

# Introduction to Fundamental Human Needs

## (Transcript)

In these times of mounting intolerance and social tension, many parents ask themselves: “How can I raise my child to not only tolerate, but to appreciate and celebrate the diversity of the human race?”

We’re not the first generation to ask this question in times of turmoil. Dr. Montessori and her son Mario lived through the horrors of World War I and II. They realized that future generations would embrace true peace only through a new vision for education - what they called ‘cosmic education.’

In the words of AMI trainer Camillo Grazzini, “cosmic education enables the children to discover many kinds of interrelationships that exist in the world and that explain how our world functions.” When they understand these interconnections, the importance of collaboration becomes clear and they begin to appreciate how much they’ve received from prior generations. And later, as young adults, these seeds that we’ve planted will sprout and grow, and our children will make their own positive contributions to society.

The Montessoris developed an approach to help children explore the interconnectedness of the human experience, and they called it Fundamental Human Needs. As with all subjects seen from a Montessori perspective, Fundamental Human Needs is structured “like rays springing from a single brilliant center of interest which clarifies, facilitates, and furthers all knowledge.” (Maria Montessori, from an unpublished manuscript)

What this means is that we give children an overarching vision of the whole - a brief journey through the needs that all humans share, including the children themselves. But then we follow rays of interest and encourage each child to explore what they’re curious about. And over the course of their studies, we help tie their new knowledge back to the human experience as a whole through activities with the Montessori materials.

The work of Fundamental Human Needs begins when children enter the Second Plane, and evolves throughout the elementary years. It’s the ideal medium for helping children learn how to plan, create, and present multi-disciplinary projects, because the interconnected nature of human life encourages them to do “a little reading, writing, mathematics, history, geography, chemistry, physics, natural history, language, handwork, and artistic work.” (Mario Montessori) So, keep this in mind when guiding your children.

The work of Fundamental Human Needs offers a combination of structure and flexibility. Structure is provided by the materials and presentations. These help to orient children in space and time, and support their growing imagination. We want them to understand how each human need has evolved, before taking a deep dive into the needs of a particular time period. But we don’t want

them to be tied to the materials or reduce human achievement to sets of cards or pre-made timelines. That's why we offer only a few key activities, and lots of external resources and suggestions, with the goal of helping them launch a self-driven exploration that will employ all their creative energies.

Please keep in mind your child's developmental stage when encouraging explorations. Young elementary children are still grounded in the present, and need small, guided, hands-on projects that they can complete in one or two sittings. Time is still fluid for them, so our work will revolve around slowly and gently helping them envision the times of long ago.

Sometime around the age of eight, children develop much greater stamina for multi-stage work, as well as a clearer understanding of past, present, and future. They begin to truly understand visual timelines, they enjoy experiencing life in our ancestor's shoes, and rejoice at finding connections between subjects.

The experiences of the upper elementary children can revolve around more mature topics, including the dubious moral choices of our ancestors. They can learn how to develop their own detailed timelines, and should explore connections with national and local history. As these children near adolescence, they will also become more conscious of their personal responsibility as a member of the human race.

In my opinion, what sets Montessori apart from traditional education methods in the elementary years is not how it approaches math or language. It's the often undervalued and misunderstood area of Fundamental Human Needs. Throughout this month, we'll be diving in and learning all the different ways that you can help your child become a more compassionate, accepting, and empowered human being. I'll be giving you a little bit of theory and a lot of practical guidance so you can learn how to present a vision of the whole, support their interests, and incorporate academic skills throughout their explorations.

Let's dive into Fundamental Human Needs!