

**Why Music is Important**

Children are natural born music lovers. Have you ever watched an infant swaying back and forth in response to hearing music? During the first year of life babies babble and experiment with sound. This precursor to singing is an important first step in learning to talk. Preschool children engage in what some researchers have called “chanting”. These are the half-speaking, half-singing sounds that often accompany young children’s play. Children love the sound of their own voices and “chanting” is the way that they experiment with sound and rhythm.



There are two broad categories of musical activities – music perception and music production. Music perception activities help young children to perceive the differences between concepts such as loud and soft; changes in rhythm and tempo; musical styles; and the identification of different instruments and styles. Music production activities help young children to be able to maintain a tempo and rhythm; express emotions using instruments; and helps children increase their repertoire and songs, and compositions.

Experiences with music and creative movement (covered in the second part of this chapter) help children to:

- Develop social skills and learn to participate in a group.
- Learn to express moods and feelings such as fear, anger and happiness in responding to music.
- Refine their listening skills.
- Develop language and number skills.
- Become more aware of their bodies and increase their self-concept. Also helps develop large and small motor skills, improves balance and coordination.
- Spatial orientation; increased control over their bodies.
- Develop their creativity; learn new concepts.

You do not have to be a musician to create musical activities with young children. Children enjoy singing with an adult – whether or not you have perfect pitch. You do not have to have a musical background to create simple rhythms on improvised or homemade instruments. The important thing is that music is an integral part of the classroom and children have a wide range of opportunities to experiment, explore, and enjoy.

Attending to children’s spontaneous music and movement activities is one of the best ways to reinforce what they are doing. Responding by asking questions or validations makes young children more aware of what they are doing. Start where the children are. You can simply describe what you see or hear. If your descriptions contain words that accurately describe music and movement (such as smooth, loud, soft, jerky, gliding), then you can continue to introduce new words and concepts.

**A Note to Parents**

You don't have to be a musician, either, to enjoy music with your children. A few moments sitting with a child listening to music, of any kind, can be of value. Don't listen only to "children's music". Try listening to classical, folk, country, and jazz or reggae. Songs and finger plays keep children focused during tough times such as waiting in line or riding in cars. Children love to sing and it is often a natural extension of the activities that are engaged in. Sing with children while engaged in activities with them. Improvise musical instruments at home – even if it is only a pot and a spoon.

Dorothy "Dino" Rice, a music educator working with Rutland County Head Start suggests the following ways that you can have fun with music at home, while exposing children to valuable music experiences:

- Echo the notes of baby's babble. Bounce a baby while reciting children's rhymes.
- Dance around the house with your child in your arms.
- Make sounds for your child to echo. Echo the sounds that your child makes.
- Make up tunes and rhymes related to household activities.
- Make shakers out of film canisters and fill with rice or popcorn. Secure lids tightly.
- Shake and drum along with songs you know to help children get the beat.
- Listen to the sound of pot lids and other kitchen utensils when you tap them with different spoons (wooden, metal or plastic).
- Play with scarves, handkerchiefs or other long piece of cloth as you listen to different types of music.
- Dance around to different music styles and rhythms.
- Draw or let your crayon dance on paper while you listen to different music together.
- Clap, clap, clap your hands.
- Read nursery rhymes out loud. Children love the rhythm and repetition.

**Developing Musical Interest**

Donna Wood's book *Move, Sing, Listen, Play – Preparing the young child for music* presents a simple overview of the young child's developing interest in music. The material below is excerpted from that book.

**Three to Four Years****Moving**

The three year old enjoys walking, galloping, jumping and moving on the floor. Despite differences in physical development within the group, try to find a common tempo when accompanying these activities with spontaneous singing, a drum or the piano. Develop ideas and suggestions of the children.

**Singing**

Encourage spontaneous speech patterns and singing throughout the day and also in short organized music sessions. Pitch, pronunciation, and word sequence are uncertain because these skills develop slowly. Be tactful with children who have not found their singing voices. Repeat familiar songs and gradually introduce new ones. A simple repeated rhythmical action such as clapping, patting, pointing, or swinging encourages and

supports the singing. Too many complicated actions, often invented and used by the adult, will inhibit the singing of the child.

