

learning - how to live - together



Primary Program 2023-2024



“Education is not something which a teacher does, but that it is a natural process which develops spontaneously in the human being. It is not acquired by listening to words but in virtue of experiences in which the child acts on his environment.”

~M. Montessori, p. 3, [The Absorbent Mind](#)

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Primary Program Introduction

Entrance into the Primary program is based on readiness. Children usually enter between 2 1/2 to 3 years old. Therefore, most children spend 3 to 4 years in Primary, inclusive of the “Kindergarten Year”.

The **Initial Year** of a child’s Primary career is an introduction to the new environment and social acclimation. A secure foundation of self-discipline, independent functioning and self-confidence is formed.

The **Middle Years** are ones of unfolding and mastery. Children return to work with materials learned in the first year and practice new concepts.

The **Final Year** of a child’s Primary career is a consolidation of skills and knowledge and a growth in competence and self-assurance. This is the time when the traditional types of learning, such as reading, writing and math computations are visible. Children during this year are beginning to make the transition from being a concrete thinker to an abstract thinker. The skills which are gained are actually a byproduct of the more important foundational characteristics, such as independence, self-motivation, and concentration that the child has internalized and will possess throughout his/her lifetime.

Through her scientific observations, Dr. Montessori discovered that young children need an uninterrupted work period. It is for this reason that there is a 3-hour work period in the morning and a 2-hour work period in the afternoon. “Uninterrupted” means that a child who is engaged and concentrating on his/her material, is able to complete the work without fear or worry that it will be interrupted by an adult.

During the work period, children are allowed certain freedoms: the freedom to move about the environment, the freedom to choose with which material to work, the freedom to communicate with others. These freedoms come with responsibilities and expectations. A common misconception about Montessori is that children are allowed the freedom to do whatever they want...this is not the case. A child is free to move about the environment; free to choose with which materials to engage; free to communicate with others of all ages.

Children may be invited to an individual or group presentation by the Guide or choose to engage with materials independently. The Montessori environment is prepared specifically to aid the child in becoming independent. When a child is able to do for himself, he gains confidence and competence in his abilities.

Each Primary environment has adults, called “Guides”, who are trained by the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI). Assisting the Guide, are adults who are trained on-site, called Aides. The AMI is the organization that was established by Dr. Montessori, to carry-on her work and vision in her absence.

Classroom Snack

Each Casa provides a snack for the children to consume once during the morning work cycle. The snack procedure is designed to incorporate several practical lessons. The children help prepare snacks and

learn manners and the social graces associated with having a snack with others. Each day children will have available to them fresh fruit/vegetables.

Classroom Lunch

If your child stays past 12:00 p.m. lunch must be brought from home. Adults eat with the children at Village Montessori School. Adults and children alike bring their lunch from home and lunch is used as another practical teaching moment: manners are refined, awareness is brought to flavors, textures and temperatures of food, and the sources of foods are discussed: plant or animal, leaf or root, etc.

Even though lunches come in a bag or box, we do not eat picnic-style. Children are involved in and responsible for all parts of the dining experience, from setting places with real dishes to cleaning-up afterwards (not only the dishes but the table and floor). Patience is learned as children await until everyone is ready before eating.

There is adequate time to eat lunch and each child is encouraged to listen to his/her body and consume only as much as their stomachs can contain. Children are also expected to consume their food independently and are guided to use the proper cutlery when appropriate. *Staff will not feed your child.*

Children are typically more enthusiastic about consuming that which they have taken part in preparing. Village Montessori School is aware of the importance proper nutrition plays in the growth, development and learning for young bodies and minds. It is for this reason that we strongly encourage that each lunch contains a protein, fruit/vegetable, and grain. We eat with our eyes and our nose as much as our palate. A well-rounded meal is colorful, with different textures.

