



# Parent Handbook

## The Journey

**Introduction:** Welcome to A Little Journey Montessori School. This Parent Handbook outlines our philosophy and procedures and is designed to acquaint families with our school and our school policies. We will be glad to answer any questions that you may have.

**Location:** A Little Journey Montessori School is located at 47 Pronghorn Trail Unit C, in Four Corners. We are located just off Jackrabbit Lane next to Montana Indoor Sports and Murdoch's Ranch and Home Supply.

**Mission:** Our mission is to provide excellence in education to children based on the Montessori method. We strive to provide an environment where working families can feel confident that their children will be well taken care of while developing lifelong educational skills.

**Environment:** The environment is prepared each day in order to provide a safe and consistent space for your children. The prepared environment is one of the most important aspects of the Montessori method for the child to learn, play and grow.

**The Child:** Each child is their own individual self and not all children learn and develop in the same manner. Montessori is self-lead and student-paced allowing the child to follow their own curiosity and to not feel pressured to keep up with their peers. The importance of Montessori is to instill independence in the child with self chosen materials in which they can access independently and provide a control of error.

**The Parents:** The parents are an important aspect of the child's development in education and we believe that involved parent's help form a foundation of success for the children. We strive to have the parent's involved through social media outlets and an

online lesson monitoring system called *Transparent Classroom*. Parent-teacher conferences will also occur twice a year for children in our toddler and early childhood room, giving an opportunity for parents to receive one-on-one knowledge about their child's progress. Parents of children in our infant room will also have ample time to sit down one-on-one with teachers to discuss their child's progress. Please, never hesitate to ask how your child is doing or if you could share your knowledge on a relevant or current circle topic.

In order for A Little Journey Montessori School to help you and your child, please help us in following these 7 policies:

1. Please leave toys at home and don't fight with children over leaving them in the car at the school door. Children can become grumpy when this happens and can make drop off challenging for all involved. Please see nap time policy in regards to soft, cozy items for nap time.
2. Please try to bring happy, relaxed children to school by allowing adequate time and a very slow pace in preparing for school.
3. Talk about ground rules with children in a "positive" manner, and practice talking quietly at home.
4. Encourage the ability to distinguish between appropriate indoor behavior and outdoor behavior. There is a difference. If your child enters the classroom with a loud voice, we will ask them to remember to use their inside voice.
5. Parent conferences are scheduled twice each year and although the staff loves discussing your child at pick up and drop off, we do not always have ample time for mini parent conferences. If you have something to discuss at length, please ask about making time to sit down with a teacher to discuss your child. We are more than happy to do so.
6. Please avoid tangible rewards for accomplishments children naturally receive pleasure from, especially during the potty training process.
7. Order is very important to children to give them a sense of security and peace. Consistency in the child's schedule and routine goes hand in hand with the sense of order for young children.

**The Staff:** We believe in the Montessori method and strive to provide Montessori certified teaching staff in each classroom. We pride ourselves in providing an environment in which the staff can also grow, supporting a work-life balance and establishing their importance to the community.

**The Community:** We know how important our community is and how important quality childcare is in order to have working mothers and families. We strive to provide a quality service to those hard working families in our community by creating an excellence in education and a quality in the care of the child.

## Our History

A Little Journey Montessori School was developed by Stephany Backstrom in the Spring of 2020 after 7 years of experience working in a Montessori classroom. Stephany saw a need for quality childcare and an excellence in education in the Gallatin Valley and decided to create a new environment. She wanted to support the working families and working mothers that could trust that their children were well taken care of while developing an educational foundation. She also wanted to create an environment for families with multiple children creating an ease in drop off and pick up and also have a place that the children could learn, play and grow together. After Stephany earned her Bachelor's degree from Montana State University, she pursued a career in Montessori education, receiving her Montessori Teacher Certification in Early Childhood, followed by a certification in Montessori Infant and Toddler.

**Organization:** A Little Journey Montessori School operates as a single-member LLC run and operated by Stephany Backstrom.

## Our Philosophy

A Little Journey Montessori School is a place where your child can learn, grow and play. Our program starts in the infant room (0-23 months), then the child will journey to the

toddler room (2-3), and when they are of age, they are ready to make their final journey to the early childhood room (4-6). All of our programs are based on the Montessori method and are aged appropriate, which help each child reach his or her full potential.

