

Meadow Montessori School Children's House

Classroom Schedule, Arrival and Dismissal

Each Children's House is a class of approximately 20 students, ranging in age from 3 to 6 years old. Our day begins each morning at 8:15 a.m. for the children who arrive at school for Extended Time Care (ETC or childcare). The children assist in preparing the environment for each day. Other children arrive between 8:15 and 8:50; an 8:50 a.m. arrival allows the children time to put away coats and change shoes. It is important to be in class no later than 9:00 because we begin with "line time" at 9:00 a.m. This is the time we present new materials, and we want to make sure your child is present for the lesson. After line time is over, the children are free to work with the newly presented material or engage in independent work choices or continue lessons with a teacher. At 11:15 a.m. we once again gather for line time for songs and movement, followed by outside recess.

Please pick up preschool students at or before 12:00 noon. Most days we dismiss directly from the schoolyard, and remember to let the adult know that you are taking your child. ETC children and extended-day students return to the building for lunch and afternoon classes. Extended-day students go home at 3:30 p.m. unless they are enrolled in our ETC Program, which offers a final pick up by 6:00 p.m.

Sign-Out Sheets

The sign-out sheet is one of our most important **safety tools**. Parents, who drop off students early (before 7:45 a.m.), or late (after 9:00 a.m.), must personally sign-in. The greeter, who is outside to assist children, signs in children arriving between 7:45 and 9:00 a.m. Between 7:45 and 9:00 there is no need for parents to come into the building.

At the end of the day, every parent must personally sign out his or her child regardless of the time he/she leaves. If your child leaves after the morning or afternoon session, the sign-out sheets will be with a teacher on the schoolyard. In case of inclement weather or if your child leaves at any other time, the sheets can be located on the clipboards hanging on the main entry wall. When no departure time is indicated, we will assume that your child remained at school until 6:00 p.m. and you will be charged for this time. (\$4.50/hour). If you continually fail to sign out, the school will charge and additional \$5 for each incidence.

Excluding cases of extreme inclement weather, children are in the schoolyard during pick-up times. The Child Information Card each family completes indicates who is authorized to pick up your child/children. If someone else is picking your child up (even if it is a relative), please inform the office in writing. Additionally, please advise anyone who will be picking up your child that he/she will be asked for a photo I.D.

Sickness

If your child is sick, a day at school may not be what is best for him or her. School policy dictates keeping your child home for 24 hours after a fever breaks. Often times, once a fever is gone, a runny nose or bad cough keeps the child feeling poorly. Giving a miserable, germ-laden child the time to rest and recover is probably best for the child as well as the others in the classroom.

Rev: 8/08/08

Please inform the office when your child will be absent from school. This pertains to absences due to scheduled appointments and vacations, as well as illnesses.

Breakfast

Please give your child a good start to each day with a nutritious breakfast. Breakfast is available at school for ETC students who arrive before 8:00 a.m.

Lunch

Lunchtime is an important part of a child's day, so please pack lunches that are well-balanced in terms of nutrition and portion. We stress grace and courtesy during our meal times, and each child eats with a place setting with a napkin. Although packing lunches can be a chore, try to use your imagination and your knowledge of the four food groups, and involve your child in purchasing and packing his/her lunch. Please note that we are able to heat lunches in a microwave (leftovers make great lunches), but we ask that you not send in frozen entrees--they take too long to heat, and the children are not left with enough time to eat.

Because we are committed to promoting ecology, we request that all liquids be sent to school in a thermos, not a juice box or other disposable container. Lunches should be packed in re-usable, reseal able containers. The same with lunch bags--please no paper bags.

All children should carry a travel-sized toothbrush and tube of toothpaste in their lunch boxes.

Extended-day students have a silent reading/ rest time for approximately 15 minutes each day.

Snack

Each child brings in snack for a week at a time. We cycle through the list once, and the remainder of the year will be on a volunteer basis. We have included a list of desired snacks, and we'll be happy to give you a reminder in your mailbox on the Tuesday preceding your assigned week. Please purchase enough snack for 20 children. You may either bring the items to school on Monday of snack week or on a day-to-day basis. Whatever works for you will work for us. If you are aware of a conflict in your assigned week, please inform the teacher as soon as possible so we can arrange a switch with another family.

