



AMERICAN MONTESSORI SOCIETY®  
education that transforms lives

# FAMILY CONNECTION



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## Communication

*The Human Tendencies are characteristics inherent in all human beings that influence how we respond to the world around us. This month, we'll touch on our last human tendency—communication.*

***“When there is communication, two personalities merge as one, and respond to one another. This represents a wonderful phenomenon of order which is brought into the inner personality of the child.”<sup>1</sup>***

**–Maria Montessori**

Communication is more than just language, though it includes language. Humans developed a complex system of communication that includes all the senses; we consciously and unconsciously communicate and interpret others' communications all the time. We read gestures and body language. We can tell someone's mood by the way they breathe, talk, walk, or move. Research suggests that we respond physiologically when we smell the sweat of someone who is fearful or happy.<sup>2</sup>

From birth, children absorb the language of the people around them on a day-to-day basis, as well as the habits, gestures, and other communication practices they see. The child's absorbent mind takes in every aspect of culture, even though they are completely unaware of it happening.

*“Of all languages, he can only learn his mother tongue well and without mental fatigue, because he acquires this language before he has intelligence. He acquires it in early infancy by mimicry. It is a gift of nature.”<sup>3</sup>* –Maria Montessori

<sup>1</sup> Maria Montessori, *Creative Development in the Child*, Vol. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Nina Notman, “Human chemical communication,” *Chemistry World*.

<sup>3</sup> Maria Montessori, *The 1946 London Lectures*.

We humans were not meant to live apart from others, but rather among others, learning the language of our family and culture from our relationship and proximity to them. As Montessori wrote, *“Humanity is distinguished by this power. Not to possess language, but to possess the mechanism for creating language.”*<sup>1</sup>

Communication is connected to several of the human tendencies we’ve already discussed, including order (grammar and syntax), exploration, repetition, perfection, and, especially, abstraction and imagination. *“These two powers of the mind (imagination and abstraction)... are both necessary for the building up of language.”*<sup>2</sup>

What can you do to support and develop the human tendency of communication in your child and your family?

**Embrace the language of your culture.** Many people are shamed into thinking they are not intelligent if they don’t speak formal English. In the United States alone, there are around 30 regional dialects spoken, and each of these is valid, as are the many languages other than English spoken throughout the U.S. Your child will likely learn formal English language rules at school. If you speak something different at home, continue to do so. It will help your child learn your culture as well as your language.



### **Read, sing, and tell stories to your child.**

Research continues to show that reading to your child is one of the best ways for them to develop a strong relationship with reading and for them to hear new words—especially if you also talk about what you are reading! Likewise, stories and songs are full of opportunities to learn vocabulary and communicate about emotions and cultural connections.

**Sportscast.** Talk your way through what you are doing, especially when children are young, and use the “big” words! You can often spot a Montessori child because they use the actual words for something: for example, instead of saying *“I fed the sucker fish,”* they love to say, *“I fed the plecostomus!”* Children love classifying, organizing, grading, matching, and learning new vocabulary. Using comparatives and superlatives (like *large, rough, smallest, thickest, narrowest,* etc.) gives children the words to describe objects and experiences more precisely.



<sup>1</sup> Maria Montessori, *Education for a New World*.

<sup>2</sup> Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*.

**Engage your child in what you are doing (not all the time, but sometimes).** I grew up in the country in a large family. As soon as I could walk, I helped my parents on our farm, and learned all the ins and outs of farm living at a young age. Don't live on a farm? Maybe you build computers or houses, play music or sports, or cook or hike? Great! Do those things with your children, and "sportscast" along the way. Involve your children in daily tasks. If you're going to the grocery store, have them help you check the pantry or fridge to see what you need, and make a list (if they are still in pre-writing, they can draw pictures or "write" their list while you make your own). At the store, they can help you find the numbered aisle, locate the item, check things off the list, and communicate with store employees.

**Remember you are your child's living lesson.** Everything you do is a lesson. While you will be a positive role model for your child most of the time, you'll also make mistakes. When this happens, model what apologetic people should do, and make amends. Instead of making children say "sorry," help them with the communication skills of solving problems and drawing and respecting boundaries. Instead of just answering a question or solving an issue for your child, ask for their thoughts and feedback—and really listen to what they say. Practice positive discipline and have family meetings. The ability to communicate our feelings, thoughts, ideas, and boundaries in respectful ways (and hear those of others) is an important part of living well and being a strong community member.

*"We must speak clearly to the child, give him the right words and repeat them often for him. In this way, we can stimulate the explosion into language...."<sup>1</sup>*  
—Maria Montessori



<sup>1</sup> Maria Montessori, *The 1946 London Lectures*.



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## Montessori and Peace

Montessori survived the Spanish Civil War and both World Wars and was exiled in India during World War II. She was a pacifist, and believed that to avoid wars, governments must stop prioritizing material goods and land struggles, and instead focus on what is best for children. In her mind, children deserved respect from governments, as well as consideration in any and all decisions that would impact them physically, socially, and emotionally.



Montessori believed that instead of “preaching vague idealisms” where we “treat peace as a luxury rather than a necessity,” we must expand our idea of education and put the care of children at the heart of our societies. <sup>1</sup>

She wrote that peace was more than the absence of war: “What is generally meant by the word peace is the cessation of war... [but] the prospect of true peace makes us turn our thoughts to the triumph of justice and love among men, to the building of a better world where harmony reigns.” <sup>2</sup>

In Montessori's mind, real peace could not be achieved unless society recognized the importance of education from birth and actively worked to care for all children.