Working together with the mix of age groups, we hope to instill and develop manners, compassion, imagination, independence and a love of learning in all of the children who enroll in our programs.

We value and support cultural, racial, religious, and economic diversity. In hiring of staff or enrolling of children, A Little Journey Montessori School does not discriminate with regard to racial, ethnic background, religion, sex, marital status, or physical disability.

A Little Journey Montessori School is an affiliate of the American Montessori Society, which provides standards for professional development.

## What is Montessori?

Montessori is a method of education developed by Dr. Maria Montessori in the early 1900's that is based on self-directed, hands-on activity. Dr. Montessori observed the child and developed her method of teaching based on what she observed of the children and their environment. The lessons that Dr. Montessori developed offer a rigorous, self-motivated growth for children in all areas of development - cognitive, social, physical and emotional.

### **Key Philosophical Messages That Make Montessori Unique**

- Deep respect for children as individuals.
- Multiage classes allow teachers to develop close and long-term relationships with their students, allow them to know each other's learning style well, and encourage older students to become role models, mentors, and leaders to younger students.
- Integrated curriculum is carefully structured and connects subjects within programs (e.g., history and cultural arts to maximize the opportunity for learning and builds from program to program to progress from concrete to abstract learning).

- Independence is nurtured and leads to children becoming purposeful, motivated, and confident in their own abilities.
- Peace and conflict resolution are taught daily and children learn to be a part of a warm, respectful, and supportive community.
- The child creates, in a very real sense, the adult that is to be, through his/her experiences, interactions, and environments.
- Hands-on learning is central to the curriculum in all programs and leads to children being engaged rather than passive with their work.
- The environments are responsibly and carefully prepared with multisensory, sequential, and self-correcting materials to support self-directed learning.
- Teachers and children, and teachers and parents work together as a warm and supportive community.
- Self-expression is nurtured in all children. Children experience art, music, writing, and other forms of creative arts with confidence and passion.

## **Desired Learner Outcomes Common to Montessori Education**

Dr. Maria Montessori, an Italian physician and educator, developed a method of teaching based on her scientific observations of young children's behavior. Her first "Children's House" was established in Rome in 1907. She found children learned best in a homelike environment filled with developmentally appropriate materials that provide experiences, which contribute to the growth of self-motivated, independent learners.

Dr. Montessori carried her message across the globe, including the United States in 1912. Dr. Nancy Rambusch established the American Montessori Society in 1960. Montessori education in the United States appeals to those who embrace it because of its outcomes for students. The American parents who originally chose Montessori education matched their views of child rearing. They saw their children as moral beings, which over time would become the socially responsible people Montessori had envisioned. And they saw their children becoming confident, competent learners.

The outcomes we aspire to teach are lifelong developments. The original American Montessori agenda of learner outcomes are as follows.

**Independence:** Is the child able to choose his or her own work, apply energy to that work, complete it to a personal criterion of completion, take and return the work to the place it is customarily kept, in such a way that another child will be able to find the work ready to do? Is the child able to seek help? Is the child able to locate resources to continue the self-chosen task without necessarily involving the teacher?

**Confidence and Competence:** Are the child's self-perceived successes far more numerous than his or her self-perceived failures? Is the child capable of self-correcting work, upon observation, reflection, or discussion? Can the child manage the available array of "stuff" with a clear sense of purpose?

**Autonomy:** Can the child accept or reject inclusion in another child's work or work group with equanimity?

**Intrinsic Motivation:** Is the child drawn to continue working for the apparent pure pleasure of doing so? Does the child, once having achieved a particular competence, move on to revel in mastery by showing others?

**Ability to Handle External Authority:** Is the child able to accept the "ground rules" of the group as appropriate in his or her dealing with other children? Is the child, distant from the teacher, able to function as if the teacher were nearby?

**Social Responsibility:** Independent and autonomous persons are always a part of a group and must attain independence and autonomy through participation in group activity. The loss of these qualities by one of a group is a loss for all. Do students attain independence and autonomy and, at the same time, develop social responsibility?

