



# AMERICAN MONTESSORI SOCIETY®

## Children at the Infant & Toddler Levels (birth through age 3)

This handout will give you a general idea of the characteristics of infants (birth – 18 months) and toddlers (18 months – age 3) and their “sensitive periods,” along with thoughts about what you, as a parent, can do to support them at home.

Sensitive periods are the times during human development when children are biologically ready and receptive to acquiring a specific skill or ability, and are therefore particularly sensitive to stimuli that promote the development of that skill. A Montessori teacher prepares the environment to meet the developmental needs of each sensitive period.

Main Characteristic/Sensitive Period	Implications for Home
<b>Order</b> – A desire for consistency and repetition.	<b>Do:</b> Allow your child to repeat an experience as many times as they wish, until they indicate they are finished (looking or moving away). <b>Do:</b> Maintain a clutter-free environment where a child can gaze/explore with purpose. <b>Don't:</b> Interrupt a child who is focusing on/engaging with something.
<b>Language</b> – The focus here is on spoken language. This period begins when the child first creates sounds by mimicking mouth movements, and progresses over time, as they learn to form words and simple sentences.	<b>Do:</b> Make eye contact with the child while speaking and with enough physical proximity so the child can watch your facial expression. <b>Do:</b> Create a rich language environment with plenty of narration or “sports casting” of the child’s experiences. <b>Do:</b> Offer books, singing, music, and sign language from the first days of life through the 3-year period.

	<p><b>Don't:</b> "Fill-in" or speak for the child who takes longer to complete a phrase. Wait for the child to offer the language at their own pace.</p> <p><b>Don't:</b> Correct the child's language; simply model the correct word or phrase for the child in friendly conversation.</p>
<p><b>Sensory Skills</b> – This sensitive period will be clear when the child is fixated on small objects and tiny details. This is an indicator that order and detail are coming together in the child's mind.</p>	<p><b>Do:</b> Offer the child a variety of experiences to engage all the senses. Include textures, tastes, sights, sounds, smells.</p> <p><b>Do:</b> Allow the child time and space to explore objects carefully and thoroughly without interruption.</p> <p><b>Don't:</b> Overwhelm the environment with experiences. Rotate a few select materials purposefully through the environment based on the child's interest and engagement.</p>
<p><b>Movement</b> – Gross and fine motor skills are an important part of what is happening now, starting with children randomly moving their arms and legs, then progressing as they lift their head, touch their mouth, sit, crawl, walk, grasp a spoon or buttons, and more.</p>	<p><b>Do:</b> Incorporate simple opportunities for gross- and fine-motor movement in the home. For example, a stepstool to support gazing out the window or washing hands.</p> <p><b>Do:</b> Recognize that basic self-care experiences are wonderfully appropriate learning opportunities for infants/toddlers. Let the child hold a spoon, pick up food with their hands, practice dressing/undressing, and anything else they are physically capable of doing independently or, at minimum, co-participating in.</p> <p><b>Don't:</b> Carry the child from place to place if they can walk or creep. Take the time to wait for the child to move through the environment independently.</p>