

# Understanding Montessori

## The Kids Talk Way



### We Have Two Seconds To Redirect Behavior

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"Look, mommy! I'm daddy!"

Three-year-old Scotty opened a blue marker and scribbled on the wall as his mom, Margie, cut vegetables for dinner. Scotty had watched his dad paint the kitchen over the weekend.

Now Scotty was trying to help, or so Margie surmised in the split second of disbelief and dismay as she took in the situation. Scotty had never marked on anything but his paper. Margie confidently took control of the situation.

"Scotty! Stop!" she said firmly, yet kindly, as she walked towards Scotty. Scotty turned toward her and made eye contact.

"Put the marker down," she continued as she knelt down to Scotty's level.

"We only use markers on paper. Remember? Please, sit down and color on your paper."

Sue got cleaning supplies and had the marks off the wall in a few minutes, while Scotty resumed his coloring.

When Frank, Scotty's dad, arrived through the kitchen door, Scotty volunteered, "Daddy, I painted the walls with my marker. But mommy told me 'only paper'."

Frank's eyes widened as he looked at Margie.

"It's okay," Margie smiled. "I used the two second rule."

As we guide young children to learn acceptable behavior, i.e. markers only on paper, not on the walls (even if you think they are the same color), it's helpful to know how a child's memory works. Humans have three basic kinds of memory: 1) active working memory, 2) short term memory) and 3) long term memory.

Active working memory in a young child will hold two-seconds worth of information. We have two seconds to get our message across! To be successful, we must be quick and direct. We also need to communicate in a way that aids short and long-term memory. Let's look at Scotty's predicament again.

When Margie saw Scotty drawing on the wall she said his name and then "stop." *Two seconds* of information. Margie quit what she was doing and started toward Scotty. When Margie had compliance to her request, she proceeded to the next step. If Scotty hadn't stopped on his own, Margie could have gently stopped him by holding his wrists.

*Put the marker down.* Another two seconds.

*We only use markers on paper.* Two seconds.

*Remember?* Two seconds as a call for long-term memory retrieval. Using the word "remember" also indicates that the request is important to remember.

*Please, sit down and color on your paper.* These two requests--sit down and color--help lengthen short-term memory and active working memory, while clarifying desired behavior for long-term memory. Also, beginning with the word please can help a child anticipate an instruction.

When you need to redirect your child's behavior quickly, remember the two-second rule. Give short two-second commands, beginning with your child's name and "stop." State desired behavior. Use the key word, "Remember?" Request appropriate behavior with a "please" to aid long-term memory and lengthen active working memory. Go to the next step after you have compliance, which may require calm repetition of the request or a simple physical intervention such as holding wrists.

If your child has difficulty following the command 'stop', play this simple game. Say something like, "Let's hop." Hop for a few seconds, then say "Stop." Freeze in place for a few seconds. Do a variety of actions, such as walk, jump, twirl, twist, turn, squirm, sommersault, wink, wiggle, kick, smile, laugh, etc. After each say, "stop" and freeze. Lengthen the activity by doing a variety of tasks and lengthen the time of each. Laugh and have a good time.

We can play to learn! That's one of the beautiful things about three to six-year-olds. Remember, research shows we learn better and faster when we're laughing and happy! To redirect behavior, use the two-second rule and stay happy.

## **Steps for the Two-Second Rule**

1. Say name and "Stop!"

2. Child stops or adult intervenes.
3. State desired behavior
4. Remember?
5. Kindly request appropriate behavior.

**Next Week:** Begin With the End in Mind