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developing music abilities in young children

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
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Circular 1071



This circular was prepared by Chad B. Howells, formerly Family Life Specialist in Home Economics Extension, in consultation with Robert B. Smith, Professor of Child Development and Music Education.

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Developing Music Abilities in Young Children: A Program for Parents

MUSIC PLAYS AN IMPORTANT PART in the lives of all of us. Indeed, music contributes much to physical, emotional, intellectual, and aesthetic development, especially in early childhood. Improvements in attention span, physical coordination, and aesthetic sensitivity can result from good experiences with music. Children who have had poor musical experiences, however, tend to develop negative attitudes towards music and avoid further activities that could be beneficial.

Parents are generally concerned about the musical development of their children, as indicated by the amount of money spent on piano lessons for children and by the number of children who are forced to take lessons. Trying to motivate children toward music by forcing them to take lessons seems to be getting the cart before the horse. Many children won't stick with their lessons long enough to discover the reason for it all.

Many of the ideas presented here are based on the studies of Dr. Robert B. Smith at the University of Illinois Child Development Laboratory. He has found that participating in quality music experiences at a young age is very valuable, particularly for boys, in developing vocal skills, interest and motivation, and general music achievement; girls did quite well even without the early experience. Moreover, Dr. Smith found that virtually *every* child could learn to sing tunefully if given the proper opportunity and experience. This challenges the idea of tone deafness as claimed by some people.

There are many ways to give young children positive musical experiences. This publication suggests some things parents can do, particularly with their young pre-school children.

LISTENING PROGRAM

Children are fascinated by music and sounds. Their sensitivity to sounds is obvious when they draw adults' attention to a certain sound or to a variation of a sound that the adult had overlooked. For a child to be able to respond to beauty and expressive quality in music, however, this sensitivity needs to be channeled and developed.

Understandably, young children lack the physical development and coordination to participate skillfully in singing, instrumental, or rhythmic activities, as these skills develop with age. Listening, however, has no such limitations, and listening activities can have been going on since birth.

The short attention span of children should always be considered, and parents should be aware of when children are getting fidgety and losing interest. An activity

carried beyond a natural stopping point can create negative, not positive, attitudes.

For very young children, parents can introduce a variety of types of music so as to give a broad span of experience. The music should be repeated over and over again, as this is the way children learn. Playing a tape of all-time favorites of the family or, if a member of the family plays the piano or some other instrument, performing a repertoire of musical selections is good.

Lullabies play an important part in the musical development of young children, but they should be used with some discretion. Parents should use lullabies with melodies of a limited vocal range and, if possible, pitched accurately within middle C and second-line G.



If lullabies completely within that range cannot be found, parents should look for ones that have at least one melody pattern within the range that can be sung by the child. If parents are not tuneful singers themselves, it may be better for their child's musical development to refrain from trying to sing lullabies. Some other means of providing music for their children at bedtime, such as playing a lullaby on a record player or on a musical instrument, may be preferable.

After children have developed physically to the point where they are ready for singing and movement activities, they should begin giving cues by wanting to sing or move when they hear music. This is the time when parents can start an active program for the musical development of their child. It is important that parents be aware of their child's development and the cues he gives. If a child fails to give cues at the time when physical development should have taken place, parents need not be overly concerned but could check to see why cues are not being given. This is how many emotional or physiological problems are first detected. Of course, the child just may not be listening, and the parent may need to work with the child to help develop his listening ability.

Developing the ability to listen is very crucial to the child's musical progress. Because of his eagerness to participate in any musical activity, the young child has the tendency to try to sing, move, or play before even listening to the music. The child must learn to listen carefully before he develops his other musical abilities.

One method parents could use to get children to listen before acting would be to present a musical selection first

For additional information and materials, see Robert B. Smith and Charles Leonhard, *Discovering Music Together—Early Childhood*, and accompanying records (Follett Publishing Company, 1010 West Washington Boulevard, Chicago, Illinois 60607).

as a listening activity only. Once children have had the opportunity to listen and become familiar with many of the elements of a musical selection, it could then be used for another musical activity besides listening. A good listening program for young children then would include, first, a period of listening for listening's sake only, and second, listening as part of another musical activity, such as singing, moving, or playing.

