

## Transition from Primary Level to Lower Elementary

Moving to a new class is always an exciting venture. But, the transition from the 3-6 level (or Primary level) in a Montessori school to the Lower Elementary is particularly remarkable, and requires our special attention.

As most Montessori parents know, Maria Montessori was a medical doctor before she became an educator. One of her greatest contributions to education was the realization that traditional education practices do not match the growth phases of children. Children grow in spurts. (Any parent can tell you that intuitively.) Montessori developed an educational model to offer information and experiences during the times when it matches the child's actual interests and ability to easily learn the material. There are also times in a child's life when they need to meet new challenges.

It happens naturally at the time when the child is losing their baby teeth. Certainly children will cling to some of the comforts of their infancy, but they will also enter fully into the amazing time of life we call Childhood... (with a capital C)!

Socially, the requirements of this phase are very different from early childhood. For one thing, fairness is a major issue. Children start to regulate and edit the rules of their own games, as well as create elaborate contingencies to account for different situations. Excuses are not easily tolerated and children expect other children to be accountable. (There *will* be "do-overs", but only if you *really* deserve them.)

This is a BIG difference from the atmosphere in the Primary classes. You can almost "feel it in the air" when you walk into the Lower Elementary. This age group means business.

This is also true of the educational environment, and it is also a change from the Primary classroom. Certainly there is a great level of care and respect for the child, but they are no longer in the fragile and formative stages of early childhood. They are of course still developing, but if they were given the emotional space to construct themselves in the Primary class, they are now ready to handle some increased expectations and responsibility for their own learning.

These differences often come as a shock to both parents and children. At age six, the child has spent *half of their entire lives* in the Primary class. They have mastered it and they are quite comfortable. This is wonderful and exactly what needs to happen for a child. They need to completely master each stage of their development...and then, of course, move on.

The elementary classroom *does* require the six year old to get out of their comfort zone. This is the first of many times in their educational career when they will be asked to do so. But, one of the wonders of Montessori education is how it prepares our children for real life. By the time our children reach the Upper Grades, they will have learned to take on new challenges with ease. They will develop a confidence and awareness of their own abilities. They will know their own comfort zone, but will not be afraid to reach beyond it in the quest for personal growth and a desire to know their own potential.

The first step is always the hardest. But, for our children, it is a necessary step in the right direction, and will lead them to both maturity and fulfillment.

## How to Help Your Child During the Transition

1. Let your child express their feelings without judgment. It's natural for us to fuss a bit when we leave our comfort zone. (I know I do, anyway!)
2. Acknowledge that it IS difficult. (Remember your first days on a new job, or in a new home, etc.)
3. Do not try to talk your child out of their feelings.
4. Show your confidence in your child's ability to succeed. Remind them of past experiences or challenges they have conquered (potty training, etc.)
5. Give them time. Allow them to "pull themselves up by their own bootstraps" rather than trying to "make it all better". Your child is growing up, and while this is different and challenging, it is definitely NOT too difficult for them. They have to find the strength *within themselves*. (That is the whole point.)
6. Do not try to make things easier by doing any of their work for them! (You'd be surprised.)
7. Try not to worry... they'll be fine, and the teacher will let you know if there is a true problem.
8. Take comfort in knowing that if your child does have any special learning requirements, that the Montessori classroom is well equipped to meet their needs. (It is a multi-sensory environment and all children are following their own individual education plans.)
9. Enjoy knowing that this will all get much easier before long, and love and support your child to their next phase of development. (Your child doesn't know this "newness" will not last forever.)
10. Also know that if you do this "weaning" now, at the RIGHT time in the child's life, everything else will be SO much easier from now on... for them (and you)!!!