

Quick Answers and Resource Recommendations to Address Common Questions about Montessori and Abintra

Compiled by the Parent Association and Abintra Faculty & Staff

1. *There's no homework at Abintra? How will my child get their schoolwork done? I'm concerned about my child having a good work ethic, too.*

“Dr. Montessori believed that if we do not dictate the work of the child in class, then it does not make sense to dictate the work they choose at home. Therefore, traditional homework is kept to a minimum. Montessorians feel that children spend all day in the classroom learning and need their afternoons and evenings to pursue their personal interests, interact with their families and relax.” (Source: <http://www.mslf.org/winter-egg-csa/>). From a Positive Discipline lens, children have "home" work to do. They need to be helping with chores and connecting with their families - both independence and interdependence. We respect the importance of that and therefore leave time and space for that kind of “homework.”

2. *Montessori is a unique, alternative educational model. How do children make the transition to another school environment?*

Montessori children have been taught to examine all angles of a situation and figure it out. They gain the lifelong lessons to advocate for themselves, ask questions when needed, and become flexible when needed to adapt. Because there is so much “education” given to their social and emotional development, they are well rounded children ready to face new challenges. “Montessori education has a fundamentally different structure from traditional education. At least when strictly implemented, Montessori education fosters social and academic skills that are equal or superior to those fostered by a pool of other types of schools.” (Source: <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/313/5795/1893.full>)

3. *When my child is ready for another school, where can we expect to go? What schools do Abintra alumni and graduates attend?*

Abintra Alumni attend public and private schools across Nashville based on the students’ interest and strengths. A good school for our students is the school that allows them to further build their strengths.

4. *The Abintra community seems small, and I'm worried that my child won't be successful outside the "bubble" of a safe, protective space. How will my child be prepared for the "real world?"*

As parents, we will never be able to shelter our children enough. It's inevitable that they will become exposed to something we wish they hadn't, at an age we think is far too young, whether at school or in the neighborhood.

The beauty of Abintra is that it isn't just the "safe bubble" to shelter them. It gives them tools to maneuver through the real world. The children learn about character, empathy, and a strong self-worth through daily life at Abintra. It's a continuous daily practice between the students and the guides. With this foundation, they can go out into the "real world" and take care of themselves. Another advantage of the smaller environment is that issues are less able to be ignored. This gives children more opportunities to practice skills in a safe environment.

"It's not our job to toughen our children up to face a cruel and heartless world. It's our job to raise children who will make the world a little less cruel and heartless."

— **L.R. Knost, Two Thousand Kisses a Day: Gentle Parenting Through the Ages and Stages**

Home is the "real world." What children learn at Abintra is what gives them the skills to go out and face the world.

5. *I'm intrigued about the benefits of Montessori education, and I'm weighing that against real, pragmatic concerns. I imagined my child attending public school, for free. Why pay more for Montessori?*

We believe that making a choice to pay for a school whose core identity is about a love of learning, a respectful community, and not about teaching to a test is worth the (potential) extra work.

6. *I'm thinking about saving money to pay for college, rather than private school. How much value does a Montessori education and community really provide?*

This time in the child's brain development is crucial to establishing skills and critical thinking for learning. We think this environment is best suited for that. Also, Montessori teaches the skills one needs to succeed in high school and college like time management, discovering individual academic interests, and collaboration skills, as well as how to study, take notes, and be self-motivated. (Source and read more: <http://montessorirocks.org/how-montessori-prepared-me-for-college/>)

The Lower School Montessori classroom is designed to foster the child's "Absorbent Mind" and their "Sensitive Periods." Montessori believed young children have an "absorbent mind," which means the child's brain is like a sponge, taking in everything around him. During this time, children go through what she calls a "sensitive period" where the child becomes immersed in an interest. This passion of interest doesn't go away until the brain learns what it needs to at that time and moment and the

development is satisfied. There is no greater gift to give a child than to hand him a prepared environment for him to explore and absorb what his individual brain needs for development at that specific time, for as long as he needs to satiate that part of development. Around the age of seven, the child moves from this “absorbent mind” to what Montessori called the “reasoning mind.” This is when the child moves from information being a natural construct of the brain, to the brain needing to memorize, comprehend, and consciously retain. At this age they move to the Upper School, which builds on the foundation of what the child absorbed in the Lower School, making it easier for the child to learn and retain.