Parents can set aside a certain time of the day for a musical listening period—perhaps in the evening just before the children go to bed, or just after they go to bed, or both. This way, listening to the music could have a quieting or calming effect on the child before and after his bedtime. For the pre-school child who can understand some of the elements of music, this listening period could be used to talk about such things as the fastness or slowness, the highness or lowness, the softness or loudness, etc.

Parents can also discuss the instruments in the selection. Children will immediately discover the excitement of identifying instruments. The most distinctive instruments should be introduced first. The percussion instruments have the most distinctive and unique sound. The woodwinds should be introduced next, then the brass instruments. The string instruments are probably best left until last as they are harder to distinguish between. When introducing a new instrument, it helps to show the child what it looks like, either a picture of it or the real thing. To recognize familiar instruments by sound, try to choose musical selections in which the instrument is either playing a solo or an easily identifiable and repeated performance.

Live concerts or concerts on television are good for helping the child identify instruments. A televised concert would probably be better for a young child, as the parents would not have to worry about the child's disrupting the concert; television also often shows close-ups of the instruments during solos.

Remember the importance of repetition to young children. They may have to hear a selection many times before they can accurately identify the instrument. Remember, too, a familiar element should always be presented in any listening program. Learning should proceed from the familiar to the unfamiliar.

The child should be exposed to many types of quality music. He has probably not established a preference for any particular type of music, as a preference comes from one's background of musical experience.

In a listening experience the equipment should be of such quality and condition that the child is presented with an excellent musical example.

Listening is necessary before a child can develop any abilities in singing or movement. Although listening activities are valuable from the cradle on, all three areas of musical experience should be included in a good musical program once the child has reached a stage where he is developmentally ready.

Using the record. Side 1 of the record included with this circular contains selections that can be used with the lis-

tening program as well as with the rhythm and movement program.

Bands 1 and 2 on side 1 introduce brass and percussion instruments playing "Gavotte and Variation," by Handel.

Gavotte: trombone and snare drum
Variation: trumpet and snare drum

Bands 3 and 4 on side 1 introduce woodwind and percussion instruments playing "Gavotte and Variation."

Gavotte: clarinet and tympani
Variation: piccolo and tympani

These four selections should first be used to identify the percussion sounds and discuss the differences between them. The pictures on page 3 will help in the discussion.

snare drum: smaller, makes a higher sound
tympani: much larger, makes a lower sound, can make different sounds

Bands 3 and 4 should then be used to identify the clarinet and the piccolo and to distinguish between them. The pictures on pages 4 and 5 show some of the differences.

clarinet: larger, makes a lower sound
piccolo: smaller, makes a higher sound

Bands 1 and 2 and the pictures on pages 6 and 7 can be used in the same way with the trumpet and the trombone.

trumpet: smaller, has valves, makes a higher sound
trombone: larger, has a slide, makes a lower sound

Of course, these listening activities should be spread over several days. The parent will need to determine how fast the child is progressing. (Remember again the importance of repetition.)

Other selections. Some possible additional selections that would be good for listening or rhythm and movement experiences are:

Bizet, "The Changing of the Guard," from *Carmen Suite No. 2*

Pinto, "Run, Run" and "March, Little Soldier," from *Memories of Childhood*

Mussorgsky, "The Great Gate at Kiev," from *Pictures at an Exhibition*

Beethoven, "Scherzo," from "*Eroica*" *Symphony No. 3*

These are just a few that could be used. With young children you may only want to use a part of a movement, as some selections can become quite lengthy.

RHYTHM AND MOVEMENT

Children enjoy moving; they enjoy rhythm; and they enjoy combining these two as a means of expression. The main reason for having a rhythmic activity should be to give the child the chance to use his entire body in expressive movement. Development of self-expression does not happen overnight; the child needs to go through some basic steps or stages from simple to complex, just as in any other type of development.



