

Preparing Your Montessori Self for the New School Year

So much to do as the new school year begins. Parents and children to meet, forms to complete, materials to prepare, classroom teaching teams to coalesce. It's an exciting time and a potential stressful one as well.

This message is for you: take care of yourself first. The most effective tool you will bring to the start of the new year is your authentic self.

I remember attending a wedding reception once where the bride was so busy telling the caterers what to do and fretting over the cake placement that she missed to whole purpose of the ritual. She was not present and we all felt it, didn't want to go anywhere near her lest she boss us around too.

Hyperbolic comparison? Perhaps. But what do you look like to others on those first important days of the new school year? Especially to the children and their families who have their own worst fears about how this first day, this first week will go.

So here are some tips from one who observes in many schools:

Less is more. Move less, move slower than you even think possible. You are already moving fast in your mind because there is so much to do; you may not realize how fast your body is moving. And how your language has speeded up. And maybe even your voice tone is altered.

Dr. Montessori suggested that we put a rosary bead in our pocket and put our hand on it to remind us to do less. You might find that useful or some other totem such as a small shell and smooth stone.

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A few more suggestions: Staying calm will help you make decisions from your frontal lobes (executive function) rather than from the emotional centers of the mid-brain. Thus, keep breathing. Practice it. Seriously. Neuroscience confirms that breathing actually cools the brain and helps us think. So breathe.

Think before you speak. In those first days, what the children need to hear most of all is you saying their names with authentic warmth and soft eyes. Followed by routines (almost rote) statements of expectations. They need to hear it over and over again. e.g. "Welcome Nathan, when you hang your coat up then you may come into the room." State what the child may do. Instruct all your team members to do the same. There will be lots of time for everything else once the year gets rolling.

Right now, it's time to set the tone for the year by:

- Taking care of yourself
- Move and speak slowly
- Smile
- Say the children's names
- Invite them to the first lessons in self-care in the foyer
- Sing songs

And keep your hand on your pocket-shell.

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fostering the authentic life of children and their families in the American culture

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