Montessori Parent Infant Programs: The Support Group Model

Maria Montessori, who developed an educational approach in Italy more than a century ago, encouraged adults to observe children scientifically in order to understand and meet needs. The more observation, the better our understanding of children, both in the classroom and at home.

In a Montessori Parent Infant program, the goal is parent education. We provide resources and support, but the greatest benefit to the family is for the parent to develop observational skills. These skills help them understand their child’s needs in the present moment, and for years to come.

A Parent Infant format that we have come to call the “Support Group Model” includes an initial home visit, one or more sessions per week with parents and their infant or toddler children gathering in a Montessori environment, and a weekly parent-only discussion session. Topics of discussion include observation, sleep issues, nutrition, positive discipline, child development, and preparing the home.

Parent Infant requires fewer materials than other levels of Montessori. The environment can be set up in a safe, multiuse space in less than an hour each week. Most groups meet in a Montessori school, but could also be in a community setting such as a library, church, or community center. Many groups meet in the facilitator’s home. We even held a program in a domestic violence/homeless shelter.

With two, 90-minute sessions (one with children, one discussion) per week, the time commitment is low, and results are tremendous. Anecdotally, we have seen that families benefit through improved sleep and nutritional habits, less child abuse and yelling, greater cooperation between the two parents, increased reading and talking to children, and eased transitions such as toilet learning and toddler discipline. We expect to confirm these benefits through future research.

Parent Infant helps schools retain families. Those who participate are more likely to stay in the Montessori school through the kindergarten and elementary years.

Facilitators should obtain Montessori 0-3 certification. Additional mentoring is available through Learning Together. Our goal is to make Parent Infant available to families in every community.