TYMPANI



SNARE DRUM

The child begins by first hearing and responding to simple rhythmic patterns. These should be rhythmic groupings that suggest basic foot patterns. The patterns could be clapped out or played on a drum or a piano. If a parent doesn't have these instruments in the home, an empty coffee can or two broomstick pieces make excellent rhythmic instruments. Patterns that are even should be introduced first, as these are easier to hear and reproduce.

Some examples might be:

walking or marching	
running	
moving slowly	

The first session with rhythm would be mainly to get the child listening to the beat of the drum, tambourine, piano, or whatever is being used to produce a walking tempo. It would be better to have the child sitting, as he will be more apt to listen this way than if he is allowed to walk immediately.

The child might be asked to move his head or hands to the beat. He should be encouraged to "listen with his ears." When a child moves well, the parent may want to give recognition by saying something like "Good, Marilyn." If more than one child is participating, parents should be careful not to compare children by saying things like "Look how well Bobby does it." Such statements will tend to bring conformity and may inhibit expressive movement. There is no "correct" way for a child to move.

After listening in a seated position, the child should be asked to show how the music makes his feet want to



PICCOLO

move. The tempo could be varied to a faster or slower beat, and the child should react with his movement to the change. Of course, not all of this would be done during one session. Parents will have to determine how much to give their child in each sitting. Children should not be expected to move perfectly, as this takes much time and practice. Older children, who are more advanced in their physical development, will be able to move more expressively and with more ease than the younger child.

The adult should *not* act as a model nor should the child be encouraged to “move like an elephant,” “gallop like a horse,” etc. Such movements become imitative instead of expressive.

Different musical elements, such as high — low, fast — slow, loud — soft, short — long, or even — uneven, can be introduced as part of a rhythmic experience. These elements can also be expressed in body movements as the child gains the concept of what these elements mean. As the different elements are used, the child learns to listen and respond as he hears different patterns. Again, the adult should not tell the child how to move but should provide the opportunity for expressive movement by re-

peating the patterns enough that the child can experiment and discover for himself.

Parents should not expect accurate or precise movement from the child, as he is still gaining physical coordination. The child does need to repeat or practice his movements over and over, day after day. Once he has had the chance for repetition, he may surprise the adult with his expressive movements. Of course, the adult always needs to be aware of the physical maturation level of the child and be careful not to frustrate the child by expecting too much, too soon.

Using the record. The record includes selections that can be used as part of the rhythm and movement program — after the child is able to listen and move to some of the simple rhythmic patterns played on a drum, piano, empty coffee can, etc.

Band 5 of side 1, “Run, Run,” from *Memories of Childhood* by Octavio Pinto, has a very fast even pattern to which the children will enjoy moving.

Band 6 of side 1, “March, Little Soldier,” also by Pinto, has a good march pattern.



CLARINET

SINGING DEVELOPMENT

Children begin singing in a directional manner, producing sounds in the general direction of the melody but seldom matching tones. They also begin singing in a limited range of three or four tones between middle C and G.



Of course, we have to remember that all children are different and will vary in their vocal range and tone-matching ability. Parents need to be aware of their child's singing ability and begin working from there.

Children need to hear and have repeated opportunities to match tones within their vocal range if they are to develop tuneful singing ability and have positive experiences that can add to their future motivation. Songs beyond their proper vocal range are an impossible and frustrating experience for children and, unless counterbalanced by some positive experience, can very easily cause them to develop a negative attitude toward music.

Because repetition is so important to young children, songs should be selected which have *repeated word patterns* and *repeated melodic patterns* as well as the *proper vocal range*. Lullabies sung to young children should meet these three criteria and if possible should always be sung in the same key. Often, young children will begin singing lullabies with their parents. Many folk songs also have repeated melody and word patterns.