**Instruments**

Introduce instruments that produce sound vibrations from metal, wood or skin (bells, rhythm sticks, drums) to help the child to recognize and listen for contrasting tone quality (timbre). Name the instruments and talk a little about differences. Offer each child in the group an instrument; ten inexpensive but musical jingle bells are better than one expensive instrument. Encourage spontaneity, experimenting and short free play experiences. Noisy banging is not music. Keeping the beat is not important yet - do not expect a coordinated group sound.

**Listening**

Encourage the children to listen and to pay attention during short music sessions; and ask them to listen, imitate, and differentiate between contrasting voice sounds (animals, birds, machines, etc.). Sing songs of good musical quality about animals or people, to the child. If we wish to develop a sensitive musical taste in children, then we must use only good musical material.

**Four to Five Years****Moving**

Marching, stamping, hopping, sliding, and twirling can be added to the movement repertoire. Body awareness and body control are developing. However, skipping, which requires hopping on alternate feet, is difficult or impossible for many four year olds. Give the child time to master this activity. They enjoy moving like animals and making animal sounds for accompaniment. Start with animals that children have seen for themselves, if you can. Large clear pictures are a substitute, but can you imagine "being" an elephant or a giraffe, if you have never seen a real one? Some nursery rhymes and folk songs are good for simple movement dramas (for example "The Three Little Kittens Have Lost Their Mittens"). They should be short with the child or children deciding how to proceed. Repeat, so that all who wish to, can have an opportunity to act.

**Singing**

Prepare the voice and develop a sense of rhythm, with finger plays, body plays, word chants and rhymes. As speech develops, introduce longer speech patterns, rhymes and songs to capture interest and stimulate musical learning. Include some material to appeal to the four year old's sense of humor and nonsense. Small repeated rhythmic actions make good accompaniments to singing.

**Instruments**

The musical concepts of loud/soft and quick/slow can be introduced while exploring a greater variety of instruments. Introduce children to the joy of ensemble playing as they walk, sing and play with jingle bells, maracas and hand drums. Well known songs such as "Jingle Bells" or "Baa Baa Black Sheep" work well, and a piano or drum accompaniment will hold it all together.

**Listening**

Sing story folk songs, encouraging children to listen. Recordings of a solo voice or instrument are appropriate, if short. Young children are happy with the melody alone and do not hear the element of harmony, yet.

**Materials to Collect for Music Making**

Easy-to-operate tape recorders and headphones  
Film containers  
Cardboard tubes from paper towels  
Coffee cans with lids  
Heavy cardboard  
Bells of different sizes  
Empty soda bottles with lids  
Popcorn kernels  
Rice and beans  
Sandpaper  
Plastic containers (such as margarine tubs, etc.)  
Thread spools – wooden ones are great  
Paint stirrers  
Wooden dowels  
Pictures from magazines that can be used to identify different types of music.  
Aluminum pie pans, cookie tins, oatmeal boxes.  
Elastic thread, yarn, and string.  
Wooden dowels.  
Empty plastic jugs with lids.  
Use your imagination!

**Creating Home Made Musical Instruments**

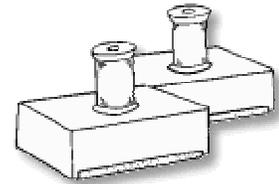
All of the instruments listed below can be made from easily located items. Find a large plastic bucket to store all the instruments and you have a “Band In A Bucket”. The bucket can also serve as a bass drum. Directions for several of these instruments came from *Shake, Tap, and Play a Merry Tune* by Tania K. Cowling.

Bells	Sew different size bells to a strip of sturdy fabric; or string on heavy yarn. See directions below for making a home made bell.
Cymbals	Use aluminum pie pans or ask a local restaurant if they have aluminum containers for leftovers that they will donate.
Dowel Board	See directions below.
Drums	Empty plastic containers with the lids on in different sizes. Beating on the top and the bottom of the container produces a different sound. Metal cookie tins also make fine drums.

