

# Music and the Young Child

by Kathleen Walden DeVerna

Children love music. They love to hear it, and they love to make it. Making music is fun. It's also one of the easiest things a child can do.

Adults tend to be much more critical than children when it comes to making music. You don't have to be a professional singer or dancer to perform for a child—children don't care if the tune is correct, the words exact, or the pitch perfect. They only care if it is fun.

And, even though it is fun, children learn a great deal through music. It is an excellent way to help them increase their social, physical, and communication skills.

## How will music help my child's social skills?

Children feel important when they make noise that pleases themselves or others. Music is a socially acceptable way to practice doing this.

It is a good way to show emotions. Whether a child is happy, sad, frustrated, or excited, music can help express the feeling. Banging very hard on a drum is a good way to say "I'm mad!" Humming a familiar tune can be very comforting.

Children learn to cooperate when they share instruments or take turns while singing or dancing together. Friendships develop as children listen to or copy other children.

## How will music help my child's physical skills?

Exercise is more fun when it's done to music. Play a favorite recording when you do alerting or relaxing exercises. This can help your child anticipate and take part in what you are doing.

Music makes any movement a little more entertaining and may encourage your child to work a little harder or a little longer. Climbing stairs can be hard work for a child with physical delays, but it seems like fun when it is done to a song like "Jack and Jill Went Up the Hill." Crawling across the floor as a horn blows or a

drum rolls may give just the touch to push your child to make that extra effort. Balance and coordination may be challenged with a song like "I'm a Tightrope Walker" by Hap Palmer. Even dancing together can be therapy when it includes stretching or positioning exercises recommended by a therapist.

## How will music help my child's speech and language skills?

Babies love to look at faces, and singing makes you all the more interesting. Knowing when the "Bumble Bee" will "BZZZZ" baby's belly encourages memory skills. Remembering where instruments are kept is a good lesson in organization. Your child may be able to get an instrument independently or have to ask for help. By watching faces, anticipating games, and asking for things, your child is learning how to communicate.

In order for children to speak, they must know what things are called. They have to know that *spoon* is what the eating tool is called and the stuff in the bath tub is *water*. You can sing songs to describe almost any experience your child has—a routine lullaby can explain bedtime; other songs may be about waking up, or bath time, or dressing.

There are many wonderful songs available on children's records and tapes, but you can make up good songs, too. Take a favorite nursery rhyme and change the words to suit the situation. Putting these everyday experiences to music is a wonderful way to build a good understanding of what words mean.

## Quiet listening is good, too.

Noise—musical and otherwise—isn't always good; quiet time is important for all children. People quickly "tune out" constant sounds. New sounds can be heard when the TV, stereo, chatter and other noises are silent. The bath water running, footsteps on the stairs, or the creak of a door can ring throughout the house when other noises aren't too loud.

Outdoors, the rustle of leaves, birds singing, crickets chirping, and water running are all sounds of nature singing. Make sure you let your child experience all of these.

### What about instruments?

Many people make their own instruments. They might tap a pencil on the table, or strum with their fingernails on a table. Babies and young children make their own instruments—they crumple paper and bang rattles just to hear the sounds. This may be noise to others, but it's music to them.

### Instruments to bang, shake, and rattle

- Assorted rattles
- Sandpaper blocks
- Large stones to bang together
- Seeds for shaking in a can
- Drum (or pan and spoon)
- Maracas
- Xylophone
- Cymbals
- Tambourine
- Bells (bracelet, anklet, or hand-held)

### Things to crumple and crinkle

- Paper: wax, foil, tissue, used wrapping paper
- Fabric: satin, taffeta, corduroy, net

- Leaves
- Clothing
- Stuffed animals

### Instruments to blow

- Whistle
- Harmonica
- Recorder

### Other musical toys

- Music box
- Musical mobile
- Door bell
- Clapping hand, stamping feet, snapping fingers . . .

No child needs all of these instruments; just choose a few that are interesting and that fit your child's needs and abilities. All instruments should be durable enough to stand up to hard use. Some families buy one instrument for each special occasion, lowering the initial cost and giving the child time to fully explore each instrument.

Regardless of whether you or your child sings, dances, or plays instruments, enjoy yourselves. Music is to have fun with! Music is an expression of pleasurable sound—there's no need for criticism. Find out what interests both you and your child. Sharing music can be an important part of your child's development.