materials. We encourage students to scrub the front, back, and in between their fingers when washing. We have them sing a song (Happy Birthday or Twinkle Twinkle) when washing so they know they've done a thorough job. The same can be done for drying their hands.

Children are expected to be reasonably independent when using the bathroom. If your child is in progress and you have concerns, you can contact the school in August and ask to speak to your child's teacher. Many children have bathroom accidents at school. Teachers can only assist children when they are wet, otherwise parents will be called to come to school.

Taking care of personal belongings

- Taking off and hanging up their coat

- We teach students to flip their coats - where they lay their coat on the floor or table with the tag or collar closest to their toes, “tag to toes”. The student then puts their hands into the arms of the coat and flips it over their head.
- Unzipping, emptying, and carrying their own backpack
- Sneezing or coughing into their elbow and using a tissue
- Opening/closing their lunch box and their lunch containers
- Cleaning up after themselves and using the recycle and landfill bins
- Wiping a table with a sponge and sweeping the floor
- Quietly pushing in a chair

2. How is order maintained in a Montessori classroom?

Grace & Courtesy is an integral piece of the Montessori classroom. Montessori teachers teach respect and positive values through modeling and instruction together. The Montessori Method helps a child by showing them what to do in a positive manner and teaches them how to build a child up through positive reinforcement. We only have 2 rules - Safety & Respect - these rules apply to all accepted classroom behavior. They are taught respect by the positive manner in which respect is given to them and all children within the classroom community. We ask the children to use a quiet body and voice. The children are asked to return work the way they found it, so it is ready for the next person, and not to touch others’ work until it is returned to the shelf. We ask that they do one work at a time. Concentration is encouraged by the uninterrupted work cycle, and individual work is to reinforce focus and concentration. Group work encourages the older children to collaborate. Everything a child selects to do in the classroom is called “work”. It is a child’s job to learn and grow; giving this job the same respect as an adult’s profession is one of the most important ways Montessori teachers model respect and positive values.

The children are given lessons on how to treat one another, how to interrupt politely, and how to be good friends to each other. It usually helps to reassure a friend first: “I am going to be a good friend, and remind you that you need a mat for your work” or “I will work with you tomorrow, right now I want to work by myself”. Food serving work is another way to provide opportunities for practicing manners. The child who is serving the food learns appropriate language and learns to serve others first and enjoy the last piece after they have served their classmates. As children put their work away, they know that they are preparing the work for the next person. These Practical Life lessons in grace and courtesy contribute to building a strong classroom community. We teach peaceful conflict resolution

to solve problems in which all parties' concerns and solutions are valued. Emotional literacy and conflict resolution are skills practiced every day in every class at Walden. The children begin by noticing emotions and solving problems with words rather than by grabbing or hitting. In early childhood, children become less egocentric and need to practice verbal messages rather than being physical to solve difficulties. Like all academics, conflict resolution is learned through a process. It begins when the youngest classmates begin to verbalize emotions and are encouraged to "tell your friend how that made you feel". "I" messages are modeled... "When you (touch my work), I feel (frustrated)". After children become adept at expressing themselves, they become more competent at resolving conflicts.

The children use a peace object, such as a peace rose, passing it back and forth, allowing each to speak from their heart until the problem is worked out. The child works to master the ability to speak her mind while caring for the feelings of others.

Concerns may also be discussed with a large group of children. We guide the children to generate ideas and solutions, and then we narrow down the ideas until we find a solution that works for everyone.

3. How can I find out what my child is doing if they don't tell me?

In our Montessori classrooms, photos are an essential communication tool for teachers, parents, and staff throughout the school year. A good portion of learning in Montessori happens as children work with the hands-on manipulative Montessori materials, such as working with the Sandpaper Letters, Moveable Alphabet, Math Beads, and Geography Maps. Much of what Preschool and Kindergarten children accomplish in a Montessori classroom does not result in a tangible product that can be taken home or saved by the teacher, but rather a physical product that can only be observed in real time. Additionally, each student works at his own pace on his own chosen materials, so the whole class is not working on the same lesson at the same time, as is practiced at typical preschools. Capturing these moments to share them with parents gives you an accurate "window into the classroom" so you can be a part of your child's day at Walden even while you're not here. Pictures are posted on the Seesaw App to help parents understand the types of things their children are doing and learning.

We regularly hear from parents about how much they appreciate seeing these photos. Photos help prompt parents with talking points about their children's day, which is important because many students (especially the very young) don't always articulate what they did at school or what they are learning. You can also ask your child to tell you if anything made

them feel happy or surprised. Asking about emotions is a good way to get your child to open up. This helps you understand what happens in the classroom and gives you a point of reference when discussing your child's progress with his teachers. There are also family visitation days where parents and grandparents can spend time with their child in the classroom.

4. What if a child doesn't feel like working?

While Montessori students are allowed considerable latitude to pursue topics that interest them, this freedom is not absolute. Within every society, there are cultural norms; expectations for what a student should know and be able to do by a certain age. Experienced Montessori teachers are conscious of these standards and provide as much structure and support as is necessary to ensure that students live up to them. If, for some reason, it appears that a child needs time and support until he or she is developmentally ready, Montessori teachers provide it non-judgmentally.

