



The power of music and song

Singing and making music are important from an early age – **Caroline Crabbe** gives some tips on how they can be encouraged within the family.

Regular exposure to music and song is to be encouraged and celebrated as it can become a great learning tool for our children. Encouraging your little one to enjoy music is a great way of strengthening the bond between parent and child, but it also provides some very real benefits to their on-going physical and mental ability which will aid them in their early development prior to going to school and beyond.

The transition from pre-school to infant school is an important time in the early years development process. Your once 'babbling' toddler has grown into a little person, with their own opinions, ideas and conversations – not to mention a relentless thirst for learning. Music is universal, it appeals to all cultures, all ages and all abilities. It's also an important part of the school curriculum and it isn't difficult to understand why. Listening to music and actively taking part in singing, dancing or playing a musical instrument are all important in stimulating a child's learning curve and developing a range of physical and emotional skills which will benefit them now and later in life.

For instance, you can help to boost your child's language skills by focusing on nursery rhymes. It's no great coincidence

that popular nursery rhymes are quite repetitive – think about 'Row, row, row your boat' or 'Twinkle, twinkle, little, star' – the repetition is key to this process of creating linguistic building blocks upon which little brains can start to make meaningful associations and melodic experimentations via simple rhythmic patterns. The use of repetition along with actions will help to develop co-ordination, balance and speech development.

Even simple songs like 'The Wheels on the Bus' help children to learn about the world around them – vital in the transition to a new school environment. Singing songs with numbers in them can also help young children to learn to count; some traditional songs even contain elements of subtraction (Five Little Ducks for example) so you might not realise that your child is being exposed to some of the simplest forms of mathematics through music and song. Exploring concepts such as colours, animals, transport and even telling the time through song, will all help with your child's motor skills and general co-ordination as they prepare for school.

Try to ensure that any exposure to music is also accompanied with movement where possible. You'll recall how

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many nursery rhymes come complete with a set of actions: ‘I’m a little teapot’ or ‘If you’re happy and you know it’ for example. Children can express themselves through movement long before they can verbalise. They also need to learn to hone their sense of balance and to control their limbs. Movement to music has also been shown to help a child express feelings and moods as they learn to interpret the music that they hear.

And finally, don’t forget about all of the social and emotional benefits associated with music; encouraging this kind of musical activity in advance of starting school can really help with self-expression and confidence in later life.

Some people believe that exposing a child to music will increase their intelligence and although this is not absolutely scientifically proven, what musical activities and singing can do is to help develop the processes that will give a child the tools it needs to investigate the world, such as language, self-confidence, creativity and social skills. All of these skills will be developed and fine-tuned during their time at school, so anything you can do to give them a head-start will do wonders.

So, if you would like to encourage more music-related time at home here are some tips to get you started:

- Sing with your child regularly, it doesn’t matter where or when you do it, just do it as often as you can.
- Don’t worry if you fluff the words or think you sing out of tune – the reality is, if you are enthusiastic about it then your child will be too.



- Make music actively – it’s not enough to just put on a CD; if you don’t interact with them, it will wash over their head.
- Don’t over-complicate things: young children respond best to easy uncomplicated songs and nursery rhymes.
 - Use simple actions – it is great fun and will help your child’s co-ordination no end.
- Make some home-made instruments to get truly musical – banging yoghurt pots together, or using a cardboard crisp tube with a handful or dried pasta makes a great shaker.

Caroline Crabbe is General Manager at Jo Jingles.

Jo Jingles provides music, singing and movement experience classes for babies and pre-school children from three months to five years of age. With nationwide sessions in more than 700 centres across the UK and Ireland and with over 90 franchisees, Jo Jingles offers well-established, structured classes that are fun, interactive and educational for little ones (www.jojingles.com).