

# Montessori Mutuality

## *Progressive People Policies for Compassionate Montessori Schools*

A Free Resource from Montessori Makers Group | [montessorimakersgroup.org](https://montessorimakersgroup.org)

Montessori education is built on a profound respect for the human being. Not just the child. Every human being who passes through the doors of the school.

That belief should not stop at the classroom threshold. It should extend into every policy, every benefit, every decision about how the adults who do this work are treated.

**Montessori Mutuality is a framework for schools that mean it. These are not aspirational statements. They are concrete, adoptable policies that signal to your staff: we see you as a whole person, and we are building a school that sustains you.**

Adopt them fully. Adapt them to your context. Share them freely. The Montessori field needs this conversation and it needs schools willing to lead it.

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## The Policies

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### 1. The Resident Guide

The most powerful wellness policy a Montessori school can adopt is structural: hire a Resident Guide whose sole purpose is to hold the school while permanent guides step away fully.

Unlike a traditional floater who covers unexpected absences reactively, the Resident Guide exists to enable planned, protected, guilt-free rest. This person spends their first weeks embedded in every classroom, learning every child by name. After onboarding, they rotate on a predictable schedule so guides can take real time away knowing their children are held by someone those children already trust.

This is not a coverage solution. It is a retention infrastructure investment. See the companion resource *The Resident Guide Model*, available free at [montessorimakersgroup.org](https://montessorimakersgroup.org), for full implementation guidance.

- Resident Guide is a permanent, full-time faculty role, not a substitute position
- Each guide receives 5 to 10 guaranteed planned wellness days per year in addition to standard leave

- Resident Guide attends all staff meetings and community events as a full faculty member
- Role requires broad level experience across at least two Montessori program levels

## 2. Extended Bereavement Leave

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Grief does not follow a five-day schedule. A policy that gives someone three days to bury a parent and return to full presence with 28 children is not a compassionate policy. It is a liability management policy dressed up as one.

- Up to 20 days paid leave, which can be taken non-consecutively over six months
- Covers loss of any significant relationship including family, friends, partners, and chosen family
- No proof of relationship required beyond a simple self-reported acknowledgment
- Bereavement coaching or Employee Assistance Program referral offered proactively, not reactively

## 3. Mindful Mental Health Days

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A guide who is holding their own mental health crisis while trying to hold a prepared environment for 25 children is not serving anyone well. Mental health days are not a luxury. They are a professional necessity in emotionally demanding work.

- Three days per year designated specifically for mental and emotional wellbeing
- Separate from PTO so using them does not deplete time for vacations or illness
- Can be taken in half-day increments
- No explanation or documentation required, a same-day notification by a reasonable deadline is sufficient
- Leadership models use of these days to remove stigma

## 4. Pregnancy and Pregnancy Loss Policy

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Pregnancy loss is among the most common and least acknowledged experiences in the lives of people who can become pregnant. One in four pregnancies ends in miscarriage. Montessori schools employ a high proportion of people in their childbearing years. The absence of a named policy is itself a statement about whose experiences the school recognizes.

- Up to 10 days paid leave following miscarriage, stillbirth, or failed assisted reproduction at any stage of pregnancy
- Leave extends to partners and co-parents
- No medical documentation required for losses in the first trimester
- Leave is separate from and does not reduce standard PTO, sick leave, or parental leave entitlements
- Staff notified of this policy at onboarding, not only when needed

## 5. Mentorship Sabbatical

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Longevity in Montessori education is a gift to children, families, and the field. Schools should build structures that reward and sustain long tenure rather than treating decade-long guides as an afterthought while spending thousands to replace those who burn out and leave.

- After each three-year cycle of continuous employment, staff earn eligibility for a paid sabbatical
- Sabbatical duration of four weeks, taken with a minimum of six months advance notice
- Can be used for rest, professional development, community service, travel, or any purpose the employee chooses
- Position is held and salary maintained during the sabbatical period
- School communicates sabbatical eligibility proactively rather than waiting for employees to ask

## 6. Mutual Care Leave

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Caregiving responsibilities do not follow traditional family structures. Montessori schools serve diverse communities and should employ HR policies that reflect the actual lives of their staff.

- 20 days paid leave per year for caregiving responsibilities
- Covers elder care, child care emergencies, foster and adoptive placements, gender-affirming care, IVF and assisted reproduction treatment, and care for chosen family members
- Can be taken in increments of one day or more
- Documentation required only for leaves exceeding five consecutive days

## 7. Right to Disconnect

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Montessori guides are asked to be fully present with children during work hours. That full presence is only possible if they are genuinely off when they are off. A culture of after-hours messages, weekend emails, and vacation interruptions is incompatible with the preparation the work requires.

- No expectation of response to work communications outside of contracted hours
- Leadership and administration do not send non-urgent communications during evenings, weekends, or staff vacation periods
- Exceptions limited to genuine emergencies defined in writing
- New staff explicitly informed of this right at onboarding
- Managers held accountable for honoring this boundary for their direct reports

## 8. Market-Leading Parental Leave

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The field of early childhood education, which is disproportionately staffed by women and people who can become pregnant, has historically offered some of the worst parental leave in any professional sector. That is a contradiction that Montessori schools, of all places, should not perpetuate.

- 16 weeks fully paid parental leave for all parents regardless of gender, birth method, or family structure
- Applies equally to birth parents, adoptive parents, foster parents, and same-sex parents
- Can be taken intermittently across the first year of a child's life
- Benefits continue uninterrupted during leave
- Return-to-work transition support including a phased return option for the first two weeks back

## 9. Neurodiversity and Disability Accommodation Commitment

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Legal compliance with disability accommodation law is a floor, not a ceiling. A genuinely compassionate school goes beyond the minimum to proactively create conditions where every staff member can do their best work. This is especially relevant as more educators are identifying as neurodivergent and seeking workplaces that see this as a strength rather than a complication.