7. *I've heard that Montessori is based on a child-led philosophy. How will my child know what direction to take in school? How will my child be prepared to make their own way in life?*

Dr. Montessori said her method is “based on the principle of freedom in a prepared environment.” The classroom is meticulously prepared for the child to freely choose work in a highly structured way. There is clear instruction, expectation, and order set in place so the child knows what to do and how to do it. Children naturally want to do purposeful work, so when done the right way, this child-led philosophy creates a self-driven, self-confident, independent, lifelong learner.

8. *What is the disciplinary approach, Positive Discipline, at Abintra? How does this compare to rewards and punishments? I've heard there are new ideas about parenting and understanding consequences. How can I make sure that my child is going to be respectful and follow important rules?*

The goal of positive discipline is to teach, train, and guide children so that they learn, practice self-control, develop the ability to manage their emotions, and make wise choices regarding their personal behavior. Punishment is about controlling or regulating a child’s behavior through fear. Punishment may work in the short term, but it’s not a good long-term plan. Just because something works, does not mean it’s a “good” solution.

9. *The classrooms are mixed ages. Why is that? Is it safe? Don't the older children just end up “babysitting” the little ones, while the little ones are introduced to ideas and actions that are beyond their years? How does this work so my child feels supported at every age?*

Mixed ages in the classroom is one of the beauties of Montessori. Here are some reasons why:

- When an older child teaches a younger child how something is done, it solidifies the learning for them and helps build self-confidence. At times, a younger child

can learn something from an older one that they have not yet grasped from being shown by an adult.

- The older child sets expectations with behavior and work ethic for the younger child that the younger child can easily learn from. The older child benefits by feeling the sense of pride and accomplishment, as well as a reminder of how far they've come. There is no babysitting taking place because the older child's role is to model the correct behavior and care for others in their community no matter how old they are.
- It helps eliminate the competitive aspect in the environment. The children are all learning on their own time. If a child sees an older student moving on to the next level of work, they see it as a privilege to work up to.
- It allows a student to work across several different grade levels across their classroom experience.
- It creates a community within the classroom that cannot be created if all children are the same age at the same level. Every child feels they play an important part within their community due to the diversity of age. They learn important life skills of patience, empathy, and respecting differences.
- It is safe for all children because there is an emphasis put on respect and kindness to all.
- It mirrors the natural world where children learn from those older than they are all the time.

10. *Why are Montessori materials referred to as "work?"*

Montessori observed that children are always moving and using their hands to learn. They love to stay busy, but naturally want their actions to have purpose. When engaged in purposeful work, the child can easily concentrate for long periods of time, does not want to be interrupted, and is truly content while doing it. This is important work to the child. Freely choosing this work at the time it appeals to them helps with their level of interest and concentration. They enjoy their work as if it was play, but they approach it with purpose and take it seriously. The word "work" can carry a different connotation to the child than it might to some adults.

11. *What about diversity in the Abintra community? Is everyone just alike?*

The goal of providing a diverse environment for your child in a school setting is to teach them a love and respect of differences in one another. The Montessori environment is built on the fundamental principle of peace and love for all living people and things. At

Abintra, all ethnicities, cultures, religions, and sexual orientations are all treated equally and welcomed. One of the most obvious ways Montessori teaches the benefits of a diverse environment is by being mixed in a classroom of different ages. With the children sharing a classroom community with others on different developmental stages of learning, different interests, and varying levels of independence, students build their skills in patience and how to interact with others different than themselves.

Diversity is also important in all spheres of life. Children are exposed to many different cultures in their learning, even if they are not in their classroom. Providing children with rich diverse lives outside of school is important if this is a value you hold as important.

12. *How will my child's progress be tracked? How will I know my child is learning and keeping pace with their grade level?*

Learning is tracked through observation, documentation, and guide/student conversations. Upper School students take standardized achievement and ability tests every spring. These assessments are used to make sure that lessons being given support student learning. Montessori is ungraded. Students may be working on several different grade levels across their classroom experience.

