

VOICES OF AMI TRAINING

A Creed To Consent

Sara Brady, AMI 0–3 Trainer

Imagine a world where a baby is born and is empowered to gain an understanding of their right to consent from the start. If an adult always takes care of the baby's hygiene and clothing needs in a respectful way, always seeking consent, the baby will understand that their body is theirs to control. Of course, a child cannot verbally give consent when very young, and as adults we often focus on that verbalisation. The issue is that sometimes we don't seek consent because we don't think the child can verbally give it. If you've travelled to foreign lands, to lands where you don't speak the language, you know that one is able to give or refuse consent through body language, through facial expressions, and through hand gestures. Well, the baby is able to do those things as well before they're able to verbally give or refuse consent. But as adults, we have to tune in to that baby and we have to become skilled at recognising their cues, understanding what they're communicating. When we want to change their nappy, we can't ask them "Would you like me to change your nappy? I'm going to wait until you're able to say yes." So how do we help a baby, and support them with their physical care needs before they're able to verbally say, "Yes, help me change my nappy"?

Imagine a world where the child is offered opportunities to be an active participant. This starts at the change table where we explain what we're going to do and we wait until they're aware of what is happening to their body. We look for cues and we tune into their feelings, thus promoting trust in the relationship. Collaboration is essential to trust. Collaboration can be likened to a dance that we have with the child. When they learn a new skill and they gain a capability, they take a step forward. And we take a step back in response and allow them to do what they're capable of doing. However, their brain is incredibly immature, and their steps forward are inconsistent. Our society leads us to believe that the best way to deal with this inconsistency is through power struggles. Through crossing our arms and saying to the child quite sternly, "You were able to pull your underwear up yesterday. You can do it again today!" For some reason, society has this mistrust, this belief that the child is trying to trick us. This simply isn't true! Inconsistent behaviour and inconsistent capability are a result of immature connections in the brain that are there one day and busy with something completely different the next day. We can offer support by dancing and when the child

communicates, "I'm just not able to do it today", we take a step forward rather than get into a power struggle. Our step forward is not to control or to coerce or to render the child passive, but to offer the minimal amount of help so that the child can still be an active participant. And as we step forward, we let the child know what we're going to do. We even empower them through choices. We say "I'm going to help you pull your underwear up. Which part of your underwear shall I hold? And which part are you going to hold? Who's going to pull up first?"

Imagine a world where the child learns to value their body for what it allows them to do and not for how it looks. This child is able to create boundaries because they understand that they have rights. In the first three years of life the child is obedient to the home, this irresistible energy pushing them to interact with the environment. They reach, they bat, they grasp, they act on an object. They initiate interactions with the environment. An active participant doesn't need to wait to be invited to explore their world. Through this exploration, the child learns that they have an effect on the environment. Dr. Montanaro described this as the crisis of objectivation. She also spoke about body scheme; an internal image that we form concerning our physical self. Body scheme forms through experience, through movements, through getting into positions by themselves, with support from the environment rather than interference from the adult. The child also develops body awareness. We often talk about the sense of interoception; the ability to be aware of the sensations in our body and what our body is communicating about bodily functions such as elimination, hunger, thirst and tiredness. If the child understands their body both externally and internally, they can make decisions that serve their development rather than conform to the adult's control. This knowledge enables the child to form a sense of agency, a sense that they are an individual gradually gaining control as they gradually gain inhibitory control. They start to understand the power of choice and the consequences that come with those choices, which further informs their ability to make choices. Before long, this child is demonstrating a will, an ability to make decisions, an inner compass encouraging responsible behaviour and ultimately the potential to be accountable for ourselves.

Imagine a world with consent from the start.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sara Brady is qualified as an AMI 0–3 Assistants to Infancy trainer and is also an AMI examiner at this level. She conducts teacher training internationally and is currently the Co-Director of Training in London, and Director of Training in Sydney and Tokyo.

Sara holds AMI diplomas at both 0–3 Assistants to Infancy and 3–6 Children’s House levels. She has a Masters in Education from Loyola College in Maryland. She has worked in a variety of Montessori settings: long-day care, pre-school, and Montessori in the home. She has enjoyed working in Nido and Infant Communities as well as parent-infant classes.

Sara lives in Sydney, Australia with her husband and has three children.

From the Voices of AMI Training Series
Association Montessori Internationale © 2025
Please credit Association Montessori Internationale
and the named author(s) if using text.

