

SUMMER

ideas for all ages!



Part 1 of 3 — Birth to Three-Year-Olds

BIRTH TO THREE-YEAR-OLDS

by Susan Mayclin Stephenson

Summer. Does this word bring back memories of long, leisurely days with nothing to do but play with friends and family until the crickets begin to sing and the moon rises? It sounds like an ancient mythological culture compared to today where both parents work year-round and children have little time off from school, summer camp, television, computers, lessons, and planned activities.

At any age and in any season, special times at home with the family are precious and create the most cherished memories. Especially for the child under the age of three, the best times can be spent at home working and playing with other family members. Instead of thinking of educational experiences and more toys, think about simplifying the schedule and the environment and enjoying the moment with your child.

One of Dr. Montessori's most well-known sayings is "follow the child," so I suggest jotting down on your planner the activities that appeal to you from the list below; then be ready to offer them to the child to see what works. For some families the best time will be first thing in the morning, for others the afternoon or Saturday morning. Be ready to follow the child in making memories together.

The First Year

Sing – Your child doesn't care if it is the Beatles or Italian Opera as long as it is your voice!

Share your music – Put on your favorite—Bach, Mozart, country-western, Afro-Cuban.

Dance – Interpret the music by dancing and enjoy yourself. Dance with your child in your arms, feeling the beat, the interpretation of the mood of the music, and you.

Talk – With eye contact and a smile, tell the infant what you are doing when you bathe her, change her, and nurse her. Tell her what you are thinking, what you remember about your early life, what you hope and dream. There is nothing she would rather hear.

Read – If talking doesn't come easy to you at times, read the book you are working on aloud to your infant. Sometime in the first year the child will begin to enjoy looking at children's books with you as you point and talk about the pictures.

Explore the home with your child – As long as it is physically safe, keep the child with you on a mat on the floor, in the office, the bathroom, the dining room, the kitchen, the porch, the garden. She can fall asleep and wake up following her own natural rhythms and will be happily learning about her family and home.

Enjoy watching the amazing development of movement in the first year – Head lifting, reaching, tummy lifting, rocking, crawling, pulling up, cruising along furniture while holding on, walking. Each stage happens only once and you were there!

Play – Explore toys with your child. What colors does she choose? What sounds is she listening to? Can she grasp a toy? Release it? How many times does she try? How does it feel to stack blocks or lie next to your infant and watch a mobile stir in the breeze?

Snuggle – Nursing may have evolved as a system of providing touch and snuggling many times a day, but as long as the child is not deep in concentration on important work, snuggling is important anytime of the day.

The Second and Third Years

In the second and third years the child will want to imitate everything you do and participate in the important work of living. It shows great respect and love to encourage this.

Keep on singing and dancing, listening and talking; add percussion instruments to your time together, and non-fiction books on many subjects.

The child would rather have real child-size tools to use with the parents than a room full of toys to play with alone. Following are some suggestions for arranging the environment to include the child and examples of things you can do together.

Kitchen/dining room – A drawer or shelf with the child's own dishes and flatware, placemats and napkins to set the table, and a small pitcher to fill water glasses one at a time. Also child-size mixing bowls and spoon, broom and mop, bucket and sponge. A child of this age can even cut the stems off flowers, place them in small vases, pour water into the vase, and decorate the table with arranged flowers.

Living room/family room – A shelf in the family bookcase for children. Perhaps a couple of CD's for the child to choose for the parent to play. And puzzles, an easel, poster paints with chubby brushes, clay, crayons, and paper can be enjoyed by both of you and eventually the child alone.

Laundry room – A child-size laundry basket makes it possible for her to carry laundry with you. And she can put things in the dryer, take them out, and learn to fold napkins, pillow-cases, and washcloths.

Bedroom – A low closet rod and drawers allow the child to help put away clothing and get it out to practice undressing first, and then dressing.

Outside – A place to keep small gardening tools, a small wheelbarrow or basket for gathering

leaves or weeds, sand and water toys, buckets, a scrub brush to help wash the car, an outside broom to sweep the porch and sidewalk, all enable the child to work alongside the parents, and eventually whenever she likes on her own.

Fun away from home – Going out doesn't always mean the park or swimming pool. A walk around the block that can take an adult ten minutes can take a child two hours if the adult follows his or her interests. The child at this age can, and wants to, walk long distances instead of riding in a stroller. She will delight in discovering the variety of plants and insects, dried leaves, and stones along the way.


The child's purpose and concentration – The most important thing to keep in mind is that the child is not doing these things for practical reasons, but out of enjoyment. She will repeat what she chooses over and over, and work at her own speed. When she begins to repeat and to concentrate, the adult should get out of the way and respect this period of important work.

As you play and work with your child, be aware of the moment when she may begin to concentrate on her own, and take this opportunity to step back and see how long the period of involvement lasts. Just as we adults become satisfied and refreshed after long periods of concentration, so do our children, from the very early days of life on. In fact this respect for concentration is the most important gift any Montessori school gives any child.

Siblings – Where there is more than one child, you will have to put some effort into creating these memories and special times one-on-one with your child at times. It is quite natural for an older child to feel replaced by a younger sibling. Perhaps plan the adult-child time for the three-year-old during the infant's nap, or send just one child to grandfather and keep one with you. Then times with the whole family will be more enjoyable for all.

With these ideas the child will feel wanted, needed, loved, part of the family. We will be giving him our time, our energy, our experience, our language, our love, and a wealth of memories that will last a lifetime. Happy summer!

Additional information can also be found at www.michaelolaf.com



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