13. *How much freedom will my child have in the classroom? It seems like my child does best with structure and direction.*

Some children thrive on the free choice atmosphere and some prefer to be told exactly what to do. The beauty of Montessori is that ALL children can find their unique way of being successful in this environment. In the Montessori classroom there is the **freedom of choice** in a **prepared environment**. The child can choose when to work on a specific lesson, but there is great importance put on how the child is instructed to do that lesson. There is structure in how the day is scheduled, where each material is placed within the classroom, and with each member of their classroom community knowing what is expected. The guide is there to help the child navigate their found freedom and use it to be productive. Providing the choice teaches the child to think for themselves. That's the foundation to greater learning!

What we are trying to create is a child who can decide for themselves what work to do without being told what to do. That is a skill that will serve them well the rest of their lives.

14. *I'm interested in a creative environment for my child. What kind of imaginary play is included during the day? Is the classroom environment interesting enough to support my child's development?*

At a time when childhood is often equated with being hyperactive, emotional, and out-of-control, parents worry that these focused Montessori children may be "missing out"

on being children. Implied in this concern is an assumption that the children are unnaturally quiet, that they might be forced by the teachers into this state.

Nothing could be further from the truth! Montessori children are simply deeply engaged in their chosen activities. Their minds are “active and alert, but not stressed.” They are in a flow state. As Dr. Montessori so succinctly put it, “[t]he first essential for the child’s development is concentration. The child who concentrates is immensely happy.” (source: <http://www.mariamontessori.com/2013/09/26/the-five-characteristics-of-play-and-of-montessori-work/>)
[Ted Talk: Do Schools Kill Creativity?](#)

Montessori children are highly creative people! They are taught to think outside the box, ask questions, create a new solution, etc. It doesn’t look like “dress up and make believe,” but the children are exercising and sharpening their creative skills daily.

15. *My child is interested in sports. How is this addressed at Abintra?*

Although organized sports are not offered at Abintra, the children are doing daily outdoor activities and some sports of their choosing. If participating in organized sports is something you and your child wish to do, children are allowed to join sports teams in public schools even if they are not enrolled there. There are also many youth sports opportunities through the [Metro Parks Department](#).

16. *Montessori sounds great for Early Childhood learning. How effective is it for older children?*

Anyone who observes a Montessori classroom can immediately see the beauty and effectiveness of this educational method. Learning is fun, and there’s a drive in the child to want to discover more. Why not continue that view of learning throughout their whole educational career? Many are happy with Montessori for preschool, but decide to go to a ‘real’ school for elementary.

But for many children, the drain of the traditional school system eventually dims that bright light in the child’s interest of discovery. Some parents want to see the numbers and have grades to track their child’s success. Others observe their child learning and thriving through watching their behavior and discussions with their guides. It becomes a personal preference of what is valued important in your child’s education.

To continue down the Montessori educational path past the preschool age, it takes more than just that impressive observation of your child in their classroom. It becomes about parents needing to understand the method and the philosophy behind it. The Montessori elementary curriculum builds off the foundation laid in Early Childhood. The child moves into being more independent. A focus is put on the development of time management skills while designing their own weekly plan under the help of their guide.

They are able to explore their interests, challenge themselves, and continue to navigate their social and emotional needs in a safe and open environment. They are seen as individual people and treated with respect.

Book suggestions:

Montessori Madness by Trevor Eissler

Brainstorm by Dan Siegel

Positive Discipline by Jane Nelsen

Mindset: The New Psychology of Success by Carol Dweck

The Book of Learning and Forgetting by Frank Smith

Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius by Angeline Stoll Lillard

Things to remember:

- Trust your child. Trust yourself
- If you have questions, concerns, feedback, anything at all – connect with your guide, ask questions, observe in classroom. The triangle connection between parent, child, and guide is extremely important.
- The focus is on the whole child - guiding them to be confident, creative, self-disciplined, loving, kind human beings. The academics are “easy.” It’s creating a whole child who becomes a whole adult that is more challenging.
- Create the world you want by giving your child an environment to grow into their true self.
- Transitions to other schools are generally academically smooth.
- From a very early age the children learn to advocate for themselves. They have the skills to examine, adjust, and creatively meet the challenges of life. These are the kinds of life skills that stay with them for a lifetime. “When danger comes, they are prepared.” (Sherry Knott)
- As adults, we must remember to do our own work. Our own self-discovery and reflection is important. Most of us did not learn to do this as children.
- The children learn by living it, not by remembering a specific lesson on the subject.
- Immerse yourself in the community and get so much out of Montessori yourself!