**“A great social mission that will ensure the child justice, harmony, and love remains to be accomplished. And this great task must be the work of education, for this is the only way to build a new world and to bring peace.”<sup>3</sup>**  
–Maria Montessori

<sup>1</sup> Maria Montessori, “The White Cross,” *AMI Journal*.

<sup>2</sup> Maria Montessori, *Education and Peace*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*.

While individual citizens cannot control what governments do, Montessori was very clear on what children need to recover from traumas, whether caused by war, abuse, or natural disasters. Researcher Erica Moretti writes about 60+ children who survived the 1908 earthquake in Messina, Italy (a tragedy that killed over 80,000 people), and then spent years in foster care before attending a small Montessori school. These children, who were given the freedom to make decisions in beautifully prepared indoor and outdoor environments, repeating activities as they liked using their hands and bodies, showed remarkable capacity to thrive and overcome their trauma.<sup>1</sup>

Other experiences like these showed the healing power of Montessori's carefully prepared environments. She believed that in a stable, soothing atmosphere, children experienced self-realization and independence, made decisions, and developed agency. They formed relationships with children of various ages, and helped each other. The role of the teacher was to prepare this ideal environment and act as "an uplifting element" in the school. Montessori coined the term *valorization* to mean a person recognizing their own sense of strength and worthiness, and believed that children who had experienced the trauma of war or abuse could find valorization in Montessori classrooms.

Montessori's description of "mental wounds" that children experienced as a result of war sound a lot like what we have come to know as post-traumatic stress disorder. While most aid groups addressed physical trauma caused by war, Montessori envisioned a global humanitarian organization, The White Cross (similar to The Red Cross), which would be dedicated to curing the mental wounds of children's wartime trauma. *"I can imagine the voluntary worker of the White Cross as a combination of teacher and nurse... and then special educational systems should be applied."*<sup>2</sup>

As Russia forces troops into Ukraine and other conflicts continue to rage worldwide, these words from Montessori, first written in 1949, are no less powerful or relevant today: *"Bringing up the subject of an education for peace in such critical times as these, when society is continually threatened by the possibility of war, may appear to be a most naive kind of idealism. I nonetheless believe that laying the foundation for peace through education is the most effective and the most constructive way of opposing war, since people's needs today in no way justify armed combat, and since war offers them no hope whatsoever of bettering their lot."*<sup>3</sup>

**"Averting war is the work of politicians; establishing peace is the work of education."<sup>4</sup>**  
**—Maria Montessori**

<sup>1</sup> Erica Moretti, *The Best Weapon for Peace: Maria Montessori, Education, and Children's Rights*.

<sup>2</sup> Paola Trabalzini, "Maria Montessori Through the Seasons of the 'Method'," *NAMTA Journal*.

<sup>3</sup> Maria Montessori, *Education and Peace*.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

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## The Cultural Connection: Ramadan

*AMS is committed to supporting its community in building skills and knowledge about diversity, equity, and inclusion. By creating equitable spaces for learning (and in many cases, unlearning), we can all further develop our critical consciousness and engage in liberating dialogue and sharing. The Cultural Connection is but one way that we fulfill this commitment.*

For Muslims, the holy month of Ramadan is the most important of the year, as it is when Allah (God) revealed to Muhammad the first verses of the Quran on a special night called “The Night of Power” (*Laylat al-Qadr* in Arabic). Ramadan (specifically, fasting during Ramadan) is one of the five pillars of Islam. Because Muslims follow the lunar calendar, and lunar years are 354 days long, the ninth month of the lunar calendar moves back about 11 days each year, meaning that Ramadan occurs on different dates each year. For 2022, Ramadan begins the evening of April 2, and concludes the evening of May 2.

During Ramadan, Muslims fast from before sunrise to sunset, and gather at mosques at night for a special prayer called *Taraweeh*. Though all Muslims observe Ramadan, the two main sects within Islam—Sunni and Shia—have some differing traditions. For example, Sunnis break their fast in the evening, and the Shia wait until the sky is entirely dark to end the daily fast. *Suhoor* is the meal eaten before the sunrise, and *iftar* is the meal eaten at sunset. Muslims usually break their fast with dates and water (following the Prophet’s tradition).

Fasting during Ramadan means refraining from food and water during fasting hours, and not engaging in negative behaviors, thoughts, and emotions like jealousy, anger, gossiping, foul language, and smoking, among others. If someone is sick, pregnant, or breastfeeding, they are excused from fasting (they will catch up their days later, or pay for meals for the poor as compensation). If someone eats inadvertently, it is forgiven, and they continue their fast.

Though Ramadan is a time of reflection, self-discipline, and charity, it is also a time of celebration. After praying, people have large meals with their family, friends, and loved ones. The end of Ramadan is marked with a huge celebration called *Eid-Al-Fitr* (“The Festival of Breaking the Fast”).

### How can you support your Muslim friend, coworker, or family member during Ramadan?

- Respect their religion by not offering them food or drink. Fasting is a joyful choice, so don't say you “feel bad” for those who are fasting.
- Do not say: “Not even water or gum?” Muslims have fasted since childhood, so they can handle it!
- Eat food in a different room or at the very least not in front of someone who’s fasting—can you imagine smelling yummy food when you are not eating?
- Schedule gatherings after dark so they can join you and participate fully.
- Wish them a happy Ramadan. While you can say “Happy Ramadan,” to show a little more support, “*Ramadan Mubarak!*” means “Have a blessed Ramadan!”

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*This article was written with the contributions of Fatna Tizi, a French-Algerian Muslim Montessori Infant & Toddler teacher who lives in New Albany, IN.*

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