Birthdays

Birthdays are a special time at home and school, and we want to show your children the meaning of birthdays. Our tradition is to walk about the sun, for each year of life marks one complete journey around the sun. A history or timeline of your child's life is a great thing to share (and make). Write a sentence about an achievement (learning to walk) or special event from each year and add a corresponding picture to a timeline showing your child's age. We will be thrilled to display your child's timeline on his/her birthday. If your child's birthday occurs in the summer or over a break, please choose another day to celebrate. The half-birthday is a great solution to summer birthdays! We request that you do not send sugary treats for birthday celebrations. We also request that you do not distribute birthday invitations at school. If you wish to give a gift to the classroom in honor of your child's birthday, you can find the class's wish list on the

website. Please let us know in advance when you would like to celebrate your child's birthday.

Clothing

Children should wear comfortable clothing that facilitates independent toileting. In addition, clothing can sometimes be a distraction, so please keep this in mind when choosing your child's attire.

Every child needs to have a spare change of clothes at school. This includes a shirt, pants, socks, and underwear. Send in labeled items in a zip lock bag and please label it. Please check the items periodically for size and weather compatibility. In the event your child uses the items, they will be sent home with a note reminding you to return them the next day.

Toileting

Children should be toilet trained before entering the Children's House. If/when they are not, we will toilet train them during the first month of school. Children should come to school in underwear. The thickly padded underwear is best because it allows the child to feel moisture without wetting his/her outside clothing; pull-ups are the least desirable because a child cannot feel wetness, so he/she isn't aware of his/her bodily functions. The only time we will allow a child to wear pull-ups is during naptime. The teacher will work closely with the family to insure a quick and successful toileting process.

Shoes

Every child must have a pair of indoor shoes that are left at school each day. They are to be clearly labeled and may not have cartoon characters on them. They should also be slip-on in order to facilitate independence; however five-year olds should wear lace-up shoes so they will learn to tie their shoes this year. If you choose to send in slippers, please send in another pair of shoes for gym. The shoes your child wears to school will be the shoes he/she wears outside for recess. They should be tennis shoes or boots, depending upon the weather.

Toys

Toys are a distraction from the children's work. Toys should be left at home or in the car. Any toys brought into school will be put away until a parent comes to claim them. Children are invited to bring in items to share that are of an educational nature. If an item is questionable, please call or write a note before bringing it to school.

Communication/Conferences

Parent-teacher conferences are scheduled at the end of the first, second, and third quarters, but we welcome you to meet with us at any time you have questions or concerns. We schedule special conferences before or after school, but never during the day. We ask that you do not try to talk with teachers during regular school hours, especially during drop-off time or pick-up time on the schoolyard. If you need to discuss something, please jot a note with your name and number and the teacher will get back with you as soon as possible. E-mail is also another option, and our e-mail addresses are listed in the directory. We cannot stress how important it is for the teachers to give their full attention to the children at all times, but especially during transition times. We thank you in advance for your cooperation.

You will receive a written assessment of your child's progress four times during the year.

Observations

We invite all of you to come in for a day of observation. Two of the three classrooms have one-way windows, so observation is relatively easy. Children's House East does not have an observation window, so you will have to come inside the classroom. Please keep a few things in mind. During the first month of school, we need time to lay the foundations for our community and get things started, so this isn't the best time to observe. After September, please make an appointment with your child's teacher (the administrative assistant in the early childhood building can assist you) for your observation. We try to limit the classroom to one or two visitors each day. Before the day of your observation, be sure to read through the guidelines, which can be found in the parent handbook and on our website.

Ground Rules

Each year every classroom generates their own ground rules, written in the words children use and understand. All of our ground rules at MMS are based on the ones we have included in this handbook, which are a philosophical structure from which all adults and children can work. We will be spending time working on our rules during the first few weeks of school, as we come to identify and define our community. Once our ground rules are set, we will share them with you. The ground rules provide the framework for the children to learn to exercise self-discipline and self-control, and you may want to incorporate them into your home life as well.

