

How to Let the Music Out of Your Children

BY CAROLYN ZORN

How can you bring out your children's natural musical ability? The best way is to watch your child and see what he is ready for. Children move through distinct developmental stages as their musical ability develops. Below are guidelines to help you recognize your child's developmental stage, with suggestions for what you as a parent can do to aid his development. (Note: ages are very approximate.)

Birth to 18 months: Babies show awareness of sounds. They may sing or hum syllables spontaneously and respond to music with the whole body. You can sing to the baby, bounce him on your lap in time to the song or chanting rhyme, play and move to recorded music, and promote finger play while singing folk songs and nursery rhymes (such as the Eency Weency Spider).

Ages 18 months to 3: Toddlers explore their voices and sing parts of songs, swinging their arms and bouncing their

knees in response to music. You can bounce toddlers on your lap in time to music, introduce percussion instruments, encourage them to make up songs, sing nursery rhymes, play simple circle and action games (such as Ring Around the Rosie), and introduce question-and-answer songs to assist in their independent singing.

Ages 3 to 5: Pre-schoolers can sing entire songs, and sing in groups. They are interested in musical instruments, jumping, skipping and walking in time to music, and beginning to coordinate clapping hands and tapping feet while singing. You can encourage creation of original songs, and teach children to appreciate great music by playing masterworks such as Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*. You can also take children to live concerts, sing songs as a family, dramatize songs, and consider beginning music lessons if children are interested.

Helpful tips to encourage your child's musical creativity:

- Sing as much as possible (in the car, while preparing meals, etc.)
- Do not expect immediate feedback from young children. They absorb songs without your knowledge.
- Young children have short attention spans. Change activities and songs frequently.
- Review songs frequently; young children love the familiarity of singing old favorites.

TIP

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