

freedom & limits in the first 3 years of life

notes from Patricia Wallner's lecture

- The ages 0-6 and 12-18 are stages of creation - during which freedom and limits are necessary for the formation of the individual.
- Freedom is something everyone wants - economic freedom, professional freedom, spiritual freedom.... But we cannot do anything we want without consequences. The limits are those that we accept within our community (family, school, neighborhood...world) and learn to live within.
- In Montessori, as it should be everywhere, the child has the freedom to move, to stay on a task as long as they want, to order one's own actions, and to develop their will.
- Of course, as the child's freedom expands, as do their responsibilities and need for self-discipline, but fundamentally their freedom is of that of the individual **to have unlimited possibilities for growth and improvement**. This freedom *should* be the basis of human society.

“The only true freedom for an individual is to have opportunity to act independently.”

- Dr. Maria Montessori, *Education and Peace*, chapter 7

- Adolescents have the freedom to develop into a fully functioning, independent adult. This is a process which begins in the first 3 years of life.
- The toddler's journey to freedom begins at birth. The toddler has the freedom to work with their hands, to find functional independence, to do practical life tasks, to fall asleep when they are tired. There are built-in social limits to learning how to be social, but within those limits - there is a lot of freedom.
- The child does everything to become an individual of their time and place.
- Everything is tied by protective laws which render freedom possible. **Fish are the most free of the living beings in the world, yet they cannot get out of the water.**
- Dr. Montessori describes physical freedom as to be free from the teacher and the parent, free of being under constant influence of another person. They must be free from being dependent. Dependence destroys personality. {*Education and Peace*}

Organic freedom is necessary to sustain physical freedom (maintaining and sustaining the body).

Then psychic freedom becomes possible. For this an education which follows the laws of development is required with a guide who knows what is psychologically appropriate for each plane and how and when to work with them through each milestone.

Then comes intellectual freedom which is spiritual and intellectual independence, or the birth of the adult.

- Freedom is an exercise of the the will, making choices based on understanding. But **freedom is not a gift to the child from the adult, but the child's own conquest.**
- Nature provides babies with a vital impulse that drives them. The parent is happy to do everything for them, but the baby fights to roll over, to pull up over and over, without anyone telling them to.
- The child in their first 3 years of life is called the *unconscious creator* - one who doesn't know that they are learning. Gradually the reasoning mind catches up with the unconscious mind and from 4 years old, the child is guided by the reason. The reasoning mind is present from birth, but it is not in control. The child develops it through living and building their knowledge, knowledge they start absorbing in the womb.
- The vital impulse driving the 0-3 child to learn is called their *Hormic will*. This and their Absorbent Mind allow the child to incarnate everything they need to learn and everything we want them to learn, such as the rules of life and language.
- How the child is born and raised will always be the most comfortable way for them to live because this is what they have incarnated. They will learn more through life, but nothing will have the same long term impact like the unprejudiced way in which they absorb their own culture, for example.
- When parents teach rules by saying "No! Stop!," this is the way they will teach rules to others. **Active discipline** is when the child is in control of themselves - when they are internally motivated to follow the rules. 0-3 year old children don't understand the whole world, so parents still need to give the rules so the child can adapt to wherever they were born (language, habits, food, climate...). The child is open to everything and develops their own discipline. The adults in their life have to model everything the way we want *them* to do it.
- Children watch us all the time. They have 86 billion neurons. They are listening even when you whisper. The Absorbent Mind takes in everything. Children repeat what we say. That's why even as an adult, you might find yourself saying something your mother always said to you, even without intending to. You incarnated that as a child.

You have to set limits, giving just enough information so the child knows what you are talking about. 'You must walk inside. We can run outside later.'

"Do not fear to destroy evil. It is only the good that we must destroy." - Dr. Montessori

"If there is some child who persistently annoys the others, the most practical thing to do is to interrupt them." (Dr. Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, ch. 27)

"A child's liberty should have as its limit the interests of the group to which he belongs. We should prevent a child from doing anything which may offend or hurt others or which is impolite or unbecoming." (Dr. Montessori, *Discovery of the Child*, ch. 3)

Don't allow child to MISUSE the materials. Allow them to USE the materials.

Be aware of how you stop chaos. Act. Don't react.

Adults can make strong connections too, even without the Absorbent Mind. The way you interact with children will get stronger and stronger with practice. Teach yourself to use certain phraseology. Adjust yourself to the child's level. You won't have to think about it. Train yourself to interact in the right way and model correctly when you are with the child.

Babies CAN concentrate. As long as they have the right materials in front of them.

"Let us remember that inner discipline is something to come, and not something already present. Our task is to show they way top discipline. Discipline is born with the child concentrates his attention on some object that attracts him." (Dr. Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, ch. 26)

- Toddlers need more time to process information than other age groups because their language is more limited than other ages. You can only say one thing to them at a time, no sequences. Speak slowly. When you put on coats, don't talk about where you are going, wait until you are on the way. Give information and repeat it.

Let's go downstairs..... We need coats Which hat do you want to wear?..... Let's go to Grandma's house..... Do you want to walk or ride in the wagon?

- Not every child in the world has to look at you while you are speaking. You should know if they are paying attention, whether they are looking at you or not. That is an archaic Western tradition.
- Around 2 years old, the child is completely separate from the parent and the Ego is formed. Their favourite word is 'No'. They want to be heard. They want to have a say in everything.

You can put on your coat. Or I will help you put on your coat.

NOT *Put on your coat or I will leave without you.*

(Then you will have to actually leave without them. Which you won't do. So you will lose your credibility.)

This only applies to children under 3 years old.

- What do you do if the child rejects your idea? You have to set the limit. Tell them nicely:
Please stop kicking the wall. Either you stop kicking the wall, or I will help you move away.
Speak to the child the way you would want someone to tell you to stop kicking the wall if you were having an emotional breakdown.
- Set rules simply by saying:
We don't climb on the table.
We don't run in the kitchen.
- With a toddler who can understand more complex language: set the limit, explain the choices, think the situation through, and assist the child to comply.



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Bio source: <https://imi-global.nl/trainer/>