

Observation



Observation: The 3rd Task

If we want to take the Montessori journey we can look at the roadmap laid out by Maria herself for some guidance. According to her teaching we have three tasks. First, we are to spiritually prepare ourselves, the adults, to be with children. This leads us to our ability to create space for children to grow and develop as children do. We accept and trust, we render our hearts burning with charity, we shed our omnipotence. This personal work may take the form of religious or spiritual practice, radical self care, meditation

1

SPIRITUAL
PREPARATION

2

ENVIRONMENTAL
PREPARATION

3

OBSERVATION



Practice modesty of the eyes

Don't let child catch you looking

STOP TALKING



Smile and stay quiet...

No need to comment, leave child alone



Name what you see...

If you must give feedback on what you see just give facts

or contemplative study, or any other activity or time spent exploring our inner world. When we know who we are, when we are at peace, it's easier to offer who we are, peacefully, to the child. Second, she urges us to prepare the environment. Hopefully at this point in your journey you have curated blogs, IG follows, collected books and gathered resources for this task and you have confidence when it comes to setting up a child's room, a kitchen space, a play and work area, and setting daily routines.



“When dealing with children there is a greater need for observing than probing.” - Maria Montessori

Our third task is to observe. Observe your child *like a scientist studies bees* - without interference and without judgement. What precedes frustration? What precedes tantrums? What is she asking for? What does she repeat? What makes her light up? What are her interests, the ones that cause her to lose her sense of space and time? How does she handle frustration? When something is hard does she persist, break down or ask for help? When she finishes a task is she prone to repeat it or celebrate in some way, or does she move on to the next thing? When chaos happens does she move closer and maybe even get involved? Or does she move back and seek solace? When “wronged” by a sibling or friend is she a peace maker inclined to “share” or help, or is she a little warrior protecting her things and space? How sensitive is she to change? How much does she need predictability and routine? When pushed to extreme emotion, how does she recover? Does she need to melt into your arms and weep and feel better through touch and acknowledgement or does she need to have space and break down unencumbered and then come back for love when she's ready? How sensitive is she to light, noise, the movement of others? Does she gravitate to older kids, younger kids, no one at all, or everyone without discrepancy? Is she a risk taker or cautious or a little bit of both?

“AS WE OBSERVE CHILDREN, WE SEE THE VITALITY OF THEIR SPIRIT, THE MAXIMUM EFFORT PUT FORTH IN ALL THEY DO, THE INTUITION, ATTENTION AND FOCUS THEY BRING TO ALL LIFE'S EVENTS, AND THE SHEER JOY THEY EXPERIENCE IN LIVING.”

Maria encourages us to never do for a child that which she can do for herself. How often do we **observe** before we help? Sometimes, a little observation reveals that our help was not necessary because persistence, trial and error, concentration, focus, and will prevailed and the child had a moment of mastery on her own. *Remember... rescue is robbery.*



1. Modesty of the Eyes - when children know they are being watched, their behavior changes. They feel less autonomy. They might start making their activity about you by searching for applause, approval, candy. Or, they could lose interest in what they are doing because they simply don't like the feeling of being watched. Over time the unintended consequence of hovering is a child who feels a sense of constant pressure, a lack of freedom, and eventually an unhealthy connection to the parent. This can result in acting out, becoming needy, or "putting on a show" instead of healthy absorption in activity. When you watch your child work, play, read, climb a high slide, etc., turn your body just a bit away from the child and set your gaze elsewhere, as if you were looking at something else or having a peaceful moment of thoughtful contemplation about something that has nothing to do with your child. **Let your child catch you not paying attention.** You are still observing our of the corner of your eye, still watching, still monitoring safety. When done this way no hovering, staring, or intense focus on the child will threaten the child's sense of freedom, autonomy, and peace.

2. Stop Talking - while observing with modest eyes, leave the child alone. There is no need to say how you feel about their work, play, climbing of the high slide, friendliness with another child, eating all their dinner, etc. When you make everything your child does about you by providing constant "feedback" you run the risk of turning your child into someone who loses touch with why we work, why we paint, why we climb the high slide, why we are friendly to others. The child has an innate drive to explore, move, try, manipulate, observe, experiment, and do it again. Your child will stay engaged with meaningful activity, connect with other children, and take risks without your prompting or feedback. Also, the young child's brain cannot focus on your words while also focusing on the task at hand. When you talk and offer constant feedback you are pulling focus away from the brain and impeding neural connections, *actually slowing down the process of your child's development.*

3. Facts - when you must speak, offer facts by simply stating what you see, what is true. Give brief, truthful feedback with no praise, opinion, fear or complication. That could sound like this:
 1. **You used a red crayon, a green crayon and a pink crayon to make that picture.** (this is in lieu of "What a pretty picture daddy just loves that so much you are so good at painting, good job.")
 2. **That slide is tall and you went halfway up.** (this is in lieu of "I don't know if you should climb that that's too tall for you you could get hurt, are you scared? See that slide over there, that's a better slide for you, when you're bigger you can climb this one, let's get down now.")
 3. **Sometimes we feel sad and we need to cry. I understand that. I will sit close to you. If you want to cuddle you can climb into my lap when you are ready.** (this is in lieu of "Why are you crying, it's OK, don't be sad, let me help you, come here, you're OK, you're OK, you're OK, mommy loves you, no need to cry.")
 4. **When dinner time is over I will put all of the food away. Let's eat until our bellies are full.** (this is in lieu of "You need to eat three more bites of green beans and finish your milk, you didn't eat enough.")
 5. **Water is on the floor. You need towels. I will get them.** (this is in lieu of "Oh my goodness you poured water all over the floor; now we have to clean up, water belongs in the pitcher on the table, here let me show you how to clean up and then let me show you how to pour this water, you need to be more careful.")
 6. **You put all your shoes in the basket.** (this is in lieu of "Good job! You put your shoes away thank you so much, high five, mommy loves it when you put all of your shoes away, now our house is clean and we know where to find our shoes, good job.")

Below are some questions to ignite curiosity for observation. Try setting a timer for 5-10 minutes a couple times a week to sit and observe your child in silence and write down what you see. Then, reflect. Question what you think you know, then question what you judge as “good” or “bad”. Where/what are you judging?

1. My child is probably an *introvert / extrovert / maybe a blend of both*. I think this because...
2. When routines are changed and my child doesn't have a lot of warning she handles it *pretty well / horribly / depends on her fatigue level she can go both ways*. Any example of this...
3. The things she loves the most that will absorb her attention for long periods of time seem to be _____. An example of this...
4. She loves playing with other kids when _____. The minute _____ starts to happen she wants to leave / gets physically / cries.
5. Her frustration tolerance seems to be high / average / low. When work/play isn't going according to plan she just *keeps going / seeks help / freaks out and breaks down*. An example of this...
6. When I watch her work/play I notice that her gross motor skills are pretty developed / getting better / under construction she needs more movement and more time.
7. When I watch her work/play I notice that her fine motor skills are pretty developed / getting better / under construction she needs more practice and time.
8. It's normal for her to test me and right now. I observe her testing most during the activities of _____. When she tests me I feel _____ and when she sees my reaction her response is _____.
9. The part of the day that is most difficult for her is _____. Her behavior is telling me _____ and if I am ready to accept that about her and support her I probably need to _____.
10. The following words describe my child:

Joyful	Curious	Inward	Cautious	Slow
Persistent	Active	Artistic	Stubborn	Fast
Gentle	Disgruntled	Exploring	Loving	Nervous
Easy	Stable	Moody	Unpredictable	Predictable