- School commits to a proactive, collaborative process for all accommodation requests rather than a reactive or documentation-heavy approach

- Accommodations explored for sensory environment, communication preferences, schedule flexibility, and workspace needs
- HR or designated administrator trained in neurodiversity-affirming practices
- Staff not required to disclose a diagnosis to receive reasonable accommodations
- Annual review of physical and cultural environment for accessibility and inclusion

## 10. Learning and Growth Fund

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Professional growth in Montessori is continuous and largely self-directed. Schools that invest in their staff's ongoing development signal that they see the person as a long-term community member rather than a current-year budget line.

- Annual stipend of \$1,000 per staff member for professional learning
- Can be used for conferences, workshops, books, courses, or credentialing programs
- No prior approval required for expenditures under \$500
- Unused funds do not roll over but can be pooled within a team for shared development experiences
- School maintains a library of Montessori books, journals, and resources accessible to all staff

## 11. Transparent Compensation Bands

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The equity salary review corrects disparities after they form. Transparent compensation bands prevent them from forming in the first place. When everyone knows the range for every role, bias has fewer places to hide.

- Defined salary ranges published internally for every role in the organization
- New hire offers fall within published bands, with reasoning documented when placing within the range
- Annual equity audit reviews compensation across gender, race, tenure, and role
- Adjustments made proactively and transparently, not only when employees negotiate or threaten to leave
- Staff invited to ask questions about how their compensation was determined

## 12. Voluntary Service Days

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Montessori philosophy has always connected the school to the broader community. Service days extend that connection outward, give staff the gift of meaning beyond the classroom, and strengthen the school's relationship to the world it serves.

- Four paid days per year for individual or team volunteer service
- Staff choose their own service activities aligned with personal values
- School may organize optional group service opportunities but individual choice is primary
- Service days are in addition to and do not reduce PTO

### **13. Schedule Flexibility Commitment**

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Montessori values the child's ability to work at their own pace within limits. That same respect for individual rhythms and needs belongs in how a school structures adult work as well. Rigidity that does not serve children or the program is not a Montessori value.

- School explores flexible start and end time arrangements where classroom coverage allows
- Four-day week or compressed schedule pilots considered for non-classroom staff
- Summer schedule autonomy offered to staff who do not have contractual summer obligations
- Schedule changes are documented, equitable, and available to all staff who request them, not only those who negotiate loudly
- Annual survey of staff on schedule satisfaction with results reported to leadership

### **14. Emergency Relief Fund**

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Financial crises do not care about work schedules. A staff member navigating a medical emergency, a natural disaster, or an urgent home crisis cannot be fully present in their classroom. The Emergency Relief Fund acknowledges this reality and provides concrete help rather than sympathy.

- Up to \$5,000 per year in no-interest, forgivable assistance per eligible staff member
- Covers medical crises not covered by insurance, natural disasters, urgent home repairs, and family emergencies
- Applications reviewed by a peer committee to ensure fairness and reduce power dynamics
- Fund replenished annually in the school budget as a non-negotiable line item
- Staff informed of the fund at onboarding and during annual benefits reviews

## 15. Unified PTO

Distinguishing between sick days, personal days, and vacation days creates bureaucratic friction and, often, a culture where staff feel guilty for using sick time as sick time because they were saving it for vacation. Unified PTO trusts adults to manage their own time.

- Single pool of paid time off to be used for any purpose without categorization
- Eliminates distinctions between sick, personal, and vacation leave
- Usage tracked by staff and reported to direct supervisor, not justified to HR
- Accrual rate and carryover policy published transparently at time of offer

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## Implementing Montessori Mutuality

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### Start with what you can do now

Not every school can adopt all fifteen policies immediately. Begin with the ones that cost nothing but commitment: the Right to Disconnect, the neurodiversity accommodation approach, transparent communication about existing benefits, and a named culture of using mental health days without stigma. These require leadership behavior change, not budget approval.

### Build toward what requires resources

Policies like the Resident Guide, extended parental leave, and the emergency relief fund require budget planning. Present them to your board as retention investments rather than expenses. The math is straightforward: one prevented departure pays for years of these benefits.

### Involve your staff in the rollout

Review these policies with your team annually. Ask which ones they most value, which they wish existed, and which feel hollow. The annual conversation is itself a cultural signal. It says we built this with you and we are still building it with you.

### Brand it

Give the initiative a name your community recognizes. Montessori Mutuality is one option. Name it something that feels true to your school. When staff can say we have a

Mutuality framework, it creates a shared reference point and a standard they can hold leadership to.

## **Make it real, not decorative**

The most dangerous version of a progressive HR policy is one that exists on paper and is never used. If your bereavement leave policy allows 20 days but the culture makes someone feel guilty for taking five, the policy has failed. Leadership modeling matters more than policy wording. Use the days. Encourage their use. Treat them as normal.

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## **About Montessori Makers Group**

Montessori Makers Group is a multi-venture ecosystem for Montessori education built by Hannah Richardson, an educator and consultant with 25 years of experience across independent, public, charter, and justice-centered schools. MMG's work spans advisory consulting, leadership formation, school management tools, the MatchHub hiring platform, placement services, and free resources for the Montessori community.

*The companion resource to this document is [The Resident Guide Model](#), which provides full implementation guidance for Policy 1. Both are free to download, share, and adapt with attribution.*

[montessorimakersgroup.org](https://montessorimakersgroup.org)