

Teaching 'BRITISH VALUES' & implementing the PREVENT duty

Sept 15

You may have heard recently that preschools have to actively promote 'British Values'. Hopefully the following information will help you understand what this means.

Teaching 'British Values' is all about promoting a tolerant, democratic society where freedom of speech lives comfortably alongside respect for all. This is woven into the new 'Prevent Duty' which, for early years settings, is all about safeguarding children who may be at risk of being drawn into extremism. For those of you wondering how this involves such young children, it's simply about teaching them to respect each other, to help them develop a positive sense of themselves, to make them feel confident about speaking up and to make sure that their opinions are heard and valued. It is also about helping young children to understand that their way of life may be different from others but still just as valuable. It is about helping children feel proud of their roots whilst still being an active part of the greater society here in the UK. The hope is that teaching children these values will help them grow into well rounded adults.

We here at Cotswold Montessori are lucky that these exact values have been an integral part of the Montessori philosophy, culture and classroom ethos since the founder of our method, Maria Montessori, devised her 'Peace' curriculum after World War II. Mapping our own, long-standing values against this new requirement to teach 'British Values', we have devised the following brief explanations of how exactly we do this:

1. Democracy

In common with many other Montessori schools, we do not have a daily timeplan that is set in stone which means that there is room for children to jointly decide how they would like their day to run. Group decisions such as whether to have lunch early or whether it's a good idea for everyone to go outside are often either jointly negotiated or determined by majority rule.

2. Rule of Law

We have a simple and relevant set of classroom rules based all around respect - for themselves, for each other as well as for property & belongings. Rules are gently but consistently enforced, always at a level appropriate to the individual child. Through various means children can easily understand, and readily buy into these rules, as well as feel that they can help shape them.

3. Individual liberty

Children are trusted to choose which activities they want to engage in and when, including e.g. when to have snack or whether they want to join group activities or not. Similarly they are free to choose whether to work by themselves, with a friend or as a member of a group. Rather than working and playing, they also have the choice to just watch or be still. With all this freedom, however, comes the responsibility that individual choices must not negatively affect the experiences and outcomes of others and children are actively helped to understand and master this if necessary.

4. Mutual respect & tolerance

Mutual respect and tolerance are at the heart of everything we do here at Cotswold Montessori. It is part of our ethos to trust children as equally important, although of course, somewhat less experienced and knowledgeable members of our community. Children's views are taken into account and respected at all times without becoming permissive. Children are also taught how to manage their own feelings, behave appropriately in a group as well as how to distinguish right from wrong. Any negative behaviours or opinions are talked about in appropriate language and if necessary challenged. Long before it became popular in mainstream settings, Montessori schools around the world have also actively celebrated different faiths, cultures and peoples so that children would start to see themselves as part of the global community, together responsible for their world.

All of these values are taught by way of role modelling, peer feedback and mutual, agreement forming discussions. This means children can easily understand and readily buy into our rules and expectations as well as feel that they themselves can help form them. Using tools such as sand-timers or designated work spaces, children are also taught how to regulate sharing and turn taking.