

VOICES OF AMI TRAINING

Navigating the Toddler Terrain: Insights for Parents and Educators

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Building strong and healthy relationships with toddlers requires a foundation of respect, collaboration, and above all, patience. To guide children effectively, it's essential to convey that we are on their side and understand their perspective. When children feel better, they behave better, and this can be achieved by honouring their requests and involving them in daily tasks.

For parents, the journey involves reflection on simple yet impactful actions: putting down the phone when the child seeks attention, active listening to understand the child's communication, and ensuring adequate time for personal well-being to be fully present with the child.

Observing non-verbal cues becomes key in recognising a child's state—identifying signs of overstimulation, fatigue, sleepiness, hunger, and thirst. In a Montessori context, this observation is integral to daily routines, guiding the educator's approach to connect with each child effectively.

Parents and educators alike are encouraged to take moments of intentional observation, noting the children's activities and interests. This practice not only aids record-keeping but also provides valuable insights for planning personalised lessons.

The concept of freedom in Montessori extends beyond independence from external control. It involves making informed choices within limits, fostering self-construction, and instilling a sense of responsibility. Parents are urged to apply this understanding, recognising the child's evolving independence and guiding their choices responsibly.

Toddlers, like teenagers, might not always act in their own best interest. Setting firm boundaries and projecting a secure authority is essential. Tantrums, often viewed as testing behaviour, present opportunities for children to learn about rules, limits, feelings, and self-regulation.

Understanding and responding to a child's emotions require building a foundation of trust and connection. Rather than simply instructing, observe and recognise the cause of any challenges. Acknowledge the child's feelings without overemphasising and provide support without taking over. It's a delicate balance of allowing feelings to run their course while setting reasonable limits.

Discipline strategies focus on immediate response, collaboration, and consistent enforcement of rules. Communication within a parenting team or between educators is crucial to avoid conflicting expectations, especially during a child's transition into a Montessori environment.

Modelling desired behaviours through Grace and Courtesy – a Montessori tool – includes sitting in a chair to eat, walking slowly, speaking quietly, cleaning and tidying, and seeking permission before taking something from someone else. This approach fosters a sense of control for the child, reducing the likelihood of tantrums.

Cleaning up becomes an integral lesson, emphasising patience and a slow, deliberate process. Guiding the child back to put away materials after each activity and modelling the completion of work cycles contribute to developing a sense of responsibility.

In conclusion, navigating the toddler terrain requires a blend of observation, respect, and intentional communication. By understanding the child's perspective, setting consistent boundaries, and modelling desired behaviours, both parents and educators can contribute to the holistic development of toddlers, creating an environment where they can thrive.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elise Arevalo is a 0–3 Trainer for the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) and leads the 0–3 Diploma Course at Montessori Northwest.

Elise specialises in Montessori education in the first three years of life and has been guiding infants and toddlers since 2011. She earned her Assistants to Infancy (age 0–3) and Primary (age 3–6) diplomas from Montessori Northwest (MNW) and completed a Master's in Education from Loyola University. She has a BA in Interdisciplinary Studies: Women & Environment with Ethnic Studies and Social Advocacy minors along with 11 years classroom and nine years administrative experience in Montessori environments.

Elise's other passions include educating caregivers on the practice and benefits of Infant Massage and Infant Craniosacral therapy. She cites, as words to live by, "Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time." (Ruth Bader Ginsberg)