Foreign Languages

This year all two foreign languages will be available in all Children's Houses. The teachers rotate their schedules and are in each classroom at least once a day. As with any lesson, children may join or observe all of the language lessons if they desire.

Field Trips

We schedule two field trips during the school year. In the early fall we travel to the Erie Apple Orchard and late spring to the Calder Dairy Farm. As always, drivers will be needed and greatly appreciated. Drivers will need to sign in at the office and provide their driver's license number as well as license plate number.

Meadow Montessori School

Children's House Curriculum Guide

The Children's House is designed to serve the needs of children from 3 to 6 years of age. With a ratio of ten or less children to each adult, the individual needs of each child are easily met. The children learn many different skills at their own academic and social level. The youngest children develop social skills. These children learn what it means to be part of a group, how to separate from their parents, take turns, and become independent. The children in their second year focus on lessons and peer socialization and always move at their own pace. The third-year in the Montessori classroom is the Extended Day year (Kindergarten). This is the year when the children grow academically at a rapid rate. The afternoon is devoted to these Extended Day children. Here, the focus of small group lessons and advanced academics helps foster the love of learning we see in children.

Practical Life

Practical life is the area of the classroom where children learn coordination, confidence, cooperation, independence, and order. These activities include care of self, care of the environment, and physical skills.

Care-of-self activities include hand washing, snack preparation, and dressing activities. These activities help the young child gain confidence in him/herself.

Care-of-the-environment activities can include plant and animal care, as well as cleaning activities. Sweeping, scrubbing, and polishing all help children learn the importance of order. If steps are done incorrectly, the results can be less than desirable.

The area of practical life called "physical skills" incorporates numerous activities. Here, children work on pouring, scooping, twisting, lacing, squeezing and pounding--just to name a few of the activities. These activities are great for learning coordination skills. The small motor skills are a prerequisite for developing strong, capable hands that will be needed for writing activities. The activities in physical skills will vary and meet all abilities and age levels. Let's look at "lacing" as one such activity: Lacing activities start as simple lacing cards with a large piece of yarn going through precut holes. Moving slowly to more difficult activities that introduce smaller holes and smaller yarns and threads. Eventually the introduction of a needle turns lacing activities into sewing. Free sewing with a needle and thread to learn stitches, button sewing, pillow making, and decorative sewing and quilting may be a more advanced activity.

All children gain valuable skills in the practical life area of the classroom, regardless of age and ability. Many of these skills set up the basic foundation to all other areas of the classroom.

Sensorial

The sensorial area of the Montessori classroom helps children develop three main skills that are used in the math sequence:

- perception of difference
- perception of similarities
- experience with a graded series

Sensorial (cont'd)

Teachers use several beautiful materials to help children learn to discriminate differences. The activities isolate difficulty so only one characteristic of the material is different in each piece of the activity. The potential differences include thickness, length, texture, and shape. Some of the activities are knobbed and knobless cylinders, prisms, cubes, rods, the geometric cabinet, and geometric solids.

Matching activities develop the perception of similarities. Here, groups of objects have identical pairs, and the child searches through comparison and contrasting. These activities involve the first two color boxes, baric tablets, sound cylinders, smelling bottles, fabric matching, and the bells. These activities help the children to find characteristics that are the same within a set.

The third set of activities in the sensorial area involves working with things in a series. The gradation of a set of objects is a challenging and advanced activity. Many of the same materials used in the previous two sections are used here; however, instead of matching and sorting, the objects are graded. Things are graded from heavy to light, hot to cold, loud to soft, large to small, and thick to thin.

Geometry is introduced in a hands-on way in sensorial work. Activities include the triangle boxes and cube puzzles. The cube puzzles--monomial, binomial and trinomial--teach basic algebraic equations in a concrete way. The triangle boxes develop knowledge of two-dimensional shapes.

Language

Before one learns to read, one must learn to listen. Listening activities are the first language activities in the preschool classroom. The silence game, rhyming, verbal labeling, listening to books, and "I-Spy" games all stress listening. Children at this level need to be able to hear the differences in sounds, words, and phrases. Many of these activities take place during group time--or without the child being aware they are having a lesson. This is often referred to as "ear training."

