



## *Is my child normal?*

The other day I spoke to a parent who complained about her 9 year old son who is very untidy. The more she talked, the more I smiled; I knew where she was heading ... is this normal? What can she do? I interrupted her by asking her if he forgets to brush his teeth, or forget to take his empty glass to the kitchen, and yes, it is normal.

Often parents are worried if their child is developing at the right pace and time.

Dr. Montessori gave us very clear "guidelines" which she called sensitive periods. We can use these as a benchmark for development.

The book written by E. M. Standing, *Maria Montessori, Her life and work*, is a easy read for those who would like to find out more about it. *Montessori Mom (1)*, an online blog, uses a table (see next page) to explain the sensitive periods from birth to age six.

Sensitive periods occur throughout the first developmental stage 0-6 and continue through to adulthood. They are particular time spans in a child's life when he is sensitive, to an incredible degree, to a particular activity or interest.

Where the first period of childhood is characterized by a more or less unconscious absorption from the environment, the second period is concerned with the acquisition of what Dr. Montessori referred to as "culture".

Translated into age levels, this means that before the age of six, children want to name everything they possibly can; they want to know what and where. They are primarily interested in facts. After the age of six, they want to know why, how, and when. They are interested in reasons, explanations, and time perspective.

During the age of six to twelve it is normal for children to go through the following sensitive periods:

1. Reason and the intelligence: For the child it is no longer enough to know, but he needs to know the reason why.
2. Imagination: As the elementary child is in The Age of Imagination, this needs to be harvested as much as possible, in moving from the concrete to the abstraction of work.
3. Absorption and acquisition of culture: The elementary child becomes more aware of other cultures as they nurture a respect of its own culture and the culture of others.
4. Morality: This is the sense of Justice, and the child is interested in what is right and what is wrong. That is also why a seven year old will so often use the words: "That's not fair!" as there are no grey areas in their mind.



Age	Sensitivity
Birth to 6 years	The absorbent mind: the mind soaks up information like a sponge. Sensory learning and experiences: the child uses all five senses- touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing - to understand and absorb information about his or her environment.
1 ½ to 3 years	Language explosion: a child builds his or her future foundation for language.
1 ½ to 4 years	Development and coordination of fine and large muscle skills advanced developing grasp and release skill spawns an interest in any small object.
2 to 4 years	Very mobile with greater coordination and refinement of movement, increased interest in language and communication (they enjoy telling stories), aware of spatial relationships, matching, sequence and order of objects.
2 ½ to 6 years	Works well incorporating all five senses for learning and adapting to environment.
3 to 6 years	Interest in and admiration of the adult world: they want to copy and mimic adults, such as parents and teachers.
4 to 5 years	Using one's hands and fingers in cutting, writing and art. Their tactile senses are very developed and acute.
4 ½ to 6 years	Reading and math readiness, and, eventually, reading and math skills.

5. Independence and exploration: Children become more interested in the wider world. They are eager to explore, to widen their contacts with the world outside the classroom, to perfect the capacities and talents in themselves.
6. Herding: Children like to do things together with their friends and this is the age of "gangs" where they form social groups.

- (1) Table: [www.montessorimom.com](http://www.montessorimom.com)
- (2) Dr Maria Montessori, The Absorbent Mind, U.S.A., Owl Books p 26.

Photo credits: Anneke Tolsma & Sharon Caldwell / Nahoon Montessori School.

It does not matter what they are called, the sensitive periods are critical to the child's self development. They unconsciously know that the time to learn a specific skill is now.

"The child's intensity reflects his need for that particular acquisition in order to live. However, once the period passes, he'll have to learn the skill with much more difficulty at a subsequent time."(2)

Adults often do not realize that a child has sensitive periods, perhaps because they do not remember them in themselves. A nine year old can be expected to be messy and less focussed on routine than a six year old. It is quite normal as his developmental urges are demanding a focus on other skills.

Charl du Toit  
SAMA President

**SAMA OFFICE:**

**Cell no:** 072 609 6979 **Office:** (041) 367 4936  
**Fax:** 086 561 8774  
**e-mail:** [admin@samontessori.org.za](mailto:admin@samontessori.org.za)  
**Website:** [www.samontessori.org.za](http://www.samontessori.org.za)