5. How can I help my child be successful?

Families can foster independence and self-confidence (let them do it!) We also suggest unstructured, creative, collaborative time and play dates. Read to your child regularly. The Montessori approach to learning is most successful when a child's school and home life work in unison. We believe in maintaining an open line of communication and dialogue. We encourage parents to become involved at Walden and to take full advantage of our various parent workshops, classroom observations, parent conferences, parent communications, and volunteer opportunities. Parents are welcome to come to the classroom to share their work, hobbies, culture… anything. Enrichment projects can be for a small group or the whole class.

6. How do you communicate with families during the school year?

Walden uses a variety of methods to help keep you informed about what is happening at the school on a regular basis. Most school-wide reminders and communications will be sent via email to conserve paper and enhance efficiency. The school calendar is located on the school's website. Please check the calendar on a regular basis to ensure that you are aware of teacher meeting days, holidays, and parent information events.

Regular, proactive, open communications are essential to a successful Montessori education. The more you, as parents, understand Montessori, trust in what our teachers do in the classrooms, and the more your child experiences consistent expectations at home and at school, the better they will do.

Here are a few of the ways we communicate with parents:

- Back-to-School Night for parents is held in September.
- Conferences are held twice a year, in November and March. This is a time to meet with your child's teachers to discuss progress, identify opportunities for development, and agree on goals for your child's experience at school. A cumulative narrative report will be provided for each child before the March conference time.
- Classroom teachers share snapshots of your child's learning through the Seesaw App. This provides a quick peek into the classroom and the beautifully engaging Montessori materials they work with.
- Classroom Communication envelopes are sent home on Thursdays, when necessary, containing paper communications.
- Email updates from teachers and administration.
- A school-wide newsletter called The Walden Window, will be emailed bi-weekly on Thursday mornings.
- Social Media: Photos of special events and ongoing classroom work are regularly posted on Walden's website, Instagram, and Facebook.
- We ask that all information about your child (transportation, dismissal, illness, etc) be sent in writing to the classroom teachers. To maintain a peaceful and academic environment, phone calls go through to the classrooms for emergencies only.

7. How are birthdays and holidays celebrated at Walden?

Birthdays: The birthday ceremony is called the Celebration of Life. Walden encourages a strong sense of self within a growing sense of community. Each child is a respected and valued member of the community. Birthdays are celebrated in a unique way at Walden. The Celebration of Life is a history of the child's life through photos and memories. During the celebration, all the children sit in a circle on the floor around a representation of the sun. The birthday child walks around the circle carrying a small globe. Each trip around the "sun" represents one year in the child's life. This symbolizes that it takes a year for the Earth to revolve around the sun and dramatizes the passage of time. As the child walks, a teacher or parent reads information that you have provided. The narrative continues until the child reaches his or her current age. It is a wonderful concrete way for your child to experience

his or her growth. Parents help make it personal. Before the birthday, parents prepare their child's story with one picture for each year of his or her life and brief information about events that occurred in each year to be included in the ceremony narrative. We prefer that no special treats be brought in for birthdays. If you feel that you would like to bring something additional to celebrate your child's birth, you may choose to bring a book or small classroom material to donate to the classroom. You can check with the teachers for a class wish list. You may use the classroom Google Group to invite your child's entire class to a party outside of school. Please distribute hard copy party invitations from home.

Holidays: The children gain an awareness of the world around them by exploring other countries, their customs, food, music, language, climate, and animals. This helps to raise their consciousness about other people, to gain an understanding and tolerance, and therefore, compassion for all people in the world. Around the winter holidays, we focus on the common theme of light and peace. We invite families to share their customs, traditions, and holidays with the class. You can also share your hobbies, work, or interests with the children. Please contact the teachers if you want to contribute.

We introduce Valentine's Day as a celebration of friendship. Children are not required to give valentines to their classmates, however they seem to enjoy doing so. We also ask that you avoid sending in candy with the valentines.

Around Halloween, we incorporate the traditional symbols in our lessons. We may focus on pumpkins, bones, skeletons, and cultural masks. We ask that families celebrate Halloween at home. We do not celebrate Halloween in the popular way. Understanding that young children have a difficult time separating fantasy from reality, we do not invite costumes or typical celebrations.

8. How can I get involved with the school?

There are several ways for parents to get involved at The Walden School throughout the year. Parents can serve as **Parent Ambassadors**, a group that meets monthly in the kitchen community room to support school activities and communication. There are also opportunities to volunteer for individual events such as **Trunk or Treat**, **Pajama Bingo**, the **End-of-Year Class Picnic**, and the school's annual fundraising event, **Bid, Sip & Celebrate**.

In the spring, families are invited to participate in **Parent Mornings**, where they can visit the classroom and engage in activities alongside their child. Additionally, parents who have an **interesting job, hobby, or cultural experience** they would like to share with a class are encouraged to reach out to their child's teacher to coordinate a visit.