**Academic Preparation:** In Montessori education, children learn to learn by learning. Academic preparation entails activation and cultivation of inherent powers and processes through which the learner becomes a supplier of meanings or of things-meaningfully-known. Academic skills are essential to learning and knowing, not the aim of learning and knowing. Do students acquire academic skills and apply them in learning to learn?

**Spiritual Awareness:** Montessori views the child as a spiritual embryo. Implications are conveyed by the metaphor. All humans are spiritual beings as well as physical

beings. They have spiritual health as well as physical health. Montessori sees no need to establish whether or not the source of spirit is theological and does not offer theological explanation. The spiritual embryo simply thrives on spiritual investment. The investment can be theological, humane, or a combination of the two. What are the spiritual outcomes of school experience?

**Citizens of the World:** All children are part of both a world political system and a world ecological system. Both systems have their constitutions and all must learn to live by the letter and spirit of their laws. As a naturalist, Montessori knew about the laws of mind and of nature and understood the consequences of disobeying either of them. What are the citizenship outcomes of school experience? Are the children acquiring civic virtue? Are they acquiring dispositions to understand the natural world, to cherish it, and to live harmoniously within it?

## **SOME IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF THE MONTESSORI METHOD**

1. It is based on years of patient observation and study of children by Dr. Maria Montessori, who was a scientist uniquely educated and qualified for this task. She was a medical doctor, a student of psychology, and a professor of anthropology, a science that is concerned with man in a unique way. She worked out her methods and developed the materials by letting the children show her what worked and what did not work. It is not a "franchise" or "patented" operation. It is in the public domain. There are responsible organizations (such as the American Montessori Society) that operate on behalf of its proper development in this country.

2. It has proved itself of universal application. Within a single generation, it has been tried successfully with children of many nations. Climate, nationality, social rank, or type of civilization make no difference to its successful application. India, France, Holland, England, Burma, Mexico, Panama, Colombia, Canada, Italy, and the United States have many well-developed Montessori schools.

3. It has revealed the small child as a lover of order and of intellectual work, spontaneously chosen and carried out with profound joy, capable of concentration and eager to learn for the joy of learning.

4. It is based upon the child's imperious need to learn by doing activities, which develop his faculties at each stage in his mental growth. These stages are called "sensitive periods," and he more readily absorbs knowledge during those periods. While

the method offers the child a maximum of spontaneity, it enables him to reach an even higher level of scholastic attainment than under other systems.

5. Though it does away with the necessity of coercion by means of rewards and punishments, it achieves a higher discipline. It is an active discipline, which originates within the child and is achieved through concentration on work, which he has chosen. Children with extremely active and curious minds are stimulated and utilize their intellectual energies constructively.

6. It is based on a profound respect for the child's personality and removes from him the preponderant influence of the adult, thus leaving him room to grow in biological independence. The child is allowed a large measure of liberty (not license) and he learns to handle it with responsibility.

7. It enables the teacher to deal with each child individually in each subject and thus guide him according to his individual requirements. Each child works at his own pace, hence the quick child is not held back by the slow, nor is the latter, in trying to keep up with the former, obliged to flounder along hopelessly out of his depth. Each stone in the mental edifice is "well and truly laid" before the next is added.

8. It does away with pressure and its trail of challenges. More than this, at every turn it presents endless opportunities among the children for mutual help, which is joyfully given and gratefully received. Since the child works from his own free choice, without pressure and coercion, he is freed from strain, feeling inferior, and other experiences, which are apt to be the unconscious cause of mental disturbances in later life.

9. The Montessori method develops the whole personality of the child, not merely his intellectual faculties but also his powers of deliberation, initiative, and independent choice, with their emotional complements. By living as a free member in a real social community, the child is trained in those fundamental social qualities, which form the basis of good citizenship.

# Admissions Procedure

Due to the fact that Montessori education is based on three-year cycles, families who have children entering directly into the toddler and early childhood classrooms should plan for their child to attend for a minimum of two years, however it is not required.

