

CLAP, DANCE, AND SING!

using music and movement with young children

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Thinking back to my days as a classroom teacher, music was a vital part of my day. A nice thing about sharing music with young children is they will most likely be excited about it. Whether you are singing (yes it is o.k. to share your voice, whether you think it is good or not) or encouraging children to dance or move around, young children love to be active and have an opportunity to express themselves. Music can calm the mood, provide relaxation, or get the body up and moving. While working with young toddlers for a number of years, I learned that music was a great transition into daily routines and a good way to release energy when the children were in the classroom. As a teacher, I made sure to have plenty of songs and finger plays in my back pocket, especially when the toddlers were getting ready to transition to lunch and then to an afternoon nap. That short span of time was often used sharing music or song!

For young children music has power and meaning that goes beyond words. Sharing music with young children can simply be a way to give and receive love. Music and movement experiences also support the formation of important brain connections that are being established from birth – age 3. Young children explore music through play. Music can be shared through singing, dancing, or playing instruments together. Engaging in music at a young age is a great social opportunity, as well as an outlet for creativity and self expression. Infancy and early childhood are prime times to capitalize on children's innate musical spontaneity, and to encourage their natural inclinations to sing, move, and play with sound (Stellacio & McCarthy 1999; Young Child, 2004). Music and movement is about the process, what children are experiencing, not a specific end result or a successful skill to be measured. An early childhood classroom should incorporate music and movement throughout the day with all ages of children. This can be demonstrated in a variety of ways: having musical instruments available during play, specific music time designed around the classroom schedule of activities, singing with children, or playing music during daily transitions from one activity to another. As a whole, music has a positive impact on every aspect of a child's early development. Dancing and finger plays help to develop a child's physical health from large motor to fine motor skills. Music can also be used to calm and soothe a child, or to get them in the mood to be active. Expose children to a variety of music such as nursery rhymes, finger plays, classical music, jazz, big band, rock and roll, etc. Programs that incorporate music daily into a child's life also help in promoting social skills. Thoughtfully planned music experiences can support and nurture each of the domains of development: social-emotional, physical (both fine motor and gross motor), thinking, and language and literacy.

Music can be incorporated both indoors and outdoors. When children are outdoors they are able to experience a variety of sounds — just in the natural environment! Instruments or props could be taken outside to provide music and movement experiences. Additionally, being outdoors means that children are being physically active, expressing their creativity, and exploring their response to music all at the same time!

HERE ARE A COUPLE OF ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS:

Where Is Baby?

Sing to the tune of "Where Is Thumbkin?", *Where is* (insert the baby's name)?, *Where is* (insert the baby's name)?, *Here I am; here I am.* (Gently pat the baby on the belly as you say the words.), *How are you today,* (baby's name)?, *Very well, I thank you.* Clap your hands, clap your bands. (Help the baby to clap his hands.)

Drum Parade

Using containers such as empty oatmeal boxes, make a drum for each child. Children can pat the drums with their hands or use a small wooden spoon as a drumstick. Play music with a brisk beat and parade around the room or enjoy the freedom of the outdoors where the drummers can drum and stamp their feet to make loud, boisterous rhythms.

OTHER IDEAS FOR INCORPORATING MUSIC AND MOVEMENT WITH YOUNG CHILDREN:

Make your own musical instruments:

For infants and toddlers — Make a shaker from an empty water bottle and put dry beans inside (make sure the cap is securely attached).

For preschoolers — Make a shaker by stapling two paper plates together and filling with dry beans, buttons, seeds, or anything that will make noise.

Use pots and pans from your kitchen as instruments and let your children create their own music.

Use props to help facilitate movement to music such as: balls, scarves, ribbons, or a parachute.

Play a children's music CD or a variety of genre of music.



SING, DANCE, AND MOST OF ALL.... MAKE IT FUN!