

Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl

Ask Children for a Hand

PREPARING FOR WINTER CELEBRATIONS can awaken us to a particular aspect of children's development—the use of their hands. With so much modern focus on using fingers to manipulate screens, it's helpful to think about children's abilities to learn to use their hands to be dexterous, careful, skillful, and, most importantly, helpful to others.

In the Montessori method, children are purposely given fragile materials to handle, like glass dishes instead of plastic unbreakable ones, specifically so they can learn to be careful. Children learn to treat each piece of Montessori equipment with tremendous respect. At this time of year, families often take out precious ornaments or candle holders that require precision in handling.

Teaching children how to care for material things is one of the ways they learn to move through the world with consideration.

Holiday time also provides motivation for making gifts, a great alternative to buying them. Creating presents can often involve learning to use tools. It's interesting that in the Forest School Movement in England and America, children are taught to chop and to saw, activities that can be dangerous if unsupervised.

In our fast pace of life, it's often easier to keep children away from tools than to teach them to use them. Cutting, sewing, carving, drawing, and building are all activities that build the hands and enhance overall development.

In our preschool, we encourage children to learn many of the rudiments of cooking—pouring, measuring, mixing, patting, kneading, spooning—as we prepare food in the classrooms. Helping children learn how to cook, even it's just holiday cookies, is a way of preparing them for the future and bolstering their feelings of independence. It's also a way that they can consistently serve others throughout their lives.

So during this active season, remember to ask children to give you a hand.

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