Please refrain from packing the following items:

- **VMS is a nut-free facility, this includes peanuts and tree nuts**
- highly processed foods
- squeezable food (e.g.: tubular yogurt or applesauce pouches)
- foods with high sugar content or high fructose corn syrup (muffins, cookies, candy)
- carbonated drinks, fruit juice, yogurt smoothies, milk
- snack packs, pudding, Jell-O, chips
- soup

Should an item of food not meet with our guidelines or expectations for a healthy lunch, your child's guide may send home the unopened and unconsumed food with a friendly reminder.

Lunch containers are not refrigerated, nor do we warm-up food. Lunches should be packed with ice packs. For warm items, it is best to use a thermal container. Pre-heat the container with boiling water & let it sit for a minute. Empty out the water and fill container with warmed food. It will be warm by lunchtime.

Young children don't require large amounts of food, so please keep this in mind when preparing portions. The state of Georgia requires that any **unconsumed food** or portions of food or drink which are served to the children or placed on the table for service and not consumed at that meal or snack by the children to whom the portions are served shall be thrown away.

We recommend the use of re-usable containers. What we have found to be most successful for the children to open and manipulate are small snack-sized containers for each food item with snap-top lids. *All-inclusive Bento-style boxes are **not** recommended.* ALL containers should be easy to open, including the lunch box itself. The outside of the lunch box must be clearly labeled with your child's name. Lunch boxes should be without commercial cartoon images (Mickey Mouse, Dora, etc.) or distracting logos.

Please consult the VMS website for healthy lunch suggestions.

Toys, Games and Other Items

Children at the Primary level love to show others tidbits of their lives. Items of interest from a vacation such as a shell or postcard; items discovered in nature such as an eagle feather or Luna moth; and cultural items are welcome objects. Each Primary community has their own protocol of how these objects can be shared. Please consult your child's Guide for specifics.

VMS provides an extremely interesting variety of daily activities with unique treasures. It is not uncommon for one (or more) of these treasures to find their way into your child's pocket or belongings. The children are encouraged to take ownership of their environment and so they often see these "trinkets" as extensions of themselves. If you discover a "tiny treasure" has made its way home, simply return it. It will find its way back onto the shelf with no questions asked.

Personal items such as toys, jewelry, hair accessories, games, etc. are distracting and disruptive. Please refrain from allowing your child to bring these to school. If you are in question as to whether an item is appropriate, feel free to ask your child's Guide. Village Montessori is not responsible for items brought from home.

Extended Day

This is a Montessori term which refers to the afternoon work period. This time has traditionally been when the older children (typically 4 1/2 to 5 and above) have an "extended" period of time to work and learn after lunch. The types of activities with which these children engage are more sedentary and "academic" in nature. As a result, materials started during the morning work cycle often "extend" into the afternoon. For instance, it is rare that setting out, counting and putting away the 1000 chain can occur within a single 3 hour work period. Children are invited to join the Extended Day at their Guide's discretion, based on observations and parent feedback about their child's needs for afternoon sleep or rest.

Nap/Rest Time

A nap/rest time is provided for those children under the age of 5 who are enrolled through the afternoon. The nap period lasts for 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Children sleep or rest quietly on a cot which has been assigned to them. We ask that each child bring a small pillow and blanket, **connected nap mats are preferred** (a mat with a connected pillow and blanket). All items must be clearly labeled. Nap items will be sent home on Fridays (or the last day of the school week) to be laundered and returned at the beginning of the following week. If your child's mat becomes soiled mid-week, please launder, and return it, or a suitable replacement, the following day.

Early Pick-Up

At VMS, we understand that it is not always possible to schedule appointments in the morning or after school. If you have a child who naps and who has an afternoon appointment, please plan to pick your child up at the end of the morning work cycle. Not only is it challenging for your child to be awakened in the middle of his/her slumber, but it can become particularly disruptive to the rest of his/her bunkmates.

Around the age of 4-4 1/2, a child begins to transition out of the need for a midday nap. The nap staff will communicate this to the Guide who will in turn communicate with the parents about the best method and timing for a transition into the extended day/afternoon.

Nap is staffed by the support staff from our Primary environments.

