

All About the Atrium

“Help me do it myself.”

The young child's motto could very well be, “Help me do it myself.”

How many parents, if they heard their small child say, “Help me” would not race to the child’s side to see how they could aid their child, prevent an accident or avoid an impending peril? Maria Montessori overheard a young child’s comment, “Help me do it myself.” She realized the child’s need for independence, in discovering his or her own capabilities. As a parent, it is sometimes easier and quicker to do things *for* our children, but when we step in and do it *for* them, we do not allow them the opportunity to become independent. If you heard your child say, “Help me do it myself,” how would you respond?



How do we see this in the Atrium?

In the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, we recognized the child’s need for independence. The youngest children in the Atrium, at age three, have shown that they are capable of pouring from one container to another, sweeping the floor or washing the table, and cutting with scissors. The child is given the opportunity to freely choose to work with a material. When a child is able to do something for him or herself, there is an increase in self-confidence and self-esteem.

How do we do we live and honor that in our homes?

Attempt to present tasks to your child without any time limit.

As adults, we often want things done as quickly as possible. Imagine hurrying to leave the house and the child is struggling to put on his or her coat or shoes. As parents, we tend to want to help our child with the task. Remember that while we want things done as quickly as possible, the child needs time to simply do, to focus on the content of the task without the pressure of time limits.

Allow your child the small struggles that come with acquiring a skill.

In Listening to God with Children, Gianna Gobbi writes, “It is easier for us to do it ourselves rather than take the time to teach the child how to do it for himself and herself; yet, this result in the child’s becoming incapacitated and more dependent on us.”

Do not judge and learn to accept less than perfect results.

Our children will most likely not sweep the floor as quickly and thoroughly as an adult, but they will not be able to learn how to sweep unless we give them the opportunity to try. How we respond to the child and their work shows our respect and faith in the child.

Know that the elementary child may ask instead “Help me THINK for myself.”

“Helping little children in their own efforts to grow is truly a form of service.”

- Sofia Cavalletti, The Good Shepherd and the Child: A Joyful Journey