

Quotations from **THE CHILD IN THE FAMILY** by **Maria Montessori**

We must try to observe the elusive manifestations that demonstrate how the psychic life of the child develops from the moment of birth and acquires a recognizable pattern in the first months of life.

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... The first duty of the educator, whether he is involved with the newborn infant or an older child, is to recognize the human personality of the young being and respect it...

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The new child reveals himself even in the first few months of life. It is clear that those of us who thought that the only utilizable psychological facts were those pertaining to the conscious mind and to linguistic expression must have thoroughly neglected the very young child. The conviction that nothing can be offered the infant except physical care has obscured facts of the greatest importance. But when the adult is prepared to perceive the child's psychic manifestations rather than suppress them, then he can see clearly that the child's inner life is much more intense and precocious than had even been supposed.....

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Special care should be shown for the psychic life of the newborn child. If it already has such a life at birth, how much greater will this be as it grows older? If we understand by "education" a child's psychic rather than its intellectual development, we may truly say, as it is said today, that a child's education should begin at birth."

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We can now describe a child's psychic and physiological growth as a kind of "incarnation", understanding by this word that mysterious force which animates the helpless body of a newborn child, enables him to grow, teaches him to speak, and thus perfects him.

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A child must receive his first sensible impressions from his surroundings, that is, from the heavens as well as from the earth, but he is not permitted to gaze at the sky.... Much better would it be to place a child on a slightly inclined plane so that he could take in the whole of his surroundings. Better still would it be to place the child in a garden where he could see birds and flowers and gently swaying plants..... A child should be placed in the same spot on different occasions. He can thus repeatedly see the same things and learn how to recognize them and their relative positions and how to distinguish animate from inanimate objects.

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If what we have to do is to help man's mental life, then the first lesson we must learn is that the tiny child's absorbent mind finds all its nutriment in its surroundings. Here it has to locate itself, and build itself up from what it takes in. Especially at the beginning of life must we, therefore, make the environment as interesting and attractive as we can.

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His eyes are bright and eager, and we must remember, as science has recently shown, that the child's eyes are not only affected by light. He is by no means passive. While undoubtedly receiving impressions, he is an active seeker in his world. He himself is looking for impressions.

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