

Parents & A

Sally Goddard Blythe, Wendy Fidler and the team at Mana Montessori in NZ answer your questions on how music helps a young child's development, the role of the key worker in caring for your child and choosing activities in the Montessori classroom.

Q My child seems to keep gravitating towards the same activities every day. How will she be encouraged to try new activities in her Montessori nursery?

It can be very beneficial for young children to choose the same activities every day. By repeating the activity, your child is mastering the skill or refining the understanding of the concepts involved. While the child is still learning and gaining from the activity, a Montessori teacher would not deter her from choosing and doing it as often as she wants. Your child's Montessori teachers will observe your child carefully and when they notice that she has become less focused on the activity they will take the opportunity to present a more challenging extension of that activity or another activity. For instance if she loves to pour, the teacher might introduce her to practical applications of pouring such as pouring a drink or filling a bowl to experiment with sinking and floating.

Montessori teachers are also alert to what it is that most appeals to your child about an activity. Is it the sound of the grains being poured from one jug to another? Perhaps your child would find the Sound Cylinders appealing?

Montessori teachers will closely observe your child to see what interests her; perhaps she is curious about activities other children are doing? The teacher may also talk with you to see what your child is interested in doing at home.

Montessori teachers want children

to develop their ability to be autonomous, independent and to make choices for themselves. Therefore they do not insist that the child do something they are not inclined to do right now. If your child does not seem keen on trying a new activity, the teacher will leave it for another time or day. Children like to return to activities that might seem too easy to adults. Your daughter may sometimes be in need of some downtime and want to spend a while doing something which is simple and soothing.

Montessori teachers will continue to present new activities to your child, to entice her to try new experiences and encounter new knowledge. Montessori teachers have faith that when the time is right your child will be ready and eager to engage with new learning.

The Team at Mana Montessori, Whitby, Wellington

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Q How will music help my child's development?

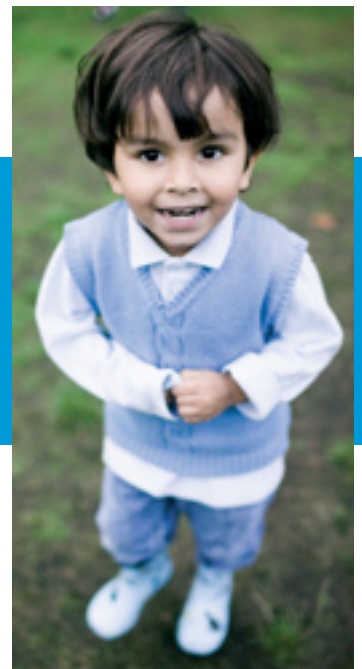
Music precedes speech. In fact an infant's earliest vocalisations have been shown to contain all the elements of music – melody, rhythm, timing and phrasing. Babies, irrespective of culture, imitate the timbre, tones and cadences of adult speech long before they learn to speak, and it is the musical aspects of speech, which convey meaning, intention and emotion. In this sense, music is a universal component of language or language without words.

Up to 90% of effective communication is based on the non-verbal aspects of language. Listening to music helps a child learn to discriminate between different sounds which is important for the development of speech and phonological awareness. Playing and moving to music help to train rhythm and coordination while singing helps to integrate the working of the hearing and motor systems. Both singing and instrumental training teach children to match movements to sounds, sounds to gestures, and sounds to visual symbols on a page. Music also helps to develop sequencing (necessary for learning times tables, days of the week, months of the year etc.) and auditory memory.

Nursery rhymes, songs, dance and movement to music can all be used in the first five years of life to develop other skills in preparation for literacy, numeracy, and for life.

Q My friend has a child in a Children's Centre and her son has got a Key Person who seems to do everything for her son. However my daughter goes to a Montessori School and although all the staff seem to know her and look after her there is not so much emphasis on Key Persons at her school. Should I be worried?

There is no need to worry. Some schools, children's centres, playgroups etc. operate in a fairly structured way and it is not uncommon to see children working in groups or individually with their key adult for most of the



day. In a Montessori setting children move freely between activities and all adults will be keeping an eye open for opportunities to extend children's learning based on children's individual needs and interests. All adults will contribute to the care, education and observations of the child, but it is the key person who is responsible for overseeing the child's welfare, development and learning.

A key person has special responsibilities for a number of children, giving them reassurance to feel safe and cared for and building relationships with their parents.

The welfare requirements of the EYFS (Section 3:4) explain the role more fully, saying that a key person:

- Helps a baby or child to become familiar with the setting and to feel safe and confident;
- Talks to parents to make sure the needs of the child are being met appropriately;
- Makes sure that records of development and progress are shared with parents and other professionals as necessary.

Sally Goddard Blythe is Director of The Institute for Neuro-Physiological Psychology (INPP), Chester and author of several books including *The Well Balanced Child* and *What Babies and Children Really Need*.

Wendy Fidler is an independent Montessori education consultant. She leads courses on learning differences and disabilities and special educational needs throughout the world.