Next, we must prepare the eyes for reading. To do this we use visual activities, such as puzzles, matching, classification, sequencing and sorting activities. Here we pick up where sensorial left off. We find the subtle differences that are needed to distinguish the difference between "n" and "m."

After many activities with the previously mentioned materials, the child is ready to start integrating his/her skills for the continuing journey to reading. The child uses the sandpaper letters to learn the relationship with a sound and the symbol it represents. Through these activities children see that blending sounds together makes a combination of sounds--or words. The movable alphabet is used for beginning or phonetic spelling activities.

The second part of language is writing. We begin with motor preparation in order to get the hand ready to write. Children have gained coordination skills through practical life activities. Sensorial activities have introduced the pincer grip used in holding a pencil. These, with other prewriting activities have prepared the hand for the specific skill of handwriting. Activities such as rock painting, the sand tray and the chalkboard help children learn the flow of shapes that lead to drawing letters. These activities are very forgiving and can easily be redone if the child is not satisfied with his/her own work. Tracing, hole punching, and cutting activities use different muscles in the hand to develop the muscles needed for penmanship.

Language (cont'd)

The metal insets are one of the first experiences of pencil-to-paper work. Children will trace a frame or inset while they gain control of the pencil. We teach cursive and only cursive, as the flow of these letters is easier than the stop and go of printing. Cursive strokes are the first steps in forming letters. These strokes are similar to those used in making cursive letters, and they break writing into smaller steps. Once strokes have been established, letters are formed, then connecting letters, and finally the formation of words. These letters are created freely on paper, then in a more controlled box, and finally on lined paper. Advanced language activities may include parts of speech, such as compound words, plurals, nouns and verbs. Here phonograms and phonemes are introduced along with sight words and digraphs.

Mathematics

Math is a large part of the Montessori preschool, beginning with pre-math activities that teach one-to-one correspondence and the relationship of symbol and quantity. Numeration activities include the numerical rods, sandpaper numerals, and spindle box, which is the first introduction to the concept of zero. The "counters game" introduces odds and evens. Sets, baskets, memory game, mystery number, and tabletop rods are other numeration activities. All these activities deal with the numbers 1-10 and demonstrate a concrete example to associate number with symbol. The child is introduced to the colored bead stair. The colored beads are a very large part of linear counting in Montessori.

Most linear counting activities use the colored bead materials. Here, the children learn that things in math are linear and follow a definite pattern. Children work with the colored bead stair, the snake game, teens and tens boards, the hundred board, and finally the squaring and cubing chains. These activities show patterns that run through different numbers. They also encourage skip counting and other mathematical relationships.

Children work with the decimal system simultaneously. The teacher introduces the child to place value through unit beads, ten bars, hundred squares, and thousand cubes. The decimal material is used to show quantities and symbols from 1 to 9000, as well as the four operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division). The child works with static and dynamic problems. Children enjoy working with the bank game where they compose their own four-digit numbers. The "45 Layout" shows how the numbers grow from 1 to 9000. This portion of the curriculum introduces the concept of exchanging and equivalencies. The stamp game is a more abstract material used to move students into a higher level of work. The same four operations are used with this material as with golden bead material. The small bead frame and dot boards are introduced to older children and will be pursued further in elementary.

Mathematics (cont'd)

Other areas covered in math include fractions, which are introduced using the cones and skittles. We also introduce money symbols and quantities.

The memorization of math facts begins in preschool with the strip board materials. Strips are used to help find a solution to a simple equation, which will become memorized with practice. Finger charts for the different operations help the child become less dependent on the materials. The multiplication and division dot boards are introduced as an introduction to these types of facts.

Geography

The geography activities at the preschool level are very enriching and exciting to children. An introduction to the parts of the Earth leads to the discussion of the three parts of the world--land, air, and water. Activities in sorting objects, pictures, and vehicles encourage children to think about the world around them.

The teacher introduces the solar system and planets, as well as the specific landforms of lake and island, gulf and peninsula, straight and isthmus, and bay and cape. The teacher introduces the planisphere and all the continents. Eventually the child will have the opportunity to work with each individual continent map learning about countries through stories, food experience and special activities. Children are introduced to history through the calendars and the concept of time. Clock activities teach us about past, present, and future.

