

THE
IMPORTANCE
OF

GRACE

— and —

COURTESY

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Seek2Learn

THE IMPORTANCE OF GRACE AND COURTESY IN EARLY YEARS

There are many pieces of a Montessori environment that set it apart from a typical classroom. From the way the children independently work at woven rugs and wooden tables, to the way the teacher gives lessons to only a few children at a time, there are multiple things an observer would notice as unusual when comparing it to other types of schools. One thing that makes a Montessori environment exceptionally unique is the way the children and teachers speak to one another and the way they carefully move about. Throughout the years at Seek2Learn, children receive a multitude of lessons on what we call “Grace and Courtesy”.



Grace and Courtesy lessons are essentially teaching the children what it means to be polite and how to appropriately communicate his or her feelings. These lessons are often demonstrated at circle time through role-play demonstrations given by the teacher and students who are willing to demonstrate their etiquette (the children are always very entertained by these lessons!)

Some examples of Grace and Courtesy lessons in our nursery:

- Greeting someone
- Asking a question
- Welcoming a visitor
- How to shake hands
- Solving a disagreement
- Serving food
- Standing in a line
- Choosing a work
- Walking in the classroom
- Using quiet voices
- Using materials appropriately
- Hanging up coats and backpacks
- Sitting at the line



- Using the restroom



One of the Grace and Courtesy lessons we practice most often in our classroom is “Solving a Disagreement”. Beginning around age three, children start to become very aware of social interactions and are in the process of learning how to communicate their feelings appropriately. One of our jobs as

their teacher is to try to help them express their emotion in a way that will benefit them in various situations.

For example, if a child starts to cry, we will go up to them and say,

“Billy, I see you are feeling sad. What happened?”

“Margaret knocked over my work!!!”

“Oh I see. Did it make you sad when Margaret knocked over your work?”

“Yes!!!”

“Okay, Billy. Let’s go talk to Margaret.”

Once the children are ready to have a conversation, we help them through what to say so they have the tools to solve the problem independently in the future. For example:

“Billy, say, ‘Margaret, it made you sad when she knocked over my work’ “

child will repeat

“Now say, ‘Please do not knock over my work’ “

child will repeat

Typically, the child is immediately comforted once they have been heard. It is a natural reaction for a child to cry in response to a difficult situation, however, the more we coach them through these conversations, the easier time they will have the next time they are solving a disagreement.

Grace and Courtesy lessons can take place in the classroom, during lunchtime, on play dates, or in the home!

Grace and Courtesy: Helping children learn self-discipline

The theme of Grace and Courtesy is the oil that keeps a group of people functioning smoothly. It is the ambiance parents can create in the home and we as teachers create it in the classroom.



It is a general attitude of graciousness and respect. We can only create it when first we model it with our own actions, and then with good-natured lessons, we demonstrate the way we do things in our class, or in our home.

Let's consider a few examples.

We want our children to be helpful. So how do we teach that? Be helpful, go out of your way to help a sick neighbor or a grandparent that needs some assistance.

We want our children to be respectful. How do we teach respect? Be respectful of your spouse and of your children.

The only way our children learn to behave is by observing and modeling it.

Conveying the Same Message with Our Words & Actions

As parents and as teachers, we quickly learn that we cannot say one thing and do another and expect the child to do what we say. In psychology, it is called cognitive dissonance when words do not match behavior, and children notice it immediately. Ultimately, our own maturity and our own efforts to live better are what help our children learn to behave.

From an early age, even when neurologically and physically, children cannot control their own behavior, they are watching and taking in our behaviors. If we are tense and have our teeth clenched while we try to help a child calm down, they are going to feel the tension and have a harder time calming down.

We can learn to take a deep breath when our children are having meltdowns and help them regain control. Especially when they are very little, when we help babies and toddlers calm down, they are establishing the

neurological connections to self-calm. Many studies tell us that the roots of violence lie in the inability to self-calm.

Activities of Grace & Courtesy

Grace and Courtesy includes many things, from care of the self and care of the environment to learning the kind and gracious way to handle all manner of situations. We care for one another's needs and we help one another learn new activities.

When we see our children not functioning the ways we wish, in many cases, we simply re-present the behavior that we want, without shame or blame. When children are deliberately naughty, we may need to take stronger action, help them calm down and try again.

"Grace and Courtesy" Lessons

Here is a sample list of grace and courtesy lessons Our Montessori teachers use in their classrooms to establish the culture of respect for self, one another and the environment. Feel free to take whatever suggestions may be valuable for your family or your classroom and create your own list that supports your values.

Classroom Management

- How to listen to directions
- How to get the teacher's attention
- Place hand on teacher's shoulder
- Wait for acknowledgement
- How to raise hand at circle time and wait to be called on
- How to wait to speak after others finish
- How to shake hands with teacher/adult
- How to ask for help from a teacher or another student
- How to greet a visitor: "Hello, my name is.... Welcome to (our home or name of school)."
- How to listen to a story or poem without shouting out questions in the middle of the story
- How to learn a song at circle time
- How to sing with a group
- How to recycle paper

Social Skills Between Adults and Children

- Friend greeting a friend
- Making an apology
 - How to admit a mistake and ask to be forgiven
 - How to say, "I'm sorry. I won't do it again."
- How to give comfort to another
 - Asking, "Are you all right? May I help you?"

- Getting a teacher
- How to introduce friends: “Mary, this is my friend, Tomas.”
- Asking to watch another’s lesson
- Asking to join in play
- Asking for a turn
- Asking an older child for help
- Asking to join a group lesson
- Inviting another child to play
- How to refuse an invitation kindly
- Introducing myself to another: “Hello (or “Hi”). My name is....”
- How to say “no” politely
 - “No, thank you. I don’t want to do that.”
 - How to say, “Stop! Stop! You’re hurting me. Stop. I don’t like that!”
- How to ask someone to move: “Could you please move? I would like to sit here.”
- “Excuse me, please. I want to walk through here.”

Care of the Garden

- Watering the plants
- Pulling weeds
- Setting up a plant area
- Sweeping walkways
- Harvesting

These lessons are a start, an example of what you can do, when you set your mind to thinking about what matters in how your home or classroom is run. With these lessons we set the standard of how we want our classrooms and our homes to function. Develop the lessons you need for the layout of your school or home and the rituals you wish your children to follow.

Remember, in Montessori, we do not assume the children know something, but we teach everything, giving the child the opportunity to do thing correctly, as they generally want to do.

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Grace & Courtesy:

Helping Our Children Learn Self-Discipline