1. Parents are expected to visit the program before submitting an application. We strongly recommend that parents who bring their children for the initial visit to please respect the children who are working and keep your child with you during the tour.
2. Complete and submit the registration application along with a non-refundable application fee of \$75.
3. Parents will be notified of acceptance with an acceptance letter and welcome packet in the mail.
4. To accept and hold your child's spot at A Little Journey Montessori School, the non-refundable annual registration fee of \$275 is required for registration, along with first month's tuition.
5. The remaining paperwork for your child's permanent file, including immunization records must be provided before the child's first day of school.

## Program Schedules, Tuition and Fees

**Program Schedule:** A Little Journey Montessori School operates year round. Our calendar is from September to August and generally follows the calendar of the Bozeman Public School District during the school year months (September to May). We are closed on the following days: Labor Day, three days for Thanksgiving, Christmas to New Years, MLK Day, President's Day, Spring Break, Memorial Day, the 4th and 5th of July (depending on how the holiday falls), and a week at the end of August.

**Summer Program:** Due to the fact that A Little Journey Montessori School is a year-round program, we do not allow children to take the summers off without paying tuition. We understand that children may be absent more frequently for special visits, family vacations and other seasonal activities, so for the summer months of June, July and August, children's schedules can be changed to the minimum enrollment for their

age group without affecting their enrollment status and without having to pay a schedule change fee for the one time seasonal change. Removing your child for the summer months without paying tuition can compromise their enrollment for the following fall.

**Tuition and Fees:** Tuition is due on the 1st of every month and will be considered late after the 5th of the month unless other arrangements have been made. A \$30 late fee will be assessed per day your tuition remains unpaid after the 5th. Any additional fees will be added to the following months invoice and are to be paid with that month's invoice.

A Little Journey Montessori School does not prorate the monthly tuition nor do we credit your tuition for days missed due to illnesses or vacation. However, for families entering our program in the infant room, we understand that parents cannot control their maternity leave and may need to return to work in the middle of the month. If you are looking to start infant care during the 1st through 14th of the month, the month's tuition will not be prorated. However, if your infant is starting the 15th through the end of the month, consideration towards an adjusted tuition rate will be discussed. This is only offered to infants their first month of school and after that there will no longer be an option to prorate tuition.

Notice of termination by the parent(s) must be given in writing to the provider 30 days in advance in order for payment responsibilities to end. Tuition is billed monthly and we do not prorate partial months. Therefore, notice must occur at the month prior to withdrawal. If you decide to withdraw, it is best to do it at the end of the month prior to your last month. If you terminate prior to the end of the month, no credit will be given for missed days.

We have the right to terminate a child for any reason. Two weeks notice will be given under usual circumstances. However, we reserve the right to immediate termination of services under extreme circumstances.

## School Policies

**Hours:** A Little Journey Montessori School is open from 7:30 am to 6:00 pm and we strive to be staffed with certified Montessori teachers throughout the day. To avoid

interrupting teacher preparation time, **please do not bring your child to school before 7:30 am. Please make arrangements for your child to be picked up no later than 6:00 pm.**

**Arrival and Departure:** We recommend an arrival time of no later than 9:00 am in order for your child to have a quality, uninterrupted lesson time. Please help your child make the transition to school by not lingering at drop off.

Montessori children keep track of their own belongings, dress and undress themselves to the best of their abilities. Thus, we expect children that can do so, walk into school, rather than being carried, to bring in their own belongings if they are able to and put them away on their own. Of course, teachers will be there to offer help when necessary and assist our younger friends with their items.

We ask that children that can do so, collect their belongings after school and transport them to the car. We will help by having your child ready when you arrive. We provide each child with a “work bag” for their schoolwork. To reduce congestion in the welcome area, please wait until you are outside the building to go through your child’s work bag.

We strongly ask that the outside doors be opened by a parent and not by a child. Children are not permitted to go into the parking lot without an adult, or to play around in the parking lot. If you should come to pick up your child while he/she is on the playground, please avoid lifting your child over the fence and please instead use the gate. You will still need to sign your child out if they are on the playground when you arrive.

Please pick your child up on time. We reserve the right to impose a late fee of \$15 for each additional 5 minutes that your child is at school past their normal pick up time. Children who are enrolled in the half day or school day program’s may add time when space permits.

If your child is picked up by someone other than the usual family member(s), please notify us in writing. For children’s safety, we require that they be signed in and out of the school each day.