Dress Code

A Montessori program is a unique learning environment where children learn how to become confident and **independent** individuals. Between the ages of 2 1/2 - 6, a large stepping stone on this path towards independence is clothing and dressing oneself.

Your child should wear clothing which allows him/her to be independent not only in dressing him/herself but in the bathroom, as well. Suspenders, overalls, and belts are particularly challenging for children...especially when trying to get to the toilet quickly.

If your child brings home soiled clothing, please return to school *the next day* replacement items. A paper reminder will be sent home with the type and quantity of items required for replenishment. We understand how life can get busy, and we have a few articles of clothing in case of emergency. These articles are clearly labeled VMS. Borrowed clothing must be returned, laundered, within 48 hours.

EACH item of clothing must be labeled...especially clothing which will be removed frequently.

Even though aprons are worn for some activities, your child's clothing may become soiled. Likewise, garments may become damaged in one way or another. Take this into consideration when guiding your child's clothing choices for the day.

At VMS, we recognize that one form of self-expression is a child's fashion choice. We strive to prepare an environment which is best suited to the developmental needs of your child; is designed to foster intellectual curiosity and is free from distractions. Your child has a developing mind which is not yet ready to understand characters and creatures which are based in fantasy. Please refrain from dressing your child in clothing which contains commercialized/fantasy characters. Clothing which positively depicts nature, the arts, sports, geography/culture/history and human rights are acceptable. Consult our website for shirt and clothing examples.

Footwear: Footwear must be comfortable, well-fitting, and in good condition. Children must be able to walk, run, jump, and climb with ease and be able to unfasten and fasten shoes independently. This excludes open-toed shoes, loose slip-ons, flip-flops, boots of any kind or footwear with heels taller than

1/2 an inch, and light-up shoes. Shoes that tie should be reserved for the child who has learned to tie bows.

Accessories: The only jewelry allowed are pierced earrings. Hats are for outdoor use only. Hair should be pulled back to not obstruct a child's vision. As with the rest of the clothing guidelines, hair accessories need to be simple, secure, and comfortable.

Our goal for your child's clothing is that it be comfortable, allow for independence, promote concentration and be safe.

Our children at VMS will always go outdoors. Children need a great deal of movement and fresh air for healthy development. Dr. Montessori was known to have said "*There is no such thing as inclement weather, only inappropriate clothing*". Select clothing appropriate for the weather of the day. Looking at the weather forecast the night before can be a wonderful teachable moment.

Birthdays

Birthdays are momentous events in your child's life. Birthday celebrations are very exciting for young children. Sometimes, the excitement for a young child can feel overwhelming. Each Guide strives to make the primary environment an oasis of calm for your child. *If your **child** expresses a desire to have a birthday celebration at school, please notify your child's Guide approximately *two weeks* prior to your child's birthday.* Each community has its own traditions, which your child's Guide will share with you at the beginning or during the year.

If you wish, you may provide fresh fruit as a simple treat for your child's primary community snack. Fruits should be pre-sliced and agreed upon in advance with the Guide.

We also encourage you to donate a (new) book to the Village Montessori Library in honor of your child's birthday. Perhaps you have a family favorite. If not, you can consult our recommended list or ask your child's guide for suggestions.

For birthdays that occur during weekends and holidays, please arrange a time with your child's guide.

Village Montessori School is unable to distribute individual gifts, goody bags, invitations, thank you notes, etc. at the school.

