



**INTERDEPENDENCE 101**  
**INDEPENDENCE 201**  
The First Plane of Development  
0-6 Years



## WHAT IS INTERDEPENDENCE?

Interdependence, or pro-social behavior, “refers to actions that are intended to aid or benefit another person or group of people without the [child’s] anticipation of external rewards. Such actions often entail some cost, self-sacrifice, or risk on the part of the [child].”<sup>1</sup>

## WHAT IS INTERDEPENDENCE, IN ENGLISH?

Sympathy, generosity, charitable donations, service, sharing, etc. It also encompasses grace & courtesy and conflict resolution. In other words, all the behaviors required to be a productive member of society when the child is grown.

## HOW DOES A CHILD LEARN INTERDEPENDENCE?

Montessori tells us the first stage of a child’s development, from birth to age 6, is an incredible time of unconscious development. From birth to age 3 the adult has little influence on their learning. The child will absorb the environment around him and make it part of his soul. He will learn his native language, adapt to the climate he is raised in, and honor any social order of his surroundings. This unconscious learning can never be wholly eradicated from our being. From ages 3 to 6, their personality changes slightly. Adults begin to have some influence on the child, but he is still absorbing his environment and forming her mind.

## IF THAT’S THE CASE, WHAT ARE WE SUPPOSED TO DO AS PARENTS?

The most important thing we can do is role model and *guide* our children. They require consistent schedules and consistent reactions.

- Role modeling and guiding may look like this:
- Parent says “Good morning” to the teacher every day.

- Child will begin to say “Good morning” to the teacher.
- You say “Good morning,” but your child doesn’t. Ask a guiding, open-ended question like “What do you say to your teacher in the morning?” The child may or may not respond.
- Continue this modeling and guiding behavior.
- After years of practice, saying “Good morning” becomes part of the child’s day.

## WHY DOES IT SAY INDEPENDENCE 201 ON THE COVER?

The early childhood aged child is still growing in independence. Until a child fully grasps her independence, she is unable to respect or provide for another’s needs. Throughout this growing independence, it is very important to set limits for the child (a whole new chapter on independence). Montessori said “to let the child do as he likes when he has not yet developed any powers of control is to betray the idea of freedom.”

## WHAT LIMITS SHOULD I SET?

Setting limits is an art that is ever-evolving and personalized to your child. What works for some, may not work for others. All parents set some limits in common. These limits usually ensure the safety of our children. While we let them walk independently, we hold their hand in parking lots and on sidewalks. How they walk in a hallway, however, is a more interdependent action. This shared space requires courtesy to others. Sometimes a child will be uncooperative in these areas. As a guiding parent, we offer them a choice: “You can walk appropriately (hold my hand, don’t run, etc.) or I can carry you. Which would you like to do?” Montessori encourages us to “teach children limits with love or the world will teach them without it.”

<sup>1</sup>Mussen, Paul and Eisenberg-Berg, Nancy. *Roots of Caring, Sharing, and Helping: The Development of Prosocial Behavior in Children*. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1977.

## BENCHMARKS OF INDEPENDENCE/INTERDEPENDENCE

	Infant/Toddler student by age 3 can/will:	Early Childhood student by age 6 can/will:
Self-Help (for more benchmarks see the Independence Guide)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• dress themselves (shoes, pants, zippers, etc.).</li><li>• use a tissue when reminded.</li><li>• avoid common dangers.</li><li>• show manners while eating.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• say birth date and parents names.</li><li>• know 911 and when to use it.</li><li>• stay on the sidewalk.</li><li>• eat neatly and use napkins.</li><li>• dress appropriately for the weather.</li></ul>
Emotions/Self-Esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• display a wide variety of emotions.</li><li>• separate easily in a familiar environment.</li><li>• take pride in their achievements.</li><li>• attempt to comfort others.</li><li>• resist change and have difficulty with transitions.</li><li>• resist help and insist on doing things for themselves.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• verbalize emotions before resorting to physical displays.</li><li>• comfort others in distress.</li><li>• transition to a new activity at the request of an adult.</li><li>• sacrifice immediate desires for a delayed reward.</li><li>• leave a provoking situation.</li></ul>
Grace & Courtesy/ Social Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• play with one or two other children.</li><li>• engage in cooperative play or circle time.</li><li>• say please and thank you.</li><li>• interrupt appropriately.</li><li>• begin to obey rules.</li><li>• greet people.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• interrupt appropriately and wait for others to finish speaking.</li><li>• obey rules without a supervising adult present.</li><li>• explain consequences.</li><li>• display appropriate behavior for a situation and follow social norms.</li><li>• initiate appropriate conversation topics.</li><li>• contribute to group conversation.</li><li>• begin to work and play without disrupting others.</li></ul>

*In the progress of personality, first comes a declaration of independence, then a recognition of interdependence.*

*— Henry Van Dyke*

## EXAMPLES OF GUIDING LANGUAGE

- The most important aspect of guiding language is explaining the child's feelings so they have language to explain how they feel in the future. "I see you're sad." "I see you're angry."
- Never force a child to say he is sorry. Explain how he has caused hurt and tell him to ask the injured/upset child what he/she needs to feel better. If they will not ask, then you ask. You can then assist the child in doing what the injured/upset child has asked.
- Remember to talk through a situation, and don't ask why. Ask "Did something happen?" or say "Tell me more." Why is not a question they can answer.
- Make limits and rules clear and consistent. When there is a problem, refer to the rules as the reason they should not have done something. This way there is no blaming on either side.
- Say things like:
  - Would you help me with ... ?
  - How can we ... ?
  - What do you think?
  - How do you think...feels?

## REMEMBER, IT'S OK IF

YOUR INFANT CHILD	YOUR TODDLER CHILD	YOUR 3 YEAR-OLD	YOUR 6 YEAR-OLD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• does not share.</li><li>• tests you at mealtime and bedtime.</li><li>• acts impulsively.</li><li>• explores everything.</li><li>• wants an adult present constantly.</li><li>• enjoys being the center of attention.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• does not share and defends her possessions.</li><li>• displays shyness with strangers.</li><li>• resists change and has difficulty with transitions.</li><li>• fights for control and resists you.</li><li>• is "clingy."</li><li>• only plays with one child at a time.</li><li>• says "mine."</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• does not share.</li><li>• talks loudly.</li><li>• is demanding.</li><li>• only plays with one or two children at a time.</li><li>• resists change and has difficulty with transitions.</li><li>• experiences extreme emotional fluctuations.</li><li>• gives paradoxical responses or is inconsistent.</li><li>• insists on doing things independently.</li><li>• resists help.</li><li>• takes pride in achievements.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• behaves inconsistently.</li><li>• asks why.</li><li>• feels upset when others break rules and seeks justice.</li><li>• develops an interest in culture.</li><li>• requires more and broader social interactions.</li><li>• experiences many other changes. See the Interdependence Guide for the 2nd Plane of Development to see ongoing benchmarks and examples.</li></ul>

## THE MONTESSORI ACADEMY OF ARLINGTON

Preparing children for life, not just the next test.