TROMBONE

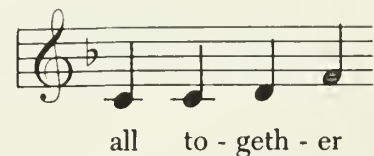
Although it can be done, it is extremely hard to find songs that fit these three requirements. Some suitable examples are included at the end of this section.

To teach a song to children, parents should use an instrument that is accurately pitched and in tune. The song should be pitched in a key within the child's limited vocal range; moreover, when the song is repeated and practiced, it should be in the same key as it was when first sung to the child. Children are very sensitive to pitch and can develop a very accurate pitch concept if they have frequent opportunities to sing songs in exactly the same key.

The first session with the child might include just introducing a song that will be learned by the child at a later time. This would be mainly a listening activity dur-

ing the first couple of days. The parents would begin by singing the song *alone* several times and talking about it. On the third day, perhaps, the parents could encourage the child to sing along. It would be good to have some kind of accompaniment, particularly a piano if possible.

A good song to start with would be "Sing With Me" (see page 8). The parent may want to introduce this song by just having the child sing the repeated limited-range pattern:





TRUMPET

Once this song is learned, it could be adopted as a theme song to introduce the singing activity each day. Other songs would be introduced later — usually as a listening activity first, then as a singing activity.

Parents should be careful when buying musical toys for their children, as many toys (xylophones and toy pianos, for example) on the market not only are tuned to the wrong frequency but also have improper intervals between tones. Can you imagine what this does to the child's pitch concept?

Record players can be an important piece of musical equipment if parents choose the records carefully. If the record is to be used for the child to sing with, use the

same criteria for choosing records as for choosing songs. The record player can also be used for rhythmic and listening activities.

Using the record. The selections on side 2 of the record can be used as part of the singing program. All the songs in the circular are included on the record except "Hop, Old Squirrel."

The record can be used as an accompaniment for the child to sing with as he learns each song, particularly if there is no other accompaniment in the home or if the parent cannot sing tunefully. If the child has already learned the song without the record accompaniment, singing with it will help improve his singing ability.

R. B. S.

SING WITH ME

American Singing Game

Merrily

mf

F F F F C₇ C₇ F F

1. Sing with me, all to - geth - er, Sing with me, all to - geth - er,
2. Lean with me, all to - geth - er, Lean with me, all to - geth - er,

F F F F Gm C₇ F F

Sing with me, all to - geth - er, Won't you be my hon - ey?
Lean with me, all to - geth - er, Won't you be my hon - ey?

C. L.

LOOK AROUND THE ROOM

American Camp Song

In a teasing manner

p

D A₇ A₇ D

Look a - round the room with me; Look a - round the room with me.

D A₇ A₇ D

Look a - round the room with me. I see a girl in blue.

WHAT SHALL WE DO?

Joyfully

American Folk Song

mf ^C What shall we ^C do when we ^C all go ^C out? ^{G₇} All go ^{G₇} out? ^C All go ^C out?

^C What shall we ^C do when we ^C all go ^C out? ^{G₇} When we ^{G₇} all go ^C out to ^C play?

J. E.

BYE-LO

French Folk Tune

Expressively

pp ^{A₇} 1. Bye - ^D lo, ^{A₇} bye - ^D lo, ^{A₇} Close your ^{A₇} eyes, it's ^{A₇} time for ^D rest.

^{A₇} Bye - ^D lo, ^{A₇} bye - ^D lo, ^{A₇} Close your ^{A₇} eyes, it's ^{A₇} time for ^D rest.

HOP, OLD SQUIRREL

Well accented

Folk Song from Virginia

mp ^D 1. Hop, old ^D squirrel, ^D ei - dle - dum, ^{A₇} ei - dle - dum, ^D Hop, old ^D squirrel, ^D ei - dle - dum, ^{A₇} dum,

^D Hop, old ^D squirrel, ^D ei - dle - dum, ^{A₇} ei - dle - dum, ^D Hop, old ^D squirrel, ^D ei - dle - dum, ^{A₇} dum,

