

## Transitioning to Lower Elementary

The transition from Children's House to Lower Elementary is particularly remarkable, and requires our special attention.

Maria Montessori developed an educational model to offer information and experiences that meet the developmental needs of each age group, 3-6 year-olds, 6-9 year-olds, 9-12 year-olds and the adolescent years. It is during these three-year developmental phases that the Montessori curriculum and practices match the child's actual interests and ability to easily learn material.

Typically, readiness for this transition happens at the time when the child is losing their first baby teeth. Certainly, children will cling to some of the comforts of infancy (birth-six years old) while entering fully into the amazing time of life we call Childhood (6 - 12 years old).

**This is truly considered to be a transition in a young child's life, a transition being a period of change, from one significant stage or experience, to another.** As children age and develop, they inevitably experience a number of different transitions and significant events which may impact upon them in different ways. Many of these transitions/significant events are common to most children and can usually be anticipated or expected, while others may be unpredicted or unexpected. In all instances, young children will need varying help to cope with these changes in their lives. **It is vital to remember that transition is a process, not a one-off event. It is important for all adults to help support the rising First grader navigate this important change** beginning with understanding the development of the 6-9 year old.

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).

**Don't be surprised to see your Lower Elementary age child exhibiting new ways of behaving that are different than when they were in Children's House classes.** This is a normal part of their development, expect to see:

- Your child, who may have been so diligent about quietly working in their Children's House class, might be more interactive in the Lower Elementary classroom.
- They may be much more talkative as they seek to foster social connections.
- They will likely be negotiating and problem-solving as they learn to handle social situations.
- They will participate in collaborative work and group lessons more often.

**To support this stage of development you can:**

1. **Encourage your child to problem solve**, help them discover their own ways to maneuver through social situations rather than rescuing them. This helps them develop practical social skills.
2. **Encourage them to be themselves** as they seek to find their place in the social group. Authenticity is a great trait at any age.
3. **Avoid outside tutoring.** We know it's tempting for parents to start their children on lessons outside the classroom to help them excel academically. But the most important thing for your child to learn is to "love learning."
  - **We encourage children to do their very best every day.** This fosters a sense of persistence and commitment that goes beyond just getting good grades.
  - **We emphasize independence** by inviting children to select their work each day, helping them discover their purpose and talents. *[Extra work can send your child a mixed message of feeling it is unimportant to concentrate in class because they are just going to work more at home. Or, they may feel learning is hard,*

*frustrating work instead of joyful discovery. Finally, they may get confused by different teaching methods, impeding their learning instead of helping.]*

4. **Encourage reading at home.** Reading together fosters parent-child bonding, which is always worthwhile. It also equips children to become more comfortable with a vital skill that fosters their learning for a lifetime. Reading also helps children develop empathy, an important tool for both self-regulation and successful social interactions.

**There is a BIG difference from the atmosphere in the Children's House classes.** You can almost feel it in the air when you walk into the Lower Elementary: this age group (6-9 year olds) means business. This is also true of the educational environment, and is a change from the Children's House classroom.

The Lower Elementary teacher and students welcome each new student and help acclimate them in their new community. They are all there to support their new community member. 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 Children's House 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 just spent their Kindergarten year being the oldest in the class who have experienced many responsibilities and privileges that come with the Kindergarten year. 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.

**Transitioning to the Lower 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. **They are building resilience.**

Resilience is the ability to ‘bounce back’ after challenges and tough times. For children, challenges and tough times include experiences like starting at a new school or kindergarten, moving house, or welcoming a sibling into the family. They can also include serious experiences like parents separating or getting a divorce, family illness or death.

**Children build resilience over time through experience.** By the time our children reach the Upper grades, they will have learned to take on new challenges with ease. They will develop 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 You Can Support Your Child During the Transition to Lower Elementary**

1. **Let your child express their feelings without judgment.** It’s natural for us to fuss a bit when we leave our comfort zone.
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.
6. **Do not try to make things easier by doing any of their work for them!**
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**. Love and support your child to their next phase of development with the confidence that they will master this transition.