Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students

Benefits of Music

by Natalie J. Dahl, MS, CCC-SLP

Music is all around us. We hear it while driving in the car, walking through the grocery store, watching TV shows and commercials, and sitting through the newest box office hit at the movie theater. But did you know that participating in music, actively playing or singing, can benefit a child's academic performance and concentration?

Research shows that children who are actively involved in singing or playing music regularly perform better in reading, math, and science because it helps build reasoning skills and cognitive development. They have higher overall test scores and are more likely to go to college. They learn concentration, goal-setting, coordination, cooperation, have higher self-esteem and interact better with their peers.

Did you know that listening to or singing along with music uses the same neural circuits as expressing speech? Music and language are universal and specific to humans. Both have pitch, tone, beat, and rhythm features. Infants typically develop spontaneous speech and spontaneous singing at approximately the same time. Music and language have auditory, vocal, and visual uses built on structure and rules. There are distinct forms of music and language that exist and vary across cultures.

Music, when paired with other activities, can encourage speech and language skills. One way to do this is to pair visuals (toys, gestures, or pictures) with words or phrases in a common song. For example, in the song "Old McDonald," a set of toy farm animals can be used to help a child learn the song and understand the words. Another way to encourage speech through music is to pause for the child to fill-in lyrics. In the phrase "E-I-E-I-…" leave a pause at the end to encourage a child to participate and vocalize the "O." This technique is useful in targeting specific speech sounds with many different songs. A final way to encourage language skills through music is to use musical instruments for fun and motivation. These can be homemade or store-bought, and can work on concepts such as fast, slow, together, stop, go, loud, and quiet.

There are many things you can do during daily routines and activities to fill your child's life with music:

- If there is music playing at the grocery store, ask your child what he thinks about it.
- Listen to different types of radio stations in the car. This will get your child thinking about music, and will help him learn to analyze and talk about it.
- A clock radio can help your child wake up to music in the mornings.

Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students
(cont.)

- Play certain songs to serve as cues for your child. For example, play or sing the same song in the morning when it's time to get ready for school or when it is time to clean toys up.

- Check out CDs from your local library or download free music from your favorite app. You can sample different artists and styles without spending money.

- Introduce your children to songs from your own childhood.

- Do chores around the house while listening to music.

- Download music-making apps on your mobile devices that let kids lay down their own tracks, just like a professional.

- Consider signing your child up for formal instrument lessons, such as piano or guitar.

Many children are ready for formal music lessons by the age of 7 or 8. The piano is a logical place to start because learning keyboarding skills sets the foundation to learn musical concepts needed for other instruments or even for vocal music. String instruments are also a good starting place, but brass or wind instruments can be more physically challenging and may not be appropriate choices until your child is older. If you are wondering if your child might be ready to begin music lessons, ask yourself the following questions:

- Playing an instrument can place physical demands on a child. Does your child have the appropriate physical development and fine motor control to play? (A music teacher can help you determine this.)

- Can your child focus on one thing for 20-30 minutes?

- Does your child understand and manipulate letters and numbers?

- Has your child had adequate music exposure? Can he keep a steady beat, identify incorrect notes in a familiar song, and repeat basic rhythm and pitch patterns?

- Are you willing to attend the lessons regularly and help ensure that your child practices regularly?

- Do you think your child will be willing to practice? What will your response be if your child doesn't like lessons?

If you feel like formal lessons are not an appropriate choice for your child yet, keep in mind that most kids should get some music instruction at school, whether they are in lessons or not. School instruction might include opportunities to sing, play instruments, listen to music, and understand the role music plays in our culture. If your child's school doesn't have a music program, local churches or community organizations may have music instruction available for kids.

Music can encourage speech and language skills as well as academic performance. There are many benefits that come from both listening to and actively participating in music, so encourage a love of music in your child! Whether you are singing in the car on the way to school, making maracas or tambourines, or practicing a new song learned in formal lessons, you and your child will have fun along the way.

Resources:

"Music and Your School-Age Child," KidsHealth, accessed June 22, 2017, http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/schoolage-music.html?ref=search.

"Speech-Language Therapy and Music Therapy Collaboration: The Dos, the Don'ts, and the 'Why Nots?,'" The ASHA Leader Blog, accessed August 25, 2017, http://blog.asha.org/2011/10/04/speech-language-therapy-and-music-therapy-collaboration-the-dos-thedonts-and-the-why-nots/.

"Speech Therapy Songs," Songs for Teaching, accessed August 25, 2017, http://www.songsforteaching.com/speechtherapy/

For more FREE Handy Handouts®, go to www.handyhandouts.com