

# Promoting an Independent Toddler in the Home

By Kathy Aldridge, Lead Teacher, Toddler I



Your Toddler child is far more capable than you might think. Many prospective parents observing the Toddler community for the first time comment, "How are you getting the children to do that?" Or, a current parent may comment, "I notice that my child cleans up after himself at school but not at home. What can I do that would help?" Supporting your child's budding independence at home can seem daunting, but there are ways you can encourage it and, in turn, help support their experience at school.

In our Toddler Community, your child will be expected to participate in dressing and undressing themselves and to take over this responsibility as soon as they are capable. To help your child succeed in this area, choose clothing that is manageable for their current skill level. Velcro or slip-on shoes are manageable for a toddler; shoe-laces are not. Elastic waist pants are comfortable for their growing and moving bodies and the lack of zippers, snaps, belts or suspenders will help them dress without frustration. Additionally, pullover shirts are preferable to those with buttons.

At home, you can demonstrate to your child on how to put on and remove articles of

clothing. When modeling for your child, your movements need to be very slow, analyzed, and precise. In the beginning, the effort can be collaborative. For example, when putting on a sock, you could start the process by stretching the sock around his toes and pulling up to his instep. Your child (after being shown), could then slip his thumbs into each side of the sock and, using a raking motion, grip the material and pull it over the heel and up the leg. Demonstrating patience by allowing sufficient time for your child to practice and refine these skills is key to building their confidence and independence.

Food is such an important aspect of the Toddler Community yet, for parents, mealtime can often be one of the most frustrating parts of the day. In the Toddler Community, the children set the table, serve themselves food and drink, drink out of a glass, and enjoy conversation. Our toddlers clean-up their meals by scraping their plates and putting them on the dirty dish cart. At home, you can support your child in this experience by eating meals together as a family. Sitting together signals to your child that this is an important time of day and emphasizes the social aspect of eating. Set the technology aside and make the evening meal a special time. Whenever eating, allow your child to decide whether s(he) eats part or none of what is being offered. That should always be a matter of





choice. You should never force a child to eat something he doesn't want, nor encourage selective eating by preparing him a separate meal. Encourage your child to use silverware and refrain from allowing her/him to walk around while eating (a choking hazard) or play with the food. Both should signal that mealtime is over. Whenever possible, allow your child to be part of preparing the meal. Toddlers can gather items from the refrigerator, wash fruit and vegetables, stir, peel, and even chop with your supervision. Include them further by allowing them to help set the table and remove dirty dishes to the sink or dishwasher. Mealtime is a social occasion where you have the opportunity to model not only good table manners but also polite conversation - how to listen as well as speak to others. Trust your child to use child-sized glasses and breakable dishes. It is through breakage that they will learn how to carefully hold these objects. When an accident occurs, show them how to clean it up and demonstrate, once again, proper handling.

For more ideas on promoting your child's independence at any age, speak with your child's teacher.

*Kathy Aldridge received her AMI Primary Certification from the Maria Montessori Training Organisation in London, England and her AMI Infant Community Level Certification from the The Montessori Institute in Denver, Colorado.*



*“Little children, from the moment they are weaned, are making their way toward **independence.**”*