

Music (Part 1)

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Music can be a source of joy and comfort throughout life—from infancy to adulthood. Music is also an important part of the daily experiences of very young children. Whether it is a gentle lullaby to a sleepy baby or a loud parade of toddlers shaking tambourines, young children enjoy listening to singing, joining in with their own voices, and playing instruments. Even if you have never considered a professional singing career, your voice is the sound infants and toddlers want to hear!

Music is a wonderful way to help children learn, because while they are singing, clapping, and dancing there are many opportunities for the best kind of learning – learning that happens through playful, joyous interactions. This edition of the *News You Can Use* is a two part series. Part 1 offers

information on how music supports development across many domains. Part 2 provides additional tips about how to use music with infants and toddlers in everyday routines.

Music and Development



Music and Emotional Development

In the midst of a busy socialization, a mother holds her three-month-old and sings, ♪“Twinkle, twinkle little star, How I wonder what you are...” Despite all the excitement around them, these two are sharing a gaze and a moment of snuggling comfort. When the song is over, the baby looks at her mom and waves an arm towards her. The mother responds by starting the song again, as if to say, “I see that you like this singing and I will keep singing to you.”

Music can support emotional development. The gentle, quiet sounds of a lullaby can help caregivers and babies calmly connect while at the same time it lets a baby know his feelings and needs are being understood. Lullabies can soothe a baby to sleep or comfort a toddler who is overwhelmed. Softly singing can help a baby stay calm and focused in a busy environment. When adults use music to help babies stay calm, they are supporting their emotional **self-regulation**. Self-regulation is the ability to manage emotions, physical needs, and arousal. Babies need adults who can help them learn this skill. A baby cannot say, “I’m hungry and I don’t like waiting for my bottle!” or “This room is too loud and busy for me, please sing me a lullaby.” When an adult responds to a fussing baby and picks him up, holds him close, and sings a gentle song she sends a message that she is there for him and will help him feel ok again.

A few toddlers are sitting with their caregiver who is singing, ♪“If you're happy and you know it clap your hands.” As the caregiver sings each verse, the children join in with the clapping and stomping, and pretend crying.



Songs are also a great way for young children learn about different emotions.ⁱ Before infants and toddlers can tell you they are happy or frustrated they must learn to recognize these feelings in themselves. Adults can use their words, faces, pictures, books, and songs to show examples of what different feelings look and feel like. The song, “If you're happy and you know it...” can be changed to incorporate any emotion with a little creativity. Toddlers love the opportunity to “practice” the emotions they feel in a situation that is safe. Singing about being angry and making an angry face, then stomping feet can help toddlers understand that being angry is normal – and you can stomp your feet to show it. It can also help them recognize their friends' angry faces. Try also using a sign for the emotion you are singing about. When you add a hand gesture, even if you make it up, you are giving children another way to communicate their emotions.

Twenty-six-month old Anita is at her family childcare provider's house. She holds a doll and sings a made up song to her, ♪“You're sad baby, baby crying, mommy is coming.”

In Anita's vignette, she is singing gently to her doll that mommy is coming back. She made this song up herself, and singing it gives her comfort. She is using the song to remind herself that her mommy will be back. Anita feels comfortable enough with music and language that she can create something entirely new, a song that she made up. Let's imagine the process she has gone through to get there: First, she recognized her own emotion of feeling sad and missing her mom. Then, she uses her new pretend play skills and decides that her doll feels that way. Anita then shows how she is developing empathy, or the ability to imagine how another person feels, by singing the song to comfort her doll. By pretending that her doll has the same emotions, Anita is showing progress toward understanding emotions in herself and being able to understand them in others. Anita repeats language she has heard adults use to comfort her and creates a song she sings to the doll (which is really a song to comfort herself). That is quite an accomplishment for such a young child!

Music, Language, and Literacy

Babies need many, many opportunities to hear people talk and sing to them so they can figure out the words of their language long before they will be able to speak them.^{ii iii}

♪“Head, shoulders, knees, and toes...”

Singing together is so much fun children rarely realize all that they are learning! Songs are a great way to introduce new words and sounds to very young children. Think of all the body parts in the song, “Head, shoulders, knees and toes!” When combined with actions children are learning about parts of their body, and probably having a giggle watching their caregiver bounce up and down from head to toe!

♪“Vengan a ver mi granja vengan todos, Come and see my farm, please come you all,
Vengan a ver mi granja que es hermosa, Come and see my farm, it's beautiful
Y, el perro hace así: guau, guau, guau...” And the dog goes like this: woof, woof, woof...”



Music is a wonderful way to support language development. Infants and toddlers take pleasure in hearing and learning new words. There are some fun ways to share music with babies and toddlers that goes beyond just singing. The more creative you get, the more children will get out of the experience. One way to expand on your songs is to use a picture book of a song.^{iv} You can also use flannel backed pictures and a flannel board, stuffed animals, or puppets to “act out” the words and actions in the song. Not only will babies and toddlers enjoy how silly you look while you play, but they will also have a picture for their mind of what are singing about. For example, using puppets while you sing the farm song above (in Spanish or English) shows babies what you are singing about and will cue toddlers to the animal sound you expect. When you sing, children hear the words. Using gestures

invites children to move their bodies. Using puppets or flannel boards lets children see what you are singing about, even if the word is not in their native language.

♪“I’m a little teapot...”

Songs and chants that have rhyming words help children grasp the difference that a sound can make in a word. In the song “I’m a little teapot,” the words *stout*, *spout*, *shout*, and *out* all rhyme. That means that the words sound the same at the end but have a different beginning sound. Knowing how to rhyme will support later reading success.^v That is wonderful news because babies and toddlers really enjoy the rhythm and language play in silly chants like “I’m a little teapot.”