Science

Early science activities include experiments with magnetic/ non-magnetic and sink/float. Science experiments are used to teach the children about cause and effect, as well as about the simple responses of items such as water, electricity, matter, and machines. Other activities involve sorting things into groups, such as living/nonliving, plant/animal and organic/inorganic.

Children examine animals and plants in more depth. Plant activities include learning the parts of a tree, root, and flower, as well as leaf studies with the botany cabinet. Animal work includes activities with the five classes of animals (fish, reptiles, amphibians, birds and mammals), sorting animals, learning the parts and characteristic of each individual class. Children practice sequencing using the life cycle of animals. Study of humans is also introduced.

Other activities

Other activities in the preschool curriculum include art activities, which are open-ended and emphasize process and not product. These activities may include crayons, colored pencils, easel activities, clay, and cutting.

The teacher brings music into the classroom each day at "line time" through songs, finger plays and dances. She introduces musical instruments and rhythm with rhythm sticks and other simple hand instruments, which comprise a preschool "band".

Outdoor activity is a part of each day, and we take a trip to the gym at least once a week. Large motor play helps strengthen the physical body as well as increasing coordination.

Preschool children learn Spanish and French when special teachers (all native speakers) visit the classrooms daily to work with small groups on simple vocabulary and basic pronunciation.

Meadow Montessori School

“Ground Rules”

Part of the preparation of the environment for the child's learning involves the establishment of ground rules of human behavior. These provide the limits for the group and for the individual.

~ Rambusch

Any child is free to work with any material displayed in the environment, so long as he uses it respectfully. He may not harm the material, himself, or others. He may not use it in any way that disturbs the activities of others. He may not take any material or part of any activity home.

A child may work on either a rug or a table--whichever is suitable to the work that he has chosen. Children do not work at or on display shelves, as their presence there would obstruct the other children's access to the materials.

The child restores the environment during and after the exercise. He is responsible for mopping his own spills (after demonstration by the teacher). He puts his own rug away after rolling it neatly. If he has been working at a table, he pushes his chair under his place at the table and puts the mat away.

No child may touch the work of another or interfere with another's activity. This provides security for the child involved in an exercise to continue to completion. However, another child may ask to join the activity. He then has to respect the child's answer. The child's right to initiate, complete or repeat an exercise is protected by this ground rule. If he must leave his exercise temporarily, he is confident that his work will be as he left it and he can resume the activity.

Children are not coerced into joining group activities. It is their right to stand as an observer of group activity without becoming an active participant. A child is not allowed to interfere or disrupt an activity in which he has chosen not to participate.

A child is not forced or even encouraged to share with another child an exercise which he has chosen to work by himself. Generosity develops as a child matures from within. He will become more generous as he gains self-security. If materials are adequate and ground rules are effective, sharing will come naturally, in cases where sharing is appropriate or necessary.

A child is free to “do nothing” if he desires, as long as he does not disturb the activities of others. He may be learning by observing others working, or he may be thinking or simply relaxing.

Jo Wood Savoye
Fairleigh Dickinson University / Montessori Program
Edited by Sister Anthonita Porta
Montessori Children's House, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Meadow Montessori School

