

Childcare and children's health

Health care information for childcare staff and families from the Centre for Community Child Health

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Music Experiences for Young Children in Childcare

Young children and music

Music is part of daily life for most Australians. Music is all around us. Television, radio, advertising, piped music when we shop, and all kinds of entertainment bring music into our lives.



For young children, too, music is part of daily life. Most young children enjoy music and they respond positively and instinctively to it. They like to dance and bob around to CDs and tapes; make sounds with instruments and toys; laugh and giggle at finger plays and knee bounces, and join in with songs they know well.

There are many ways in which adults can

share music with young children and incorporate music experiences into their daily program. Music can fit naturally into caregiving routines, be part of play, and form the basis of sociable experiences for groups of children.

Types of music experiences

Music as part of caregiving routines

There are many ways in which music can become part of the tasks associated with caring for young children: lullabies to settle a baby at sleep time, gentle songs to soothe a distressed toddler and ritualised songs used for greeting, goodbye and pack-away times.

Musical activities can be easily incorporated into caregiving routines. Songs and rhymes need not add extra time to these regular tasks but they can significantly enhance the quality of the interactions. Procedures like nappy changing, sunsafe procedures, hand washing and preparing for snacks and meals can all be enhanced by the addition of music. Playful interactions between adult and child can be important in developing the relationship between carer and child.

When changing and dressing babies and toddlers, singing songs and saying rhymes are useful alternatives to spoken conversation because they can readily engage several children at once. Songs and rhymes need not add extra time to these regular tasks but they can significantly enhance the quality of such one to one interactions. Different children will develop favourites and they are quick to express their preferences. Once the task is complete, a finger play or sensory game may be included. Children enjoy

these playful engagements often giggling in anticipation of the tickle that is about to come. Such pleasurable contacts can help reduce anxiety, distress or impatience by focussing the child's attention away from their discomfort or stress. Playful musical interactions between adult and child may be important in developing the relationship between carer and child and can help to forge strong bonds between them.

Songs and rhymes can be created or adapted to match specific routines. Singing can be undertaken during almost every regular routine and task with the exception of eating (for obvious reasons). For example:

- *Here we go round the mulberry bush* can be adapted to fit most situations by changing the words. The lyrics can become *This is the way we... wash our hands, pack away, put on our hats or roll the dough*. Singing about the task at hand is especially important for younger children and children from non-English speaking backgrounds as it provides a model of appropriate language for what the child is actually doing at the time.
- *This is the way we wash our hands* can easily be extended to include other parts of the routine: *this is the way we roll up our sleeves; ... use the soap; ...turn on the tap; and ... dry our hands*. Unlike conversational language, the lyrics of a song can be repeated many times (four for every action in this instance). In a song, repetition of words and phrases is perfectly natural but it would be forced and affected in spoken language. Repetition also helps with language development.
- For older children, music, when coordinated with movement, offers many opportunities for transitions from one environment to another (playroom to bathroom or inside to outside for instance) and from one experience to another (story to outdoor play; clay to handwashing). The song *Let's go walking*, for example, can be adapted to include alternative ways of moving such as jumping, galloping, tiptoeing or sidestepping.

Music also offers endless possibilities to assist young children's learning in a wide range of curriculum areas. Advertisers know that tunes help messages stay in people's minds. For similar reasons, songs can be used to reinforce fundamental learning like basic literacy (alphabet songs) and numeracy (counting songs). We also teach young children songs to help them remember important safety messages like the procedure for crossing the road or wearing a seat belt.

Music can be included in many of the routines that occur every day as well as being incorporated into transitions and learning across the curriculum.

Music as play...particularly outdoors

Young children learn about their world through play. Children can explore sounds and create them using simple instruments, sound-producing toys and soundmakers (everyday objects like pots and pans that can be used to make sounds). Free music play offers young children a powerful non-verbal way of expressing themselves. Such experiences also cater for children at different stages of development; and as they are open-ended, the children can play in a variety of ways - on their own, in parallel



with others, or in more sociable, associative play.