*♪ Los pollitos dicen pío, pío, pío
cuando tienen hambre, cuando tienen frío.
La gallina busca el maíz y el trigo
Les da la comida y les presta abrigo.
Bajo sus dos alas, acurrucaditos,
hasta el otro día
duérmense los pollitos.*

*♪ The little chicks say peep, peep, peep
when they are hungry, when they are too cold to
sleep.
The mother hen looks for corn and wheat
she gives them food to eat.
Safe under mama's wings, huddling up,
Sleep the little chicks until the next day.*

Music can be a wonderful way to engage children in the language and culture of their peers. Invite parents and family members to share the songs they heard as children and now sing to their baby. Imagine how comforting it is for a very young baby to hear the same song her family sings coming from her loving caregiver. That tells the baby, "What you share at home with your family is important to me too."

When you include music from another culture or language make sure you find out if the use and lyrics are appropriate for the children. While it may be tempting to turn on a radio station that plays music in a foreign language please make sure that you know exactly what words are being used when you share music with children. Here are some ways to make sure your music use is culturally respectful:

- Ask families to preview music you borrow from the library.
- Find children's songs with lyrics that are also translated into your language.
- Make sure the songs you choose are appropriate for the classroom. Some cultures have specific uses for music like songs only for healing or celebrations.
- Include instruments from all over the world.
- Ask a parent or neighborhood musician to come and play near the children.
- Share music and songs from your own culture and childhood.



When there are children and caregivers who do not speak the same language, a caregiver can learn and sing a song in the child's home language. Activities like this can provide a connection between their child care and home culture, and helps to create a culturally inclusive classroom environment.^{vi} Early childhood educators have an amazing opportunity to celebrate diversity through music experiences.



Music and Movement

Whether rocking to a lullaby or bouncing to the beat, movement is a natural response to music. Young infants often rock or wiggle when they hear a tune and toddlers love to be the star of the dance floor! Combining music and movement helps to develop muscle strength and coordination, as well as a child's spatial awareness. (**Spatial awareness** refers to a child's understanding of where her body is in space and in relation to other people and things). Choosing music for movement activities is a fun

way to share instrumental music from other cultures. You can bounce around to polka, sway gently to lullabies, and clap along with chants.

In the first three years of life, infants and toddlers spend a lot of time learning how to use their bodies. Music can support gross motor development through many different movements as children clap, bounce, wiggle, walk, stomp, march, jump, and bend. Gross motor skills also include rolling over, pulling up, crawling, bouncing, and walking.

Six-month-old Alana sits on her caregiver, Nita's lap. Nita is chanting, "Patty cake, patty cake..." while she holds Alana's arms and gently moves them to clap, pat, and roll along with the words. Alana smiles and reaches for Nita's hands when the song is over so they can do it again and again!

In the example above, baby Alana is snuggled on the lap of her caregiver, Nita, while they play patty cake. As Nita moves her hands, she is helping Alana to develop her **gross motor skills**, the ability to have control of the large movements of her body.

Thirteen-month-old Henry is standing up and holding a shelf for support. His mom and home visitor are nearby singing, ♪ "Cinco monitos, Sentados en un árbol decían, Pinchando al Sr Cocodrilo, 'No me puedes pillar,' Sr Cocodrilo vino, Sin hacer ruido, ¡CHAS!" (Five little monkeys swinging in a tree). As they sing, Henry smiles and bounces along. And when the crocodile comes, his mom reaches to tickle him while he wiggles and laughs out loud.

As Henry is bouncing to the music, he is practicing standing, balancing, and is building strength in the leg muscles he will need for walking.

Two-year-old Hannah and her friend Joseph are singing, ♪ "Where is Thumbkin, Where is Thumbkin, Here I am, Here I am..." As they name each new finger, they pull their hands from behind their backs and attempt to point only one finger at time.

Hannah and Joseph are working hard to improve their fine motor skills (the small muscles in the hands and fingers) as they sing the song "Where is Thumbkin?" Young children use fine motor skills all the time to pick up food, turn the pages of books, and play with toys. Songs that involve finger play give children the opportunity to practice moving their hands and fingers as they build their eye-hand coordination. Fine motor skills are especially important for learning how to hold a fork, write with a pencil, or tie a shoe.



Conclusion

Music contributes to the development of so many important skills. As you think about the many ways you support the infants and toddlers in your care, make sure you include daily experiences with music. Consider all the times in your daily schedule that you can engage children in music experiences that encourage listening, singing, fingerplay, dancing, and other ways of moving and making music. Have fun – and remember to watch for News You Can Use, Part 2, for more information about how to use music with infants and toddlers.

ⁱ Linda Kimura, "Music: The Great Organizer for Early Language and Literacy," in *Learning to Read the World: Language and Literacy in the First Three Years*, ed. Sharon E. Rosenkoetter and Joanne Knapp-Philo (Washington D.C.: Zero To Three Press, 2006) 236.

ⁱⁱ John M. Feierabend, Ph.D., "Music and movement for infants and toddlers: Naturally wonderful," *Early Childhood Connections*, Fall (1996), http://www.giamusic.com/music_education/feierabend/articles/infants.html.

ⁱⁱⁱ Elizabeth Carlton, "Learning through music: The support of brain research," *Child Care Information Exchange*, May/June (2000): 53.

^{iv} Mary Renck Jalongo and Deborah McDonald Ribblett, "Using song picture books to support emergent literacy," *Childhood Education* 74 (1997): 15.

^v Bonnie B. Armbruster, Ph.D., Fran Lehr, and Jean Osborne M. Ed., "Put reading first: The research building blocks for teaching children to read." 2nd ed. (2003): 3, <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/PRF-teachers-k-3.cfm>.

^{vi} Kimura, "Music and movement for infants and toddlers," 242.