Parent-Guide Conferences

Formal conferences occur twice a year and are scheduled on the calendar in advance. These special meetings are held without children present so that all adults can discuss the development, behavior, social-emotional as well as academic progress of the student. Childcare will be available at the school *only* during your child's conferences, and *only* for the child who is enrolled. Families with siblings are given priority in scheduling. Sign-ups will be live two weeks prior to the first conference date and will close the Friday before conferences. If you should need to change your scheduled conference time, we ask that you switch with another parent and inform your child's guide at least two days in advance. Missed conferences will not be re-scheduled. *Attendance to Parent-Teacher Conferences is mandatory.*

Parent Education Events

Individual conferences are held to discuss the individual child's experiences and progress. To understand these experiences and to learn more about the Montessori classroom it is important to attend parent education events and study groups. This will enhance your understanding at our personal conferences. Parents have found that study groups and parent education events improve parenting skills because suggestions are often given on discipline, preparing your home environment, and enhancing your child's learning experience at school. **Some attendance to parent education meetings is mandatory at VMS.**

Family of the Week

Each family is asked to contribute fruits and/or vegetables and flowers a few times during the year. The produce is used as the snack for the week and the flowers are used by the children to create arrangements to beautify the learning environment. When a child shops with and helps to select the items with you, it allows them to take ownership of her/his environment. This opportunity allows the child to take ownership of his/her environment. Children are involved in the preparation of snack and the flowers offer children the ability to refine skills such as measurement, logical sequencing, visual aesthetics, and concentration, language, not to mention the confidence that is gained from accomplishing such a skill independently. Being the provider of the Casa's groceries for the week is a source of pride for each child. Guides will offer a sign-up at the beginning of the year, or assignment during the year, for families to choose which week. A reminder is given on the Friday before your week. *Please no thorns or artificially colored/glittered flowers.*

Children's Work

The prepared Montessori environment maximizes independent learning and exploration on the part of the child. Each child works in an individual way with his own store of knowledge, allowing him to progress at his own pace. Montessori individualized instruction deals in the concrete, making use of manipulative that materialize abstract concepts.

The "work" of the child is one of self-construction in a Montessori classroom. As a result, for the first year and a half to two years, your child may not bring home examples of what they have accomplished during the day, with the exception of artwork. Most of the materials and activities in a Casa are process-oriented vs. product-oriented. With the observation and re-presentation of the material by the Guide and the continued practice by your child, he/she works with a material until proficiency is reached. Many of the materials in the Practical Life and Sensorial areas indirectly prepare your child's hand for writing through developing the pincer grip, strengthening the hand and flexibility of the wrist and establishing a left to right movement.

Once your child has prepared her hand for writing, she may begin bringing home papers called Metal Insets. This material is the first time a child has had a pencil formally placed in her hand and the specific and prescribed way of making serpentine lines further helps prepare her hand for writing letters and numbers. When your child *does* begin bringing home math or language papers, please remember that they will most likely be inaccurate with misspelled words, letters, words or numbers in reverse, and incorrect mathematical equations. Montessori education focuses on the process instead of the product of the work. As your child practices with a material, the Guide makes minor corrections. The

Montessori approach to education also does not have grades. A child works with and practices a didactic material until they have become proficient with it. Many times, the next material in a progression cannot be presented until there is some level of proficiency with the previous. If you notice errors in your child's work, it is advised that you contact your child's Guide to ask questions instead of bringing your child's attention to the error. To do so may discourage your child from practicing or persevering to achieve mastery. Suggestions for how to talk to your child about his/her school work include: "it looks like you worked hard on this"; "tell me about your work"; "what do *you* notice about your work?"; "I look forward to seeing more of these papers"; etc.

Transitioning to the Next Level: Lower Elementary

Continuing her insightful work into the mind and development of the young child, Maria Montessori developed an excellent curriculum for the Elementary years. As with the Primary program, the Elementary program is based on individualized instruction uniquely designed to meet the developmental, social, and educational needs of the child from 6-12 years of age. It centers on an integrated vision of knowledge, emphasizing the inter-relatedness of fields of study while allowing each child the time and space to explore in-depth at his or her own pace.

Dr. Montessori recognized that a fundamental shift occurs in the development of the child around the age of 6. It is one of the reasons why traditional school begins around this time. She observed that the child between the ages of 6-12 become different from the Primary aged child (3-6). They become leaner, with courser hair. The deciduous teeth fall-out and the permanent adult teeth begin to emerge. It is a period of stability of health. Mentally, the child develops a reasoning mind and imagination. This allows him/her to conceive of big ideas and academic concepts.