**Attendance:** The Montessori philosophy insists that we respect the child’s need for consistency. The children who benefit the most from the prepared environment are those who attend regularly. A child’s experience in the classroom and with the materials are cumulative; consistent attendance enhances the child’s learning. A consistent

routine also provides security for the children; a sense of security enables the child to learn more readily.

The classroom guides (teachers) spend quality time and energy preparing the curriculum and lessons each day and for each child. For all students at every level, each day counts toward their learning and development. Please help to ensure your child's social and academic progress by avoiding any unnecessary tardiness and absences.

**Infant Care:** Parents will be responsible for providing diapers, formula or breast milk for their child while in our care. A written plan from parents regarding individualized feeding and diet schedules will be followed while your infant is in our care. Parents will be responsible for informing staff as to when their child is ready to start transitioning to solid foods. We will not make this transition without communication with the parents. Infants will nap in cribs until parents have authorized that it is safe for their child to transition to a nap mat. This will not be done without written consent from the parents. Parents can also fill out an individualized sleep schedule that will be followed while your infant is in our care.

**Potty Training:** Potty training will be initiated once the child is ready. Teachers will communicate with parents when they notice that a child may be ready to start the potty training process. Parents can also notify staff when they would like to start the process if the child has expressed interest in their home. When your child is potty training, please be sure to provide sufficient extra clothes. We will send any soiled clothing home with the child at the end of the day.

**Clothing:** Please dress your child in comfortable, age appropriate, sturdy clothes that can be put on and be taken off indecently, especially if they are potty training and able to do so. Please avoid long party dresses, costume dresses, party clothes or shoes and dress up clothing.

Since we try to go outside as often as we can, outdoor clothing appropriate to the season is essential. This means complete waterproof snow gear whenever there is snow - or the warning of. Boots are highly recommended during the spring melt and fall rains when the ground can be wet and muddy.

Tennis shoes are ideal for outdoor play in warm weather; sandals with closed toes and an ankle/heel strap are fine, but please **no flip-flops, clogs, or cowboy/girl boots.**

**Lunches and Snacks:** Your child's lunch is provided by you and must include a protein source and a fruit and/or vegetable. Lunch items must be cut up and ready to eat with our provided silverware. Some foods that can be eaten with hands at home are

too messy for a group setting; meat for example, must be cut into bite-sized pieces. Oranges or hard boiled eggs must be peeled and ready for the child. **Please do not pack candy, fun fruits, fruit roll-ups, dip, grated cheese, squirt or drinkable yogurt, juice, sweetened milk, soda or beverage of any kind. Do not include medicines or vitamins in your child's lunchbox.**

We recommend the use of ice packs in order to keep your child's lunch cold and thermoses for foods that need to stay warm. We are unable to refrigerate and heat all of the children's lunches.

We provide a healthy morning snack of fruits or vegetables with the option for water or milk every morning during our morning work period. If your child is allergic to cow's milk, we will work with you to provide an alternative option should you wish. Children who stay past our school day (3:45) may finish food from their lunches during our afternoon snack time or receive a school snack if they do not have any food left over.

**Naps:** Nap time will be a part of the daily routine for children in our infant and toddler rooms. These children may have one small, soft, cozy item for them to snuggle with during their nap, however it must remain in their cubby while not being used at nap time. This nap item must be small enough to easily fit in your child's cubby.

For the children in our early childhood room, nap time is available for children who normally nap during the day. They may also have a cozy nap time item. Nap time for those in our early childhood program will be left up to the parents discretion and should not be the child's choice. If your child seems to be phasing out of nap but still occasionally benefits from it, it is best to set a schedule of two or three days a week in which they rest. The consistency in their schedule is very beneficial to them.

We provide each napping child with an age appropriate sleeping space; crib, cot or mat and a blanket.

**Sharing and Toys:** Please do not allow your child to bring toys to school. However, children may bring well chosen items based on our current circle topic. We strongly recommend bringing one book related to our topic over toys and other personal items. We do not guarantee that books brought from home will be read to the group or that the children will be able to present their item during our group circle, although we will try our best. We will not accept most toys or fragile, expensive items.

**Birthdays:** Children celebrating their birthdays are welcome to bring our snack for the day that consists of their favorite fruit or vegetable. Please speak with staff prior to bringing snacks.

