

Family Connection

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“The satisfaction which they find in their work has given them
a grace and ease like that which comes from music.”

—Maria Montessori, *The Discovery of the Child*

Human tendencies

BY HEATHER WHITE



Why does an infant put everything into their mouths? What prompts a preschool-aged child to ask why everything happens as it does? Why are elementary-aged children obsessed with the idea of justice and equality? They are all compelled by innate inclinations towards particular characteristics or types of behavior.

Maria Montessori identified eleven cardinal tendencies that drive humans to understand and make a difference in the world around them. These human tendencies are universal and stable across time, part of our shared human experience despite race, country, culture, or time of existence. These tendencies stimulate one’s development while allowing them to adapt to, and understand, their environment.

The following eleven human tendencies are vital to the preparation of the Montessori environment and the adult in order to best serve children’s needs.

Orientation: Human beings want to understand their place in the world. Children like to establish points of reference, observing the environment and learning where they fit in.

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Order: Order promotes a deeper understanding and allows prediction of what is yet to come, which provides security. A prepared environment provides order for children, which then helps them develop internal order.

Exploration: Human beings are naturally curious and love to use their senses to learn more about the world around them. Exploration also provides a sense of security as children are able to understand how the environment can and will fulfill their needs.

Communication: Humans have a universal drive to connect with others, sharing their thoughts, emotions, and experiences. Communication facilitates understanding between people and from generation to generation through written and spoken language, touch, facial expressions, gestures, art, music, and dance.

Activity: People typically enjoy remaining busy. Children often enjoy movement devoid of any goal in mind; they appreciate movement for movement's sake. Children will often remain active through the use of games, songs, dance, and pretend play.

Manipulation: Physically harnessing elements of one's environment helps an individual to better understand it. Naturally, after a child finds something interesting, they want to use it in some way.

Work: All human beings have a need to carry out work to remain happy and satisfied. Work promotes feelings of accomplishment and self-respect.

Repetition: Human beings have an innate desire to repeat an activity in order to lead to exactness and self-perfection. This occurs when a child repeats a task over and over again, first for mastery and then for pleasure.

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Exactness: Instinctively, humans seek precision in their work. Children want the materials on the shelf to be placed in their exact position or for the Pink Tower to be perfectly aligned when built. It is this exactness that brings enormous satisfaction.

Abstraction: This tendency sets human beings apart from other animals. It allows us to generalize and predict. Humans harness the ability to imagine something and take the creative steps necessary to bring that imagined item or scenario to reality.



Perfection: All of the human tendencies culminate in perfection. After exploring, manipulating, and working in the environment, humans are able to perfect their activities, facilitating mastery.

Developing an awareness of the human tendencies allows Montessori teachers to recognize these inclinations in their students and encourages the preparation of the adult and the environment in such a way so as to promote these innate drives in children, helping to guide them in their learning and exploration.

Praise vs. Acknowledgement in a Montessori Home

By Heather White

“Good boy!”

“What a fantastic job!”

“You get a gold star.”

These are common phrases used by many parents and educators. In fact, this form of praise is often recommended as a valuable parenting tool. Instead of punishing children, parents are told that praising positive behavior will strengthen the relationship and beget more positive behavior.

The problem, however, is that praise leads children to look for external acknowledgement to validate their feelings and achievements. They relinquish their own motivations and judgements.

Parents can strive to use more effective praise and acknowledgement that emphasize the child’s work and their effort. This assists in building the child’s self-confidence and self-belief, empowering them to rely on their own motivations and judgements.

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Everyone says good job sometimes, and that's ok. It can be helpful to try to focus on noticings and specific behaviors to acknowledge and encourage efforts.

Here are some alternative phrases that can lead to intrinsic motivation:

<p>It looks like you really enjoyed that work!</p>		<p>You did it (all by yourself)!</p>	<p>You worked really hard on that!</p>	
	<p>You put your work away, so now we can go to the park!</p>	<p>That was really helpful how you fed the dog.</p>	<p>Thank you for showing me!</p>	<p>I noticed you sharing your toys with your friend.</p>
<p>You are balancing the blocks to make a tower!</p>	<p>You remembered your manners today. I heard you say thank you!</p>		<p>Thank you for helping me tidy up!</p>	<p>What do you think about your work? What is your favorite part?</p>



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