All subjects are introduced in the Elementary classroom. these include language arts, mathematics, geometry, botany, zoology, Spanish, geography, the physical sciences, visual art, and music. Children are given key lessons that allow for open-ended, unlimited exploration in areas of specific interest to the child.

In the Primary, the world is brought into the child through the exploration of cultures through pictures and in-class presentations. This is contrasted by "Goings-out" in the Elementary where the children are encouraged to develop independence and resourcefulness and gain "real-life" experiences.

The Montessori Elementary is a six-year program and is divided into two groups at Village Montessori: Lower Elementary (ages 6-9) and Upper Elementary (ages 9-12). A child's elementary career is completed after the 6th year. Not every child is ready to enter the Elementary program at age 6. Some children are better served in Primary a bit longer. Your child's Primary Guide will work with an Elementary Guide to determine readiness for the next level. Parents will be invited to observe in Elementary classrooms and attend Elementary Parent Meetings prior to the child's advancement to Elementary. Moving from Primary to Elementary is a continuation of your child's educational career. As a result, *we do not have a graduation ceremony for the Primary children who are advancing into the Elementary program, either at our school or other schools.* The only recognition ceremony VMS has is at the completion of the Middle School program.

Consult the Village Montessori Parent Handbook for matters not covered in this Primary Handbook.

Glossary of Terms

Casa...Many of the romance languages define *casa* meaning “house” or “home”. Dr. Montessori named her first classroom “*Casa dei Bambini*”, or “Children’s House”. Today, Primary Montessori classrooms are often referred to as *casa*’s.

Prepared Environment...Through her observations, Dr. Montessori observed that young children interacted with their world in very concrete and sensorial ways. She also observed that when the adults and environment were suited to the child’s needs, children could be highly capable and independent. Montessori prepared environments are places of learning that are specifically designed to meet the developmental needs of the young child. They contain not only the concrete learning materials but furniture and fixtures with which children can independently be successful.

Primary...The level in a Montessori school for children between the ages of 2 1/2 - 6. In traditional schooling, this level is often referred to as “preschool”. In a Montessori classroom, or *Casa*, this also incorporates children who would be in their Kindergarten year.

Guide....This is the primary adult in the learning environment who has been specifically trained to implement the Montessori curricula. In traditional terms, this individual is known as a “teacher”. The term *teacher* conjures up the meaning of one who imparts knowledge to another. The term *guide* invokes one who allows another to independently discover and who points out relevant information.

Aide....This is the secondary adult in the learning environment. This person is usually untrained (in Montessori) and assists the Guide with several duties (including but not limited to): safety of the children; care of the environment; adherence to schedules and routines, amongst other duties. This person is integral to the successful functioning of the prepared environment.

Grace & Courtesy....Grace is having harmony with the environment and courtesy is having harmony with others. These are lessons which help the children have respect for their environment and each other. For example: how to interrupt politely and how to carry objects with two hands.

Work Cycle....During Dr. Montessori’s observations of children, she discovered that when children are offered an uninterrupted period of time, they go through a cycle of intense, concentrated focus; respite and reflection; and inactivity that lasts for about 3 hours.

Presentation...A formal “lesson” from the Guide to the child or children on how to use a particular, didactic material.

Work...In its literal sense from the dictionary: *activity involving mental or physical effort done in order to achieve a purpose or result*. In the *casa*, children are actively engaged with materials which require *both* mental and physical effort. The purpose achieved ultimately is the construction of the child’s personality and development. Each learning material, or “work”, has other direct and indirect purposes.

Practical Life...An area of the *casa* which contains materials that will help the child to become independent; that will help the child develop deep concentration; and that will aide the child to control his or her fine and gross motor skills. The Practical Life area contains works which are like *practical*

activities you would have at home to function in everyday *life*, such as sweeping, apple cutting, plant watering, how to use fasteners like buttons and bows.