Drumsticks	Use wooden dowels with the ends wrapped in soft cloth, secured with a rubber band.
Rain Sticks	Put beans, rice, etc. into a tube that can be closed tightly on both ends. Decorate with feathers, ribbon, designs, etc.
Rhythm Sticks	Use wooden dowels with the ends smoothed; or get paint stirrers from the local hardware store.
Sandpaper Blocks	See directions below.
Shakers	Fill empty film canisters and small plastic soda bottles with rice beans, or popping corn. Make sure to either glue the tops closed or secure them with tape. You can also purchase plastic eggs and fill them with a variety of materials. It's a good idea to glue the egg closed to avoid accidents.
Tambourine	See directions below.

**Sandpaper Blocks**

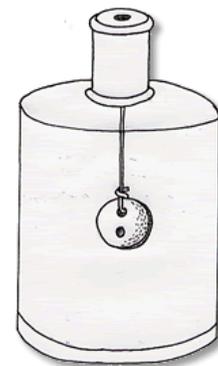
2 blocks of wood (2" x 4" x 6")  
 Sandpaper – different grits  
 2 empty thread spools (wooden ones are great)  
 Glue and a heavy-duty stapler



- Attach thread spools to one side of blocks of wood. Allow the glue to dry overnight.
- Staple the sandpaper to other side of block of wood (or you can try using hot glue, but make sure that the sandpaper attaches firmly).
- Children can tap blocks together for a louder sound or rub them together for a quieter sound.

**Homemade Bell**

Soup can with one end removed and smoothed.  
 Empty thread spool  
 2 large buttons  
 Masking tape  
 Glue and yarn or string  
 Hammer and large nail  
 Material to decorate the outside of the bell



- Punch a hole in the end of the soup can with the large nail.
- Cover the cut edges of the can with masking tape.
- Tie two buttons to the end of a piece of yarn or string.
- Put masking tape on the other end of the string to make it easier to thread through the can and empty thread spool.
- Thread the string from inside the can to the outside. Spread glue on the bottom of the thread spool before threading the yarn or string through it.

- Press the thread spool tightly against the can to secure the handle.
- Lower the string so that the buttons hang about 1/3 of the way down the can.
- Tie a large knot in the string close to the top of the thread spool.
- Children can decorate the can, if desired.

**Tambourine**

1 or 2 aluminum pie plates

3 –5 jingle bells or bottle caps

3-5 five-inch lengths of elastic thread

Paper punch

Materials for decorating the tambourine

- If using bottle caps, remove the cork lining first. Then flatten them and punch a hole in each one. Make sure that there are no sharp edges.
- Punch 3-5 evenly spaced holes around the outside rim of the plate.
- Use elastic thread to secure the bells or bottle caps through each hole.
- Alternate tambourine can be constructed by placing buttons, stones, or bottle caps between two pie pans. Punch evenly spaced holes around the pie pan and lace together tightly. These can be decorated, if desired.

**Dowel Board**

5 wooden dowels (1/2" x 5")

Sandpaper

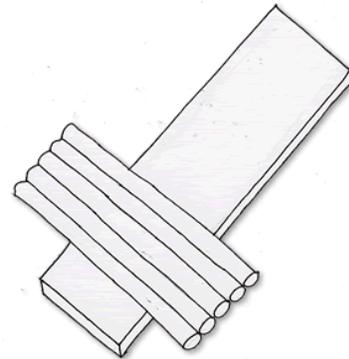
Paint stirrer or thin strip of wood

Carpenter's glue

Varnish and paintbrush

Metal or plastic thimble

- Smooth the ends of the dowels.
- Glue dowels across the paint stirrer or thin strip of wood. Use additional glue between the dowels for added strength.
- Varnish the instrument, if desired.
- To play, put thimble on your finger and stroke the dowels to make a washboard sound.
- If you want to get fancy, cut the dowels to different lengths.

**Music Activities**

- Sing with children every day. Encourage informal singing throughout the day. Short action songs and humorous ones are great. Nursery rhymes are a must. Leave out a word while singing and have children supply it.
- Have children act out songs, providing simple props such as scarves, hats, puppets, etc.
- Create number cards on heavy card stock. Have children beat their instruments the same number of times as the number on the card.

