



Music at heart

more than just music lessons

How to create a stimulating environment at home

Babies learn by listening, imitating and memorizing; they need models that they can copy

Babies have no power of discernment; they copy everything, good and bad

The influence of the home environment, where young children spend so much of their time, and the models provided by their close family, are of primary significance in shaping their abilities and character as they mature

If we want our children to grow and develop in the best possible way, as adults we must give great and thought to the quality of the environment we provide for them; the best quality environment will produce the best results

You can give your child an ear for music simply by surrounding him / her with a musical environment

Sing

Babies and young children love to make sounds and move rhythmically

Research has shown that early musical interaction between parent and child can enhance the development of the infant's communication and perception skills

- Talk, hum and sing to your baby whilst changing, bathing, dressing and feeding them; look into your baby's eyes, hold him / her close to your body and respond to baby's sounds by imitating them and smiling

Babies may not understand the words you sing to them, but they are able to absorb them

- Sing any song using any sound that your baby is making, for example 'ma' or 'ba,' instead of the words

Baby will 'catch' your enjoyment of the music and will soon respond with smiles, cooing sounds and enthusiastic arm and leg movements

- Review your day in song: choose a familiar melody like *Twinkle twinkle little star* and sing about what you did that particular day – getting up, riding in the buggy, going to grandma's, taking the dog for a walk etc

Play

Infants and toddlers learn through the senses and through social interaction

As adults we tend to make a clear distinction between work and play, having forgotten over the years that the process of meaningful learning is fun and exciting

The best way you can help your child blossom, musically and in every other way, is not to give him / her a toy and say 'Go and play,' but take a toy and say 'Come and play.'

- Expose your baby to a variety of sounds, make sounds with your mouth and put your baby's fingers on your mouth as you make the sounds:
 - Buzz like a bee
 - Hum
 - Pop your cheeks
 - Make a siren sound
 - Cough
 - Pretend to sneeze
- Crunch different kinds of paper, including cellophane and tissue paper
- Use voice play when getting your child dressed:
 - Slide your voice up and down with the movement of a zip
 - Mimic the 'pop' of each popper in sound as it is fastened
 - Sing short notes whilst pointing to the dots on a spotty dress
 - Sing long notes whilst tracing your finger along the stripes on a tshirt
- Use voice play around the house
 - Mimic the sounds of water pouring in the bath, or peas falling into the pan
 - Make a request or statement in a low voice or a high voice, or a whispering voice, rather than the usual talking voice, for example 'Let's put on our coats and go to the shops,' or 'It's time to tidy up the toys.'
 - Sing up or down a scale when climbing or coming down the stairs
 - Sing a low note when your child sits down, or a high note on standing up
 - Sing rather than talk when counting, one note higher for each successive number
- Call your young child's name repeatedly from different places in the room until s/he turns towards the sound
- Hold a rattle or bell in front of your baby and shake it gently. When s/he is watching it, move it to different places and see how baby's head turns in the direction of the sound
- With older toddlers, play 'I hear with my little ear...'
- Use your hands to mark the pulse or rhythm of a song, or even something you say, either on a table or your knees
- Play with wooden spoons or plastic tubs

Move

- Be alert and react with movement or dancing to any music that is played in the house, on a CD, the radio or TV
- Take your baby's hands and gently clap them together whilst singing your favourite songs
- Rock your baby in your arms to settle when crying, or to lull to sleep whilst singing a gentle lullaby
- Place your baby on a large inflatable ball, tummy down, hold him / her securely and slowly roll the ball back and forth, singing
 - *Roll, roll, roll the ball, back and forth we go*
Merrily merrily, merrily, merrily, back and forth we go!
- Simple activities like rocking a baby will stimulate brain growth
- Swinging your baby also helps to develop a sense of rhythm as well as some very important brain connections

Listen

- Select one piece of beautiful classical music for your newborn baby, perhaps a piece by Bach, Vivaldi or Mozart
- Let your baby listen every day to a recording of this piece – play it when baby is being fed, changed and going to sleep

The baby will, after five or six months, recognize this music

When used consistently from birth in this way, it will provide a comforting environment for your baby, and you will find that, even when away from home, your baby settles and becomes calm on hearing the recording – the music does the job of a favourite blanket or pacifier, and will help your baby to fall asleep quickly and easily

Take Music at Heart home with you

Through bringing your young child to Music at Heart Early Years classes you will learn lots of chants, songs and singing games that you can continue to use in daily activities at home

- Recite poetry and nursery rhymes, and sing songs, throughout the day
- Songs like *Ring a ring a roses*, *Incey wincey spider* and *Pop goes the weasel* are favourites because of the sound the words make and the anticipation of the endings
- Peek-a-boo songs and games reinforce your child's sense of trust and safety
- Knee-bouncing songs such as *To market, to market* and *Mum and Dad and Uncle Tom* are the source of much laughter and can teach musical concepts such as fast and slow

- Chants like *Humpty Dumpty* and *Hickory Dickory Dock* help to develop a sense of pulse and rhythm, and an understanding of up and down when performed with the whole body

Repetition is very important; you will quickly see how your favourites become your child's favourites

Read aloud

Reading aloud is a wonderful gift you can give your child

The simple act of reading to children can have a huge impact on many aspects of their development, starting with the bonding enjoyed when your child sits on your lap and you share a book together.

In addition to the obvious benefits of increased language comprehension and a larger, more expressive vocabulary, reading raises children's cognitive scores, promotes a longer attention span, improves thinking and listening skills and builds the imagination – all qualities which will enhance their musical development.

- Set aside a special time each day for books – bedtime often works well
- Select books with short sentences and simple illustrations
- Let your child hold the book and turn the pages
- Stop and talk about the pictures, particularly things that catch your child's interest
- Repeat, repeat, repeat – read the same book over and over – the more you repeat, the more the brain gets wired

Enjoy the Moment

Live in the 'here and now' with your child, rather than always having your mind on the next appointment, chore or activity

- Train yourself to be a careful observer of your child and celebrate each new accomplishment, however small, with joy and praise

Raise your child day after day in this atmosphere of good music, and there can be no doubt that your child will develop an excellent ear for music