



Our aim is not only to make the child understand, and still less to force him to memorize, but so to touch his imagination as to enthuse him to his innermost core.

~ Maria Montessori

Montessori Matters

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Family Celebrations

With the holiday season upon us, I offer you this article by Patricia Oriti originally published in the AMI/USA Newsletter in September 2008. Patricia is a Montessori parent educator and author of At Home with Montessori.

To our children, we parents are the world. Our children love us passionately and absolutely. They trust and accept us unconditionally. They learn the world's meaning through our eyes. Children adopt our values because we are their models, and they want to be just like us. As imitators, children share our spiritual wealth when our spirits are rich and suffer our emptiness when our spirits are impoverished.

Holidays are an important part of family life because they provide a *dynamic example of living values*. When our spirits are full, celebrations elevate the family experience; in times of challenge, family traditions can provide comfort and continuity. Let's look at how parents can enhance their family's celebrations, both by rediscovering the meaning and by finding ways for their children to participate. I see this as a three-step process.

The First Step

To prepare for a celebration we must begin with our own person. We must go to the core of our own personal self and find some truth about the holiday, some value that touches us and gives us reason to celebrate. Such reflections bring the meaning of the celebration up-to-date with who we are now, can remind us of treasured rituals we enjoyed as children, and can help us create new ways to celebrate.

What a parent says depends on her own interpretation of the meaning of the holiday. For some parents, Thanksgiving Day might mean gratitude for food and the absence of hunger. Other parents might want to tell the story of the first Thanksgiving. Another might want to share memories of the warmth and hospitality of his grandparents whose home he visited every year as a child. Keep in mind that providing factually accurate information is not as important as showing how that event touched your life.

What we say in our story adds to the child's understanding of the world's spirit and culture; this is our gift to our children. This is our history, our tradition. And with the passage of time, many celebrations, and many stories, our children find that life is rich, interesting, mysterious, and complex. Unlike a child whose experience of a holiday is limited to receiving gifts (as in birthdays) or consuming

food (Thanksgiving), a child who understands the meaning of a celebration can enjoy giving, receiving, participating in something's "bigger than himself," the satisfaction of belonging not only to his family but to history and the peace that accompanies that satisfaction.

The Second Step

Children are connected to the event, and its potential richness, by their meaningful participation in the beginning, middle, and end of the celebration. Children want to help prepare for the activity and be part of the cleaning up or putting away afterwards. They absorb the meaning – our meaning – of the celebration through their participation. Our children want to be with us; our work is attractive to them because it has meaning.

This is both an "everyday" and a "special day" desire. The desire to participate is a constant in a child's life.

When parents find the meaning of the celebration for themselves and then find ways for the children to participate in the preparation and conclusion, *the child inherits a spiritual fortune.*

How to Involve Children

Children can help plan the meal, make the shopping list, and help gather food at the grocery store. They can make place cards, set the table, prepare a centerpiece. Children can participate in gathering and washing ingredients and helping to prepare the food in ways appropriate to their age and skills. On the day of the celebration itself, the child is frequently a host. (Hosting can also happen when celebrating with immediate family.) As a host, he can help to greet the guests, hang up their coats, offer refreshments. A wonderful way to engage the child in purposeful, meaningful activity is for him to serve hors d'oeuvres. This is something even a very young (two- or three-year-old) child enjoys doing and can help him feel an integral part of the celebration. ("See, this is a very important occasion and I have a role to play.") The adult must have observed what the child can comfortably and competently carry; a young child's limit is probably two or three items. The child can don a child-sized apron. A two-year-old will need a salad-sized plate to serve food

items that do not slide and a basket for those that do. The child needs a low table where he can refill his tray, either independently or with the help of an older sibling or adult.

During the heart of the celebration, children can build on and express their conversational skills; engage with planned, prepared activities (a walk outdoors, a board game, tour of the house); soak up the ambience; and check-in with guests about their needs (another beverage? a more comfortable chair?).

Participating in the end of the celebration is satisfying and completes the child's cycle of activity. Saying good-bye to guests, putting away leftover food, replacing chairs in their usual place, and clearing the table are examples of ways children can participate when the visit is over.

The Third Step

The final step in the holiday is to *savor the celebration*. At the end of the day, the parent can tell true stories about the occasion. This is also an opportunity for the adult to listen to the child or for the child to write a story or a picture. Writing has become a rare activity in many of our lives. It enables the child (and the parent) to digest the delicious memories of the event. This written reflection can become a part of the family library.

Our children derive their understanding of their lives' meaning and purpose when we allow them to participate in our lives. They share meaningfully when they are a part of the beginning, middle, and end. Celebrations are a reservoir of cultural and spiritual depth. They are holidays that can emphasize human virtues, a sense of awe, religious observances, and charity for those with material, emotional, or spiritual needs. I encourage parents to not limit children's participation in their lives to only special occasions. Children's participation in everyday life is a fundamental need and joy. It is through regular purposeful activity, especially with their parents, that they find meaning in their lives. If we accept Dr. Montessori's challenge to "follow the child" we will be led to experience all of life with complete devotion, fullness of heart, and a celebration of the moment.

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UPCOMING EVENTS:

Nov 24-26: Thanksgiving Holiday
No School

Dec 1: Morning Coffee at Poncey Highland with John Panessa from Apogee Georgia School Choice Scholarship Fund
8:30 a.m.

Dec 2: Ten Thousand Villages Shopping Night
6:00 – 8:00 pm

Dec 17: Winter Break Begins
12:00 pm dismissal for all children

Dec 20 – 31: Winter Holiday
No School

Jan 3: Teacher Work Day
No School

Jan 4: School Resumes

Jan 13: Contracts Sent to Returning Students

Jan 13: Parent Education Evening: *Montessori 101* at Glen Castle Campus
6:30-8:00 p.m.

Jan 13-14: Parent Classroom Visits at Glen Castle Campus
Time of Day and Date by Invitation

Jan 17: Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday
No School

Jan 20-21: Parent Classroom Visits at Poncey Highland Campus
Time of Day and Date by Invitation

TEN THOUSAND VILLAGES HOLIDAY SHOPPING EVENT

Montessori In Town and Ten Thousand Villages invite you to join us for our annual **MIT Shopping Night on** December 2 from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Our shopping night allows you to do your holiday shopping while supporting artisans and craftspeople from around the world. Additionally, Montessori In Town receives 10% of the sales accumulated this evening directly benefiting our Financial Aid Fund. Anyone is welcome to attend, so be sure to tell your friends and neighbors. We hope you will join us for another fun and profitable evening.

Ten Thousand Villages
1056 St. Charles Ave, NE
Atlanta, GA 30306
404-892-5307

RRISA DRIVE TO BENEFIT NEEDY FAMILIES

It's not too late to give! Through the first week of December, MIT will participate in a clothing and household goods drive to benefit Refugee Resettlement & Immigration Services of Atlanta (RRISA).

Please contact RRISA parent coordinator, Sarah Eiler, at (404) 840-4505 or saraheiler@earthlink.net to arrange pick up of donations. All donations are tax deductible and will be put to good use!

You can learn more about RRISA and their work by visiting www.RRISA.org .