



Young Children and Time

Time is an interesting concept for all human beings; sometimes a day can feel endless and other times it goes by in a flash! We often rely on clocks and calendars, as well as the sun and the moon, to guide us through our days. Our relationship to time is complex and the desire to find meaning is universal—it is human nature to think ahead to future events and also reflect on the past. We anticipate certain moments with excitement, or sometimes hesitation, as our brains naturally categorize each one based on past experiences. Such associations are triggered by sensorial impressions and emotional imprints on the brain. Our minds are designed to absorb everything around us from the moment we enter the world.

We can learn so much from a young child's "presence of mind." Dancing in the sunlight and chasing butterflies or lying in the grass and watching the clouds go by.... "not a care in the world," as the saying goes. At the same time, this very young child who is full of wonder and discovery is also seeking direction and clarity. The same child who could spend hours in a field of butterflies has a strong need for routine and order (....and he or she will be sure to let you know!). As we consciously help to scaffold a child's brain with meaningful experiences, it is the balance of exploration along with predictability that allows for rich and positive associations to bloom in one's psyche. Young children are not able to read clocks or calendars; and therefore, they rely on the routines and order in their day to literally feel grounded in reality. When children know what to expect, this fosters a sense of comfort, trust, and security in the world around them.

The need for external order lays the foundation for internal order to develop. As they get older, children begin to understand time in a new way. How can we help young children establish a positive relationship with time? The Montessori classroom supports the developmental need for both freedom and responsibility. Establishing good habits around time management, concentration, and planning ahead are important life skills. We set our children up for success when we adults plan ahead! Arriving on time or even early sends a strong message to your child about the value of time.

It helps to have a few books on hand as a treat while you wait together ("Oh look, we have some extra time. Let's read together!"). This week, several parent-child pairs were sitting along the hallway wall reading books together as they waited for the school day to begin. What a peaceful way to start the day!

As we know, time has a way of marching on. Before long, these young Toddler and Primary children will be skipping up the hall to Elementary! Sometimes it feel like eternity when the decision about what shirt to wear or which vegetable to eat lasts far too long, and then other times we wish for time to stand still. Time is a precious balance between gratitude, celebration, and preparation as we gently hold the past, present, and future in the arms of our children. What a gift it is to share our days together.

Enjoy every moment!

Ashley and the Toddler/Primary Team