ZULU LULLABY

Soothingly Zulu Folk Tune

pp Loo, la, loo, la, loo, la, go to sleep, _____

A7 A7 A7 A7 D A7 D A7 A7

Loo, la, loo, la, loo, la, go to sleep. _____

A7 A7 A7 A7 D A7 D A7 A7

HOOSEN JOHNNY

Lustily Illinois Folk Song

mf 1. The lit - tle black bull came down the mead - ow, } Hoo-sen John-ny, Hoo - sen John - ny.
2. He shook — his tail and jarred the riv - er, }

F B7 F F C7 F C7 F

The lit - tle black bull came down the mead - ow, } Long time a - go.
He shook — his tail and jarred the riv - er, }

F Bb F F F C7 F F

REFRAIN

f Long time a - go, *pp* Long time a - go,

F Bb F F Bb F F

mf The lit - tle black bull came down the mead - ow, } Long time a - go.
He shook — his tail and jarred the riv - er, }

F Bb F F F C7 F F

GOING DOWN TO CAIRO

With gusto

Illinois River Chantey

f Go - ing down to Cai - ro, Good - bye and a bye - bye,

Go - ing down to Cai - ro, Good - bye, Li - za Jane.

Black your boots and make them shine, Good - bye, and a bye - bye,

Black your boots and make them shine, Good - bye, Li - za Jane.

C. L.

THE SEASONS

Gospel Song

With bouncing rhythm

mf Hal - le - lu - jah for the spring - time! Hal - le - lu - jah for fall!

Hal - le - lu - jah for the win - ter! For I like them all!

All children can develop musical ability if given the proper experiences and opportunity. The critical time for the development of these abilities is in the early childhood years, most of which are spent in the home. There are many things parents can do to foster development in listening, rhythm and movement, and singing. Presenting a sequential program at home can help their children develop musical capacities easily. This is a good beginning, and if parents have put forth this effort in the home, they do not want their efforts wasted when the child enters school. Parents should support and encourage quality music programs in the schools, such as having music

specialists in the elementary and preschool programs.

When anyone teaches a song to a child, he should ask himself, "Why am I teaching this song to this child?" Is it just to "busy" the child? Is it to fill a need of the adult? If it is to help the child in his musical development, we need to be more careful and deliberate in our methods. This is not an easy task: it takes time and effort on the part of the parent. If the time and effort are given, both the child and the parent will share a rewarding experience. This time spent together in a good musical program can also add to positive parent-child relationships now and later on in life.

CONTENTS OF THE SUPPLEMENTARY RECORD

SIDE 1

- Band 1 — *Gavotte*, by Handel (trombone and snare)
- Band 2 — *Variation*, by Handel (trumpet and snare)
- Band 3 — *Gavotte*, by Handel (clarinet and tympani)
- Band 4 — *Variation*, by Handel (piccolo and tympani)
- Band 5 — "Run, Run," excerpt from *Memories of Childhood*, by Pinto (Johana Harris, piano)
- Band 6 — "March, Little Soldier," excerpt from *Memories of Childhood*, by Pinto (Johana Harris, piano)

SIDE 2

- Band 1 — *Sing With Me* (Three Twins)
- Band 2 — *Look Around the Room* (Molly Davey)
- Band 3 — *What Shall We Do?* (Molly Davey)
- *Band 4 — *Bye-Lo* (Marilyn Powell)
- Band 5 — *Zulu Lullaby* (Marilyn Powell)
- Band 6 — *Going Down to Cairo* (Paul Mayo)
- Band 7 — *Hoosen Johnny* (Molly Davey)
- Band 8 — *The Seasons* (Three Twins)

* Third verse (French): "L'enfant dormira bientôt."

For additional information or for the possibilities of joining a lesson/discussion group on this topic, contact your County Co-operative Extension Office.


**DEVELOPING
MUSIC ABILITIES
IN YOUNG CHILDREN**

SIDE 1

PVII588

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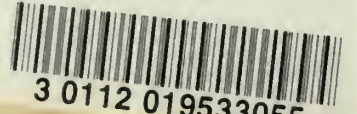
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