

Parenting Together

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Music and Child Development

Music has a power that goes beyond the words. Enjoying music together builds connections between parents and children. The sounds and rhythm surround the child in a world of sensations and feelings. Music also offers a happy and rewarding learning experience and nurtures a child's imagination and creativity. Read on to learn just how music supports all areas of young children's development.

Music and Early Development

Like all the best learning experiences in early childhood, music activities simultaneously promote development in multiple domains. Singing while rocking your baby stimulates early language development, promotes attachment, and also supports an infant's growing spatial awareness as the child experiences her body moving.

Social-emotional skills

Because music is so often shared with others through singing, dancing, and playing instruments, it can be a very social experience. Music activities with infants and toddlers offer opportunities to:

Understand emotions

Singing about feelings helps babies and toddlers learn the words to describe their emotional experiences ("If you're happy and you know it..."). There is no denying that music simply evokes feelings—even when there are no words.



Learn and practice self-regulation

Lullabies soothe even very young children. When adults help babies calm down, they are supporting the development of self-regulation. The experience of being soothed can also help babies learn to soothe themselves.

Develop self-esteem and self-confidence

Babies and young toddlers develop a sense that they are smart and competent when they can make an impact on their world. Babies get great joy out of making their rattle "chicka chicka" and toddlers pay such careful attention while tapping on their xylophone to make it chime, smiling with pride when they hear the "music."

Share and take turns

Music naturally encourages turn taking. Repeating the sounds a baby makes with his voice or rattle; toddlers taking turns playing musical solos while others listen. Incorporating call-and-response songs like "Who Ate the Cookies from the Cookie Jar?" into daily activities with toddlers also encourages turn taking.

Physical (motor) skills

Be it the muscles in the lips used to form words in a melody, the small muscles of the hands used to hold a drumstick or for finger play, or the large muscles in the legs and arms as children dance all around, music is a great physical activity for young children. It supports:

Gross motor development

When people think about music, dancing is one of the first activities that come to mind. Dancing, being held and rocked to music, and making musical sounds by snapping colorful scarves in the air or jumping on bubble wrap are all melodic ways that young children can build the muscles in their arms, legs, and trunk.



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Fine motor development

Finger plays like “Where Is Thumbkin?” and interactive songs like “The Wheels on the Bus” are perfect examples of ways music can support the development of small muscles in children’s hands and fingers—the same muscles they will use for writing and drawing when they are older.

Balance

In moving one’s body to music, children can stand while swaying or shifting their weight from one foot to the other—which means they can balance. Imagine that “Let’s Do the Twist” is playing. Young toddlers try to copy their parents and/or caregivers movements, twisting & shaking to the beat, while attempting to stay balanced and not fall over! (Of course, falling over is often the fun part.)

Body awareness

Moving different parts of a baby’s body and encouraging toddlers to move their own bodies as you sing a song—for example, “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes”—helps them learn that these body parts belong to them as they learn to improve motor control.

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Cognitive skills

Music naturally provides opportunities to practice patterns, math, and symbolic thinking skills, all in the context of fun & sound, which makes it an attractive and engaging activity for young children.

Counting

Many songs introduce numbers and counting: “One, Two, Buckle My Shoe,” “Five Little Monkeys,” “This Old Man,” and “The Animals Came in Two by Two” are just a few examples. The rhythm and repetition of songs may make it easier for very young children to remember the name and sequence of number patterns.

Patterns and sequencing

Almost every piece of music has a pattern or sequence built into its melody or lyrics. Learning to anticipate patterns and place objects or events in sequence builds critical early math and early reading skills. Choose songs that are repetitive in rhythm or lyrics to help children learn to anticipate patterns (“Pop Goes the Weasel,” “Old McDonald Had a Farm”).

Language and literacy skills

If you ask which area of development music impacts the most, the majority of people will mention language skills. In fact, music activates literacy and language learning in many ways.

Spoken language

Music gives children an easy-to-enter window into practicing language and deciphering meaning. Modifying the words in well-known songs (“Happy lunchtime to you”) or asking older toddlers to fill in the blanks while singing encourages children to practice logical thinking and reasoning skills.

The Book Nook

A Fox Found a Box
By Ged Adamson

Duerme, niño, duerme
By Laura Herrera

Sing with Me!
By Naoko Stoop

References

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- Toddlers and Challenging Behavior: Why They Do It and How to Respond
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- Managing Problem Behavior at Home
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