Guidelines for Preschool Parents

- *Explore your feelings about separating from your child.* Parents may feel guilty about leaving their child in someone else's care. As a result, they unconsciously send mixed messages to their child. A parent may ask for one last hug/one last kiss endlessly. Even after the child has become involved in an activity, the parent may distract the child with elaborate leave taking rituals. Perhaps the most confusing message comes when parents say, "You'll miss your mommy, won't you?" as a way to reaffirm their child's affection. Such cues cause great confusion for children.
- *Acknowledge your child's feelings of anger, frustration, or despair.* It is normal, when children's desires have been thwarted, for them to experience strong emotions. They may express these by hitting, scratching, screaming, or spitting. Children benefit when the adults verbally identify their feelings ("You're very angry"). At the same time, it is important that the child not be allowed to hurt the caregiver or the parent.
- *Emphasize that you will return.* It is sometimes helpful to describe verbally what you will be doing while he/she is away. For instance, "I will get on the bus and go to work. I will be there all day. At 5:00 I will get back on the bus and come here for you." It also helps to associate departure with some specific part of the day. "First, you will play in the big room. Then you will have lunch and nap time. I will be here after you go outdoors."
- *Develop a plan for leaving.* Some parents benefit by going through a step-by-step analysis of what they will do and say the next time their child hesitates about going to the school. Phrases parents have recommended include, "You don't want to stay at school without me? Usually, you have a good time here. I feel this is a good place for you to be. I will be leaving in one minute."
- *Let the staff help you and your child separate.* Frequently, parents wait for their children to give them permission to leave. They try to attain this permission with statements like, "Don't you want me to stay here with all your friends?" or "You want me to be proud of you, don't you?" Children seldom cooperate in this effort. At this point, caregivers should step in and say, "Your mom is leaving now. I'll help you find something to do." Allow the staff member to take the child into the classroom.
- *Remember that once you have said good-bye, you should leave promptly.* A lingering departure or unexpected reappearance heightens the child's anxiety by making the environment unpredictable.
- *Follow the plan you have chosen.* It is very confusing for the children when one day the parent relents and allows them to stay home and on another occasion insists that they remain at the school. This sporadic approach seems arbitrary to the child and very unfair. Such inconsistency encourages children to test each time to determine whether today you will give in or not.
- *Tell the caregiver to contact you to let you know how your child is doing.* A follow-up phone call at work or home assures parents that their child is receiving personal attention and that they are important, too.

- *Remember that handling situations like these is a normal part of the caregiver's job.* You may be embarrassed or distressed that your child is causing the caregiver difficulty. Keep in mind that this is not the first time she/he has dealt with this type of problem; and that your child's behavior in no way reflects negatively on your skills as a parent.
- *Develop a coping strategy with your child.* Even young children can participate in developing a strategy in advance for coping with returning to or remaining in the school. You and your child can engage in a problem solving process of describing the situation, generating alternative approaches, and figuring out which procedures might be the most effective. In this way, the child takes on some of the responsibility for seeking a solution. This leads to feelings of control and success, which build upon one another and can help you and your child overcome the difficulty.

Mistakes to Avoid

- *Denying the child's feelings.* Phrases like "Don't worry" or "Don't cry" intensify children's feelings of distress rather than soothe them. They indicate that their feelings are wrong or unimportant, rather than help them find constructive ways of coping.
- *Shaming children.* Children's anxiety increases when adults say, "Mommy will feel bad if you don't stop crying," or "Nobody likes to play with a cry baby." These tactics do nothing to relieve the child's despair. Children in this situation should not be burdened with responsibility for making other people feel better.
- *Manipulating children.* In order to relieve their own anxieties, adults may use leading questions to get the child to say at the end of the day that he/she had a good time. For example, "Wasn't it fun playing with all those toys?" or "You're glad you stayed, aren't you?" It is important to allow children to express their real feelings even though they may be ambivalent or negative. When children must repress their feelings to satisfy adults' expectations, it is harder for them to resolve the emotions they experience.
- *Sneaking away.* Often, children become involved in activities while the parent is still in the room, and it may seem easier to simply leave without telling the child, letting the child discover later. While this tactic may work in the short run, it damages the child's confidence in the adults and reinforces the notion that the school is a place that cannot be trusted. It creates a sense of abandonment. For this reason, parents should tell their children that they are leaving and that they will return.
- *Bribing children.* Crying or shouting children make adults anxious. To stop the behavior, adults may say, "If you're good, I'll bring you a present when I come back." This strategy has two disadvantages. First, it conveys to the child that the school is not intrinsically a good place to be, but one that must be endured for a greater reward. And second, it avoids the real issue of the child's feelings.

Conclusion

- These guidelines are aimed at helping parents feel more confident when children say they don't want to return to a group setting outside their home. When a youngster says, "Can't I stay home just for today?" it calls for patience, understanding, and sensitivity. Once parents have determined that the setting is a beneficial place for the child, it will not be long before the child is again able to derive pleasure from his/her experience away from home.