



# INTERDEPENDENCE 101 INDEPENDENCE 201

The Second Plane of Development  
6-12 Years



This publication is the second part of our series on Interdependence. The foundations of interdependence can be found in the guide for the first plane of development. Following is an extension of building interdependence in a 6–12 year-old child with Montessori experience.

## WHAT IS INTERDEPENDENCE?

Sympathy, generosity, charitable donations, service, sharing, etc. It also encompasses grace and courtesy and conflict resolution. In other words, all the behaviors required to be a productive member of society when the child is grown.

## HOW IS THE 6–12 YEAR-OLD CHILD DIFFERENT THAN THE 0–6 YEAR-OLD?

From 0–6 years, a child learns by absorbing the environment around him. At 6 years of age, Montessori noticed a significant change in the focus and direction of their development. The child shifts from individual formation to development of social beings. They are building their moral compass and learning the rules of social engagement. The questions they ask shift from “What is that?” to the more probing questions of “How? When? Where?”. They have developed the ability to reason and are searching for the relationship between facts. At the same time they begin to distance themselves from their family, they also engage in that dreaded behavior of “tattling.” This behavior is simply the child clarifying right and wrong. They are very interested in using the facts available to come to their own conclusions about what things are right and wrong. After some time, they define their moral values leading to the birth of their sense of justice.

## WHAT IS OUR ROLE AS PARENTS?

The most important thing we can do is continue to role model and guide our children. The difference now is that your child is watching what you do and comparing it to what you say. (Uh-oh) This is when saying that caring for others is a priority is not enough. You need to model it for them and hold them to high ethical standards. This may mean helping them honor a commitment to a team or stand up for a friend who is being bullied.

## WHY DOES IT SAY INDEPENDENCE 201 ON THE COVER?

The 6–12 year-old child is now physically independent, for the most part. The second part of independence is setting limits for our child. Limits at this age begin to reflect the values of your family and the moral expectations for your child. How do you react to external authority? Do you obey laws, like no texting and driving? How do you show gratitude? All of these examples you set are teaching your child how to react in similar situations.

## WHAT LIMITS SHOULD I SET?

Setting limits is an art that is ever-evolving and personalized to your child. What works for some, may not work for others. All parents set some limits in common. These limits, like curfews, usually ensure the safety of our children. At TMA, we set limits with the goal of producing a productive, caring community citizen who is able to handle external authority. We offer choices within the limits and allow them to experience the consequences of their choice. Basically, we hope to produce children with a strong moral compass who are kind, generous, and gracious. We encourage you to set limits and consequences together as a family.

The following page provides some strategies to reinforce the ideals we are working on in the classroom. For further information, your child’s classroom teacher is a wonderful resource of information and knows your child very well.

*Teach children limits with love or  
the world will teach them  
without it.*

*– Maria Montessori*

## IDEAS FOR ENCOURAGING INTERDEPENDENCE IN YOUR CHILD<sup>1</sup>

|   | Why?  | How?   | Try This:   |
|---|---|--|---|
| <b>Make caring for others a priority.</b>                                   | Children need to learn to balance their needs with the needs of others.   | Let them know it's important.<br><br>Encourage them to work out problems before quitting a team, band, or a friendship.  | Make sure children always address others respectfully.<br><br>Emphasize caring when you talk with teachers about school performance.  |
| <b>Provide opportunities for children to practice caring and gratitude.</b> | Becoming a good person won't happen on its own. Children need to practice caring for others and expressing gratitude.   | Daily repetition-helping a friend with homework, pitching in around the house, etc.  | Only acknowledge uncommon acts of kindness.<br><br>Talk to them about caring and uncaring acts they see on TV or about acts of justice and injustice they hear about in the news.<br><br>Make gratitude a daily ritual in your family. Express thanks for those who contribute to us in large and small ways. |
| <b>Expand your child's circle of concern.</b>                               | It's important to teach them to care for people outside their immediate family and friends.<br><br>Children need to learn to consider the perspective of people they interact with daily. | Help them consider others' perspectives.<br>Include people who are vulnerable.<br><br>Help them consider how their decisions ripple out and impact different members of the community. | Encourage them to care for the vulnerable, like a teased classmate.<br><br>Use conflict (including sibling conflict) to practice trying on the perspectives of others.<br><br>Make sure they are friendly and grateful with everyone, like bus drivers and waitresses.  |
| <b>Be a strong role model and mentor.</b>                                   | Children learn ethical values by watching and thinking through the actions of adults.   | Practice honesty, caring, and fairness.<br><br>Acknowledge mistakes and flaws.<br><br>Respect children's thinking and listen to their perspectives.                                    | Model caring by doing community service, with or without your child.<br><br>Give your child an ethical dilemma at dinner or ask them to share dilemmas they have faced.<br><br>Use news stories to encourage them to think about other children and the hardships they face.                                  |
| <b>Guide children in managing negative feelings.</b>                        | The ability to care for others may be overwhelmed by feelings of anger, shame, envy, etc.   | Teach children that all feelings are OK, but some ways of dealing with them are not helpful.   | Practice calming down: ask them to stop, breathe in through their nose and exhale through their mouth, and count to five. Practice when they are calm so you can remind them when they are becoming upset.  |

<sup>1</sup>Summarized from information provided by the Making Caring Common Project.

## EXAMPLES OF GUIDING LANGUAGE

- The most important aspect of guiding language is explaining the child's feelings so they have language to explain how they feel in the future. "I see you're sad." "I see you're angry."
- Never force a child to say he is sorry. Explain how he has caused hurt and tell him to ask the injured/upset child what he/she needs to feel better. If they will not ask, then you ask. You can then assist the child in doing what the injured/upset child has asked.
- Remember to talk through a situation, and don't ask why. Ask "Did something happen?" or say "Tell me more." Why is not a question they can answer.
- Make limits and rules clear and consistent. When there is a problem, refer to the rules as the reason they should not have done something. This way there is no blaming on either side.
- Say things like:
  - Would you help me with ... ?
  - How can we ... ?
  - What do you think?
  - How can we make this feel fair for everyone?
  - How do you think...feels?
  - What can we do to help...feel better?

## REMEMBER, DURING THIS TIME YOUR CHILD MAY:

- Pay less attention to their appearance.
- Have unpredictable manners.
- Like to be away from home or develop an attitude of detachment.
- Begins "tattling."
- Become more extroverted.
- Play games that seem strange to us including secret language, passwords, and other rituals.
- Question you about everything, including your own inconsistencies.
- Express their opinions in ways that seem impertinent or rude. Continue coaching!
- Want to learn about many topics, but not in great detail.

## WAYS TO MODEL AND ENCOURAGE INTERDEPENDENCE

- Hold the door for those behind you.
- Offer to let someone go first.
- Offer to take your neighbor's dog for a walk.
- Invite someone new over.
- Volunteer to be a tutor or mentor at school.
- Give someone a compliment every day.
- Make a treat to send to a senior center.
- Write a thank you note to a teacher, firefighter, coach, or mentor.
- Say good morning to the teacher, principal, and other students.
- Call grandparents and other special family members you don't see often.
- Encourage them to be friendly to a new student.
- Make a card and send it to a friend for no reason.
- Give a huge tip or compliment to a waiter.
- Have a "normal" conversation with a homeless person.
- Give another driver your parking spot.
- Help and elderly neighbor carry the trash out.
- Buy an inspirational book for a friend.
- Smile a lot!

## THE MONTESSORI ACADEMY OF ARLINGTON

Preparing children for life, not just the next test.