- Play classical music (in addition to other types of music). Listen to different styles and tempos. Talk about the emotions that the music suggests. Talk about the instruments. Try having children listen to music with their eyes closed. See Music Library list at the end of this chapter.
- Collect pictures from magazines or books that portray a variety of animals, feelings, movement, places, etc. Play a selection of music and ask children to select a picture that reminds them of the music. For example, they might pick a picture of a circus to go with loud band music.
- Create a listening book. Play a piece of music with no singing. Let children draw pictures and dictate a story to go with the music. Repeat the activity several times and keep adding to the listening book.
- Create simple musical instruments such as those suggested in “Band in a Box”. Have children experiment with different ways of playing them. For example, tap a drum with a stick, a hand, a metal spoon, and a drumstick.
- Play music with a strong beat. Have children clap their hands in time to the music. Find a simple poem that can be recited while children clap out a rhythm.
- Take a “sound” walk. Help children to identify the sounds that they hear. Remember music is composed of sounds and silences. Identifying silence is important, too.
- Listen to musical stories such as *Peter and the Wolf*.
- Let children experiment with sounds made from their bodies – brushing their feet, clapping, tapping, and slapping their thighs.
- Create two sets of containers filled with rice, beans, sand, corn, and small stones. Have children match the two that sound alike.
- Read stories about sounds. Involve the children in the telling of the story. Use stories like *Tubby the Tuba* that encourages participation and making music and sounds.
- While children watch, strike three objects (for example, a bell, a wooden block, and a tambourine). Have children close their eyes; strike one of the objects and have children try and identify which object it is. As a variation try adding loud and soft sounds.
- Clap your hands in a given pattern. Have children try and replicate the pattern. Try this game using simple drumming instruments.
- Use a drum to demonstrate volume. Children identify when it is playing loud tones and soft tones. Try this with different instruments.
- Create a “Found Sound” project. Ask parents to help children find an object in their home or neighborhood that makes a pleasing sound. Have the children bring the objects into the classroom to share and play.

**Songs and Rhymes**

There are many books containing songs and rhymes that help children grow through music and movement. Add the rhymes listed below to your collection:

**Hinges**

I'm all made of hinges [Bend elbow]  
Cause everything bends [Bend knees]  
From the top of my neck [Bend neck]  
Way down to the end. [Bend ankle]  
I'm hinges in the front [Bend forward]  
I'm hinges in the back [Bend back]  
But I have to be hinges  
Or else I will crack! [Clap hands]

Note – You can set up different kinds of hinges on a table so children can explore these objects.

**Home Sweet Home**

A nest is a home for a robin [cup hands to form a nest]  
A hive is a home for a bee [turn cupped hands over]  
A hole is a home for a rabbit [make hole with hands]  
And a house is a home for me [make roof with peaked hands]

**Quiet Cats**

We are little pussy cats [use hands, crawl, or tip-toe]  
Walking round and round  
We have cushions on our feet [whisper]  
And never make a sound

**Taller, Smaller**

When I stretch up, I feel so tall  
When I bend down, I feel so small  
Taller, taller, taller, taller  
Smaller, smaller, smaller, smaller  
Into a tiny ball

**The Apple Tree**

Way up high in the apple tree [point up high]  
Two little apples smiling at me [make two circles with hands]  
I shook that tree as hard as I could [wrap hands around “trunk” and shake]  
Down came the apples and [two circle hands come down]  
Mmmm, they were good! [rub tummy]

**Building a Music Library**

Many types of music lend themselves to creative movement. Start a collection of CDs and/or tapes. Look in thrift shops for used ones.

*The Jungle Book* (soundtrack of movie)  
*Fantasia* (soundtrack of movie)  
*Les Sylphides* (ballet music)  
*Swan Lake* (ballet music)  
*Heroes Symphony* by Philip Glass (simple piano music)  
*Planet Drum* by Mickey Hart  
*Carnival of the Animals* by Saint Saens (circus/animal theme)  
*A Night On Bald Mountain* by Mussorgsky  
*Pictures at an Exhibition* by Mussorgsky.  
*Peter and the Wolf* by Prokofiev  
*The Nutcracker* by Peter Tchaikovsky  
*Really Rosie* by Carly King (from the book by Maurice Sendak)  
*Overture to Carmen* by Georges Bizet  
*Babes in Toyland* by Victor Herbert  
*La Mer* by Claude Debussy  
*Introduction to the Orchestra* by Benjamin Britten  
*Songs for Children* by Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger  
*Not for Kids Only* by Jerry Garcia and David Grisman

