

Help! I need a (Montessori-friendly!) break from my child/ren

Hello Simone! I have read both your Montessori Baby and Montessori Toddler books and I had a question. Being a stay at home mom, there are times when my son doesn't sleep. I honestly need a break in the day. Now perhaps this has to do with logistics on my part, but there have definitely been times where I had my son of 15 months watch a screen for a few moments on a tough day when I needed some time to get myself back to center. Can you send me some tips or ideas on better ways to accomplish a break for myself with a clingy teething toddler? I am at home alone most of the time so some advice would be great. Thanks.

These feelings are indeed very common. We can often feel overwhelmed, exhausted or fed up; we might have a teething toddler hanging on our leg, or an older child whining at us “I'm bored!” or we had a terrible night with the baby or other. I've written before about [how hard it is to look after toddlers \(and what we can do about it\)](#).

In Montessori we are often so busy “[following the child](#),” that we overlook our own needs. So here are some ideas to make us put ourselves back in the picture. Not at the expense of our child, but also not caring for them at the expense of ourselves.

Find rest in the small moments

Rather than waiting until we have time or money to get a massage/date night/night off, these are things we can do with our children at home in the small in between moments.

1. Put on some music for our child to dance to while we rest (or we may be inspired to join them).
2. Head out into nature - most of us (both adults and children) feel better in fresh air and depending on our energy levels we could hike, pack a picnic with a blanket to rest while the children explore (look for a safe possibly-gated area if we are with young children), sit on the beach while the children dig in the sand, sit under a tree in the forest etc.
3. Call a friend to talk to while the children play.
4. Lie on the floor next to where our child is playing - often having us nearby is enough and they will be happy to play while we rest.
5. Listen to a children's audiobook together - audiobooks are a great alternative to screens.
6. Have a nap with our child - even if they don't sleep we can give them a pile of books to explore.
7. Put on the record player (or a Spotify playlist) and have a music afternoon.
8. [Make playdough](#) with our children - it takes just 10 minutes to make and is relaxing for everyone to play with. Great for regulating our nervous systems.
9. In warm weather, set up a water table for our child to explore with different jugs and cups to measure and explore. Another favourite is a paint brush and a bucket of water to “paint” the pavement.
10. In cold weather, make a cosy snuggle spot with blankets, cushions, and warm drinks for everyone. If we can't get outdoors, we could also set up an indoor [obstacle course](#) and then lie horizontal while they explore.
11. Light some candles (keep out of reach of very young hands; teach older children how to light candles safely) and some essential oils to help us relax.

12. Roll out a yoga mat and do some yoga poses or meditate - the more we do this around our children, the more they will get used to us exercising and relaxing near them while they do their own thing or come join us.
13. Have a reading time each day where we read our book and our child "reads" theirs (yes, looking at pictures and turning the page is still valuable for them).
14. Breathe - let out some big sighs, shake our body, release some of the tired energy.
15. I love primal screaming - get our children to join us and likely we'll end up releasing any tired energy (and laughing a lot).
16. Blow bubbles and they can chase around to catch them.
17. Put on some headphones while supervising play if we need some quiet time or are feeling over-stimulated.
18. Be creative. Create together. Depending on the age of our child, we could pull out some art supplies and we can work on some art while our child creates their own too.
19. Make a cup of tea and sit down while it is still hot to drink it. Only get up if it is an emergency.
20. Look out the window. Watch the world go by together. When we slow down, our child often does too.

Some other thoughts:

Prepare the environment. Set up an area with activities that meet the needs of our children so they can engage in meaningful activity independently. This can give us space to do something we enjoy like reading a book or magazine, sewing, woodworking, knitting, etc.

Involve them with what we are doing. Find something that we love to do that we can do with our child - for some of us, this will be baking; for others it will be gardening etc.

We also know that in Montessori families we love to involve our child in preparing meals, doing the laundry, washing the dog, making the beds etc. This can take longer initially, but we are building the skills for later when they will be able to manage themselves and, most importantly, where they see that they make a valuable contribution to the family.

Community care. This is something that I wish that I'd built up more in the early years. Some of our greatest friendships came out of these: giving a ride to a friend on the way to preschool, babysitting swaps once a month with friends (they came once a month to babysit for us; I went once a month to babysit for their family) etc. And there are many other ways to give and receive care in our community.

Make rest part of our family culture. Set up a place in our home to rest. I first saw an intentional resting space on the IG feed of Eloise Rickman (@mightymother_) many years ago. It could be a yoga mat with meditation cushion and eye pad, a bean bag, a hammock etc. This introduces the idea that rest is important in our home. Our children will see us modelling rest instead of falling into the busy culture we often see around us.

Radical subtraction. My Montessori friend Seemi Abdullah of Trillium Montessori introduced this term to me. Look at what we have going on in our lives. Start saying "no" so that we can be more in the things that are important to us.

Switch off. Often we think that checking social media is a break yet rarely does it give us the energy we are looking for. Better to switch off and find some sunshine if we can. Put the sun

on our faces. This will refuel us much more for the rest of the day. When I am now waiting for a friend, instead of getting impatient or spending it on my phone, I take the opportunity to



simply sit and observe my breath (when I remember of course).

If we do want a quick social media break, tell our child we are going to have a break to check instagram or other, put on a timer, and model putting down our phone when we are done.

Know ourselves. We all decompress in different ways. Some of us like to talk to a friend; others of us need quiet; some of us want to go for a run or clean our house. I know that I needed to eat nourishing food, do some yoga and meditation each morning, and to have a long soak in the bath with the door locked once everyone was tucked into bed.

I hope that this has given you some food for thought for how you can get a Montessori-friendly rest in your day.

Sending you lots of rest and ease in your days. And I'll be back in your inbox soon with more Montessori inspiration. Til then...

Much love,
Simone x