

# Sensitive Periods

## By

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## For

### KHT Montessori

#### What are Sensitive Periods?

Hugo de Vries, A Dutch biologist, based on his studies, knew that insects are guided by instinct to complete certain tasks at certain times. He called these times "Sensitive Periods."

Dr. Montessori spent many years observing children. She realized that children were guided by an "inner" need to complete certain tasks at certain times. Dr. Montessori called these blocks of time in a child's life, "**Sensitive Periods**." These are specific periods of time when a child is absorbed with one characteristic of his environment to the exclusion of all else.

Maria explains these periods as "***an intense interest for repeating certain actions at length, for no obvious reason, until... (Because of repetition) a fresh function suddenly appears with explosive force.***"

The child does this because he loves his environment...not an emotional love, but an intellectual and spiritual desire. As a result, the child has great joy! Dr. Montessori said, "***When one of these psychic passions is exhausted, another is enkindled. Childhood thus passes from conquest to conquest in a constant rhythm that constitutes its joy and happiness.***"

If a child is prohibited these sensitive periods, the natural consequences are shown with the disturbing effect on psychic development and maturity.

As soon as a sensitive period appears, the child must **be assisted**.

#### Necessary Conditions

Now, we are going to talk about what 2 conditions are needed for Sensitive Periods to become apparent and for the child to grow:

1. **Child is dependent upon integral relationship with his environment – both things and people.** Only through this interaction can the child come to an understanding of his self and the limits of his universe.

Dr. Montessori said that, "***A child's work is to create the person she is to become.***"

2. **Child requires freedom.** If the child is given the key to his own personality, and is governed by his own laws of development, the child is in possession of the very sensitive and unique powers that can only come forth through freedom.

If either of these two conditions is not met, the child will not reach full potential of development and his personality will be stunted.

Maria believed that since this pattern exists before birth...education should start at birth.

Dr. Montessori said, ***“Education is not something which the teacher does. It is a natural process which develops spontaneously.”***

Western education thought has been influenced by **Descartes’** view of man as two separate parts...**intellectual** and **physical**.

Montessori believes that the full psychic powers cannot be achieved without physical activity. If movement is curtailed the child’s well-being is threatened.

Montessori believed that the child possesses an intense motivation towards his own self-construction.

### **Child’s Goal**

Below, we are going to talk about what the **Child’s Goal** is as they grow!

**The unique and ultimate goal in a child’s life is the full development of himself.** He achieves this through an understanding of his environment.

The child’s emotional and physical health depends on his constant attempt to become himself.

Dr. Montessori said, ***“Above all it is to be noted that the child has a passionate love for order and work, and possesses intellectual qualities superior by far to what might have been expected.”***

A child shows the need for order in 3 ways:

- Positive joy in seeing things in their proper places
- Demonstrates tantrums when they are not in their proper places
- Child wants to do it all by himself if he can. Dr. Montessori said, ***“Never help a child with a task at which he feels he can succeed.”***

Now, let us talk about about what the **11 Montessori Identified Sensitive Periods** from birth to 6 years of age!

### **11 Montessori Identified Sensitive Periods**

When Maria Montessori talks about children being “inner directed” she is referring to a child in a sensitive period where they have an inner compulsion. If, as a teacher, you observe a child, you will be able to pick up on their sensitive periods.

Maria identified 11 Sensitive Periods that children go through from birth through 6 years of age. The breakdown in chronological time is just an approximation. Children have their own “**time clocks**” and we must be willing to observe them and then to assist them when the time is right!

Birth – 1

**Movement**

All the new movements of a new life with crawling, walking, touching, etc.

Birth – 6

**Language**

Learning vocabulary and comprehension

1 – 4

**Small Objects**

Where the child becomes absorbed by objects and details often over-looked by the adult

2 – 4

**Order**

Desire for repetition and consistency

2 – 6

**Music**

Where child is interested in melody, pitch, rhythm

2 – 6

**Grace and Courtesy**

Where the child imitates polite and acceptable behavior and integrates them into his personality.

2 – 6

**Sensory Impressions**

Where children learn through their five senses and make sensorial discrimination's.

3 – 4

**Writing Interest**

Where the child becomes interested in writing before reading

They attempt to use writing instruments and paper to write letters and numbers.

3 – 5

**Reading Interest**

Where the child becomes interested in the symbolic sounds each letter makes and how to form words.

4 – 6

**Spatial Relationships**

This is where a child becomes interested in their place in space. They study relationships between familiar places. They study the relationship between objects such as a puzzle.

4 – 6

### **Mathematics**

This is where the child is able to absorb the concepts of quantity and operations using concrete materials.

Below you will find a list of where you can look for **Additional Information on Sensitive Periods**.

### **Additional Information on Sensitive Periods**

#### **Books by Dr. Maria Montessori**

Advanced Montessori Method (old edition) (paperback) – Chapter XXV

Books by Dr. Maria Montessori:

Teaching Montessori in the Home – The Pre-School Years – page 8

The Absorbent Mind – Page 52, 166

The Absorbent Mind (paperback) – Page 96

The Discover of the Child (old edition) - Pages 220 – 222

The Secret of Childhood (old edition) – Chapter III, pages 34-41

The Secret of Childhood (paperback) – Part I, Chapter 7, 45-51

To Educate the Human Potential (paperback) - pages 5-6

What You Should Know about Your Child – Page 51, 52

What You Should Know about Your Child (paperback) – Page 40, 41

#### **Books by Mario Montessori**

Education for Human Development– page 13, 19, 20, 42, 48, 50, 53

Education for Human Development (paperback) – page 13, 19, 20, 42, 48, 50, 53

#### **Books by Edwin Mortimer Standing**

Maria Montessori – Her Life and Work – pages 138-139, 316

Montessori Revolution in Education – pages 36-40, 45, 192

Montessori Revolution in Education (paperback) – pages 36-38

The Montessori Method – A Revolution in Education – pages 36-46

**Book by Anne Burke Neubert**

A Way of Learning - page 72

Book by Sr. Christina Marie Trudeau

Montessori's Years in India – pages 81-82

**Books by Lena L. Gitter**

Montessori's Legacy to Children – page 5

Montessori's Legacy to Children – pages 1, 5, 26, 54

Ready Your Child for School – page 6

**Books by Reginald C. Orem**

Montessori for the Disadvantaged – page 19, 30, 34-38, 50 130

Montessori Today by Reginald C. Orem – page 19

Montessori, Her Method and the Movement – What you Need to Know by Reginald C. Orem (paperback) – page 73, 104

**Book by Paula Polk Lillard**

Montessori – A Modern Approach – page 18, 24-25, 32-36

I hope that I have given you a better understanding of Sensitive Periods. Please come and Learn with Us at KHT Montessori. We will be starting a new group of parents and teachers through the online 12-month certificate course.

You can reach me for additional information about the course by sending email to:

[karen@khtmontessori.com](mailto:karen@khtmontessori.com)

Blessings,  
Karen