We celebrate birthdays during our circle time with a special ceremony using the Montessori globe called “around the sun”. This ceremony requires one photograph taken during each year of your child’s life (example: 4 pictures for a child turning 4). These pictures will be returned to you at the end of the day.

**Conferences:** To help each child’s progress, and set goals together, parent-teacher conferences will occur twice a year for children in our toddler and early childhood room, giving an opportunity for parents to receive one-on-one knowledge about their child’s progress. If your child is in the infant room, there will be ample time to sit one-on-one with teachers per your request. We expect there to be a lot of opportunities for our infant parents to meet with teachers especially as they transition to solid foods and out of cribs at nap time. If at any time, regardless of your child’s classroom, you would like to sit down with teachers, please let us know and we would be more than happy to accommodate you.

**Illness and Medication:** In order to attend school, children must be able to participate fully in the daily routine, including outside play time. While we understand that mild colds are common in children, and generally do not interfere with everyday activities, **please do not send your child to school who may be exhibiting one or more of the following symptoms; a fever, a bad cough, a rash, a thick nasal discharge, unexplained redness in the eyes, vomiting, or diarrhea. Children must remain home for 24 hours after the symptom(s) have subsided.**

A child who does not normally nap, but needs a nap in order to recover and make it through their normal daily routine is probably not sufficiently recovered to return to school.

Should your child become ill or injured at school, we will attempt to notify you immediately. We will apply first aid in case of injury when necessary. If you cannot be reached, we will call your emergency contact person if it is required for your child to be picked up from school immediately. A child who is seriously injured will be taken to the hospital when emergency services are deemed fit. Our staff has been trained in CPR and First Aid and will administer the necessary care until EMS arrives on scene.

We will not dispense medicine without a signed medication form. If your child needs medicine during school hours, please fill out a form each day it is to be administered.

The medicine must be in its original container, clearly labeled with your child's name and instructions.

**Non-Medical Emergencies:** In the event of a citywide emergency your child will remain at school unless we are advised by authorities to evacuate. If children are moved, the location will be posted on our doors if able to do so. Children's safety will be our first priority. Parents will be informed as soon as children are in a safe place and we are able to do so.

**Pandemic/Natural Event:** If an unforeseen natural or health event, such as a pandemic, happens, the situation will be assessed by A Little Journey Montessori School. Parents may be expected to pay a fee or partial tuition to hold their child's spot. Each situation will be handled on a "by case" basis.

**Child Abuse:** Montana law mandates that all staff members report any suspected abuse or neglect of children.

**Non-Discrimination Policy:** A Little Journey Montessori School does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender, religion, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin in student admission or hiring of employees.

**Re-Enrollment:** Re-enrollment for the next school year (beginning each Fall) is done annually every spring. Current families will need to notify the school if they plan to have their child continue for the following year and pay the annual deposit fee. This deposit is non-refundable and will be applied toward supplies for the coming school year. Please see current enrollment for deposit fee. Updated health and identification information is due at this time if available or no later than the beginning of September. If your child will be transitioning to kindergarten for the coming year, you will need to notify us of a tentative last day for your child.

**Withdrawal:** Enrollment is for the entire year and parents agree to pay the full monthly tuition fees for the calendar year. Notice of withdrawal by the parent(s) must be given, in writing, to the provider 30 days in advance in order for payment responsibilities to end. Tuition is billed monthly and withdrawal notice must occur at the month prior to withdrawal. If you terminate prior to the end of the month, no credit will be given for missed days.

**Grievance Procedure:** Parents that may have a grievance or concern about the school or staff should attempt to resolve the conflict directly with the Director. This can often clarify and resolve a situation in a calm and cordial manner.

**Termination Policy:** A Little Journey Montessori School reserves that right to ask a family to withdraw their child from school for any reason in which the school is unable to meet the needs of the child or in which the child shows they are not ready for the Montessori classroom setting. If a parent, guardian or family member engages in behavior that is destructive, disruptive, or undermining to the school environment, to the children and/or staff, the family may be asked to withdraw their child from school. In addition, we reserve the right to dismiss a family for non-payment.

**Thank you!**