

‘Montessori From the Start’

Montessori From the Start is “childcare” for babies and toddlers - but not as you might know it. When most people think of “childcare” for babies and toddlers they picture challenging environments filled with crying children, chaotic mess, endless check-lists and impersonal assembly-line nappy changes. Many childcare professionals - and parents - mistakenly believe that these challenges of childcare are an inherent part of the process. That common model is so pervasive that many people find it difficult to imagine childcare occurring in any other way – but there *is* another way and you will find it at *Montessori From the Start*. Our model is founded on a deep respect for the *needs and rights of the youngest members of our world*. Dr. Maria Montessori said “the greatness of the human personality begins at the *hour of birth*”. This reverence for the baby is what informs all aspects of our care community. We do not incorporate any feature, routine or element unless it is in the best interest of the child.

We make no distinction between our ‘curriculum’ and our ‘routines’. Just as we use the term ‘*educarers*’ to highlight the symbiosis between ‘education’ and ‘care’, we must also highlight the fact that the *curriculum is the routine and the routine is the curriculum*.

Most childcare centres treat ‘curriculum’ and ‘routine’ as two separate entities. The adults in these other environments physically and intellectually place distance between the two aspects. They view the ‘curriculum’ as the stacking toys and books placed in the classroom and view the ‘routine’ as the nappy-changing and feeding that must be ticked off the checklist. This distinction between two separate aspects inevitably has two unintended results; it creates an *implied hierarchy* and it leads to *assembly-line attitudes*. The sense of implied hierarchy manifests when childcare workers believe that ‘routines’, such as nappy changing, must be rushed through in order to get to the ‘more important’ curriculum experiences. This tends to subtly promote the assembly-line mentality, when every child is changed one-by-one at a pre-determined set time so that it can be done ‘as quickly as possible’. The child experiences these rushed routines as impersonal at best and uncomfortable at worst.

We see every element of our routine as a valuable part of the curriculum, and following the curriculum forms a part of our natural daily routines and rhythms. When a baby has a wet nappy, we respond to that individual’s need. While we assist with changing the nappy we engage in communication, eye-contact and interaction that promotes healthy development. There is no “nappy change time”, it is simply that at certain points during the day a child’s activity will be *changing my nappy*. The same principle applies to food preparation and meals, changing clothes and other practical elements of the ‘routine’. Practical and necessary daily routines provide opportunities for meaningful learning and development.

We also carefully prepare the environment with purposeful materials and present specific experiences. These materials and presentations are sourced from the Montessori curriculum and are designed to support the child’s innate needs. For babies and toddlers, the materials focus on promoting movement, coordination, communication, sensory awareness and blossoming independence.

Montessori From the Start is a specialized program designed for the needs of the Infant & Toddler community, being children from 6 months to 3 years. Due to the incredible rate of growth that children experience during these first three years we have three spaces that cater to the distinct needs within this spectrum, but the overall program remains integrated, and there is flow and flexibility between these areas. As a tribute to Dr Maria Montessori, the innovative educator who developed the pedagogy we implement today, we reflect her Italian heritage in the language we use to describe our *From the Start* environments. These are:

- **Nido (6 months to first steps)**

Nido is Italian for 'nest'. Our Nido area is for our very first arrivals – those children who are brand new not only to our community but to the world! Our babies who are not yet mobile need a particularly special, intimate and secure space where the most important priority is the growth of meaningful and positive attachments with our attentive caregivers.

It is important to note that our Nido days are shorter than our overall operating hours. Babies in our Nido group are welcome to attend between 8.15am and 4.15pm. This shorter day is a deliberate philosophical choice that expresses our commitment to child-centred practices. Due to the unique needs and vulnerabilities of infancy we believe it is important to advocate for the child's physical and psychological well-being by ensuring that their hours in a formal care environment are limited and their time with family is maximized. A shorter day also ensures that the educators are consistent throughout the whole of the child's day, thus ensuring a sense of trust and bonding. This also reflects the needs of many new parents who prefer a gentle approach to easing their child into care.

Our Nido rooms also include an area where our Montessori Playgroup is held. This lovely area extends out to a beautiful under-cover play space for year-round outdoor activity.

- **Piccolo (First steps to 2 years)**

Piccolo is the Italian word for 'little'. You may also know this word from the half-size flute that plays an octave higher than its full-sized counterpart, or from the miniature coffee it lends its name to. All of these uses of the word are apt considering the unique needs of the children in this group! Our Piccolo children are still very little, but they are now mobile and ready to make beautiful music with an endlessly effervescent energy that adults can emulate only through copious consumption of caffeine! Our Piccolo environment is designed to respect and channel this bounty of bubbly enthusiasm by giving children space to strengthen their steps and build their bodies!

- **Bambini (Toddlers - 2 years to 3 years)**

Bambini is the Italian word for 'children'. Many people speak of 'the terrible twos' but we take the opposite perspective, viewing this time as a *terrific* and valuable period where children blend the wide-eyed wonder of their first years with the cognitive and communicative capacities of their upcoming Pre-school years.