

freedom & limits from 3-6 years old

notes from Madlena Ulrich's lecture

- In order to be able to follow limits and show responsibility, the child must develop the will so they can relate to the rules that are applied to our group.
- The **will** is the desire or inclination to do something. Willpower and will are often used interchangeably, but they are different.
- **Will** is the inclination but **will power** is the power to direct the will to do something or continue to do something in the face of hinderances or distractions.
- When we do something "of our own free will" it means that we have done it voluntarily and it also means we have considered options. *Do I do it or not?* Exercising your will means you have considered options and have made a choice.
- **Self control** is the ability to regulate your thoughts and behaviour in the face of temptations. We have the ability as adults to give ourselves little rewards if we show signs of self-control. *If I do that, then I can do this. Before I watch the news, I will finish this assignment. After I finish this task, then I will have a cup of tea.* You use the will to push away distraction, but still require a reward after.
- Being **strong-willed** is sometimes considered to be a negative trait by adults when a child is not doing what the adult wants them to do, if a child does the opposite of what we want or is hard to direct and need rewards or punishment to do what the adult wants them to do. However, we also admire people with a strong will, those who have risen above society.
- Montessori thought a strong will is a positive thing. It means that you have a strong connection to your own will and your own needs, whereas a child with a weak will might allow themselves be guided and and will follow their peers or obey orders.
- In Montessori we believe that we should help the child to develop their will, to become in charge of their own actions, to be able to stop themselves from doing what they are not supposed to do and challenge themselves to do what they must.

Practical Application:

- Lots of children's games are about training the will and executive functions.
- The Montessori classroom allows the child to be able to focus on what is essential and to be able to adjust their own feelings and emotions.
- We use our will to calm ourselves down and to wake ourselves up and to adjust.
- We encourage the children to practice creative problem solving. What is plan b.,c., and d. and how can I adjust?
- The child should learn to trust themselves and to build their self-esteem. Without self-esteem the child might not act upon the will. Strengthening their will power builds resilience, allowing them to continue their work even when they make mistakes.
- The child needs to have a feeling that they are doing something deeply meaningful.
- Babies can't control their emotions and need to build up these skills in order to regulate their actions in 3-6.
- During the first year of life, the child doesn't have control over their hormone system. Their sense of external feeling of safety is given to them by the adults in their environment, for example the calming and singing voice of their father.
- When they become toddlers they begin to learn how to be aware of and regulate their emotions.
- At age 2, the will starts to form.
- We can see that the child's actions are not based purely on impulse, but on a decision. Now that the child has found their will, they exert it as much as they can. For a toddler it's new and they don't know where or how to use it. They tend to over-use it. They say "no" to every question. This is actually a very important stage.
- At this beautiful and exciting stage, the child is becoming aware that they have a will. It feels to them like they could change the whole world with the word 'no'. The child with their new power needs to practice the use of their will. This coincides with the maturation of the prefrontal cortex. *I want a cookie but my parents told me that I can only have a cookie after dinner.*
- A child's development in this area is very dependent on the caregiver. The child may have a strong will but it is still hard work to use that will in the face of temptation. It's even hard for some adults.

- Practical life activities provide the 2-3 year old child with the intelligent direction of movement. These materials are essential in the development of the will. *I am moving my hands over the table with the soapy water to eventually cover the whole table with suds. I am building the pink tower by moving one block at a time. I am going to continue scrubbing that whole table until its washed and then I will continue tidying up until everything is back on the shelf.*

Support the child's will with enthusiasm.

Give the child time to make their decisions and don't give too many choices.

Obedience & The Will:

- Obedience is the ability to regulate yourself and to follow the needs or requests of someone else.
- Blind obedience is not a good thing. But the child must learn a willingness to listen to others, consider what they say, and decide whether or not they should act upon what they said. Obedience really means that the child knows they need to do something and they can do it, even if they don't want to because they know that it is important. *My teacher says we need to tidy up our work - I don't really want to, but I know it's true.*

Levels of obedience:

- level 1: the child obeys if their needs are in accordance with the requests.
- level 2: the child obeys as long as you don't turn your back.
- level 3: the child obeys without being asked, because he sees the needs.

Development of the will:

- level 1: instinctual behaviour of the newborn that needs the adult to build up the ability to self-regulate
- level 2: deliberate action when the child starts noticing the needs of other and occasionally acts upon them ... if they feel so inclined at the moments and then around 2 it turns more into internal motivation.
- level 3: the child becomes aware of the impact of his actions on the environment. *If I push my friends while we are standing in line something unpleasant will happen and that's not positive so I am checking myself even though I am impatient right now.*

When the child is not doing what we want, we must consider which stage the child is in the development of obedience and their will. that development and ask ourselves, "Do my wishes line up with that child's?" Some children have been given very little opportunity to regulate their will. For example, some

adults think that a little child should not have to struggle with are putting on their socks or putting their own work away. This child may consequently have a delay in their development of will and obedience.

Respect child's pace.

Respect child's ability to self-correct and to build self-confidence and resilience.

Observe.

Respect the child's concentration.



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Madlena Ulrich spent her childhood in Germany and attended a Montessori Elementary school there. She moved to Norway as an adolescent and later obtained a Bachelor's degree as a preschool teacher at the University College of Vestfold, Norway. She took her original AMI 3-6 training at Mount St. Mary's Montessori College in Dublin, Ireland. Since 1995 she has worked in the classroom and has been involved in the development of Montessori in Norway by giving lectures and serving as Vice President on the board for the national association NMF. In 2008 she started on her Training of Trainer's, spending two years with Molly O'Shaughnessy in Minnesota and a summer course with Ulla Wikefeldt in Sweden. She is now an AMI Director of Training and is currently working with students in Norway, Romania, Russia, Czech Republic, and is part of the AMI faculty in China.

Bio source: <https://montessori.org.au/people/madlena-ulrich>