Free music play works well outdoors, alongside other play activities. The children are able to play freely, to select which activity they wish to

explore and to move on to other activities when their interest is roused. The children can make as much noise as they wish without the sound becoming overwhelming. There are many ways that musical activities can be incorporated into outdoor play such as;

- Free music play with soundmakers may involve a **music mat** with an array of simple instruments, toys and everyday objects like kitchen utensils (checked for safety). Children can explore and manipulate the objects however they wish, in a variety of ways. Potentially they can discover different sounds, find different ways of making sounds, and they can experiment with combining sounds and creating patterns of sounds.
- Alternatively, soundmakers that are light and have no sharp edges, can be suspended from a **sound line**. Empty 2-litre milk containers with different contents are ideal; their handles also make them easy to attach to the sound line. For safety too, it is important to ensure that the line is well above the children's height. As the soundmakers are hanging from the sound line, the children instinctively respond kinaesthetically. They will move around and dance as they play with and respond to the sounds available on the sound line.

Music as a sociable experience

Sociable music experiences involve groups of children and one or more adults participating together in music

activities. This kind of music experience is probably familiar as group, mat, circle or sharing time. In sociable music experiences, adult modelling is important as it demonstrates musical behaviours that the children can emulate such as singing, moving, playing instruments, listening and creating with sounds. Adult participation and enthusiasm also encourages the children to join in music making as well as helping develop positive dispositions towards music.

Sociable music experiences can include a wide range of activities and games involving songs, playing instruments, listening to recorded music, singing games, listening games, moving and dancing, stories and puppets.

Including songs, dances and stories from other countries is an effective way to expand children's cultural experience and foster values such as sensitivity and tolerance.

An example of an activity that could be part of a sociable music activity is a stick game. Each child in the group has a pair of tapping sticks. The following stick game is based on a traditional nursery rhyme; the children say the rhyme and do the actions indicated:

Jack be nimble, Jack be quick

Tap sticks to beat

Jack jumped over the candlestick

Tap sticks to beat

Jack jumped high

Pause and tap sticks up high

Jack jumped low

Pause and tap sticks on floor

Jack jumped over and hurt his toe

Tap sticks on shoe

This activity facilitates physical coordination, language skills, and cooperation as well as the musical skills of listening and playing the sticks in time with the words. The collegial nature of sociable music experiences also helps foster the social skills associated with being part of a group including sharing an adult's attention, listening, cooperating, doing the same thing as other children and sharing space.

Benefits of including music in the daily program

Music can also be used to enhance learning and development in areas as diverse as language, memory, listening, physical and social skills. Music involves children in both emotional and physical responses to their environment. It is also an experience that offers many opportunities for enjoyable interactions, especially between young children and adults. Participating in pleasurable and appropriate music experiences can also help young children build self-confidence and self-esteem.



Music offers young children a means of expression and an outlet for their creativity. This self-expression is especially important for younger children who may not yet have acquired the language skills that enable them to express their feelings, thoughts and needs in words.

Making music part of the daily program has a positive impact on the environment as well as the children. A rich aural environment can also help nurture children's musical development in the same way that a language-rich environment stimulates literacy and language learning. As music is highly enjoyable for young children it can enhance the quality of routines, learning across the curriculum and interactions between children and adults. Making music together can truly make everyone's day.

QIAS Principles: 1.1, 2.1, 7.3, 7.4, 8.3 and Quality Area 6.

FDCQA Principles: 1.1, 2.2, 4.4, 4.5 and Quality Area 3.

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Suggested books for planning music experiences:

Andress, B. (1998). *Music for Young Children*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace.

Edwards, L.C., Bayless, K.M. and Ramsey, K.M. (2004) *Music: A Way of Life for the Young Child*, (5th ed.) N.Y.: Prentice Hall.

Young, S. and Glover, J. (1998). *Music in the Early Years*. London: Falmer.

Suggested song collections:

Clark, H. (Ed). (1995). *The new useful book: songs and ideas from ABC Play School*. Sydney: ABC Enterprises.

Larkin, V. and Suthers, L. (1995). *What will we play today?* [Volume 1]. Sydney: Pademelon.

NMAA (Ed.). (1979). *Merrily, merrily: a book of songs and rhymes for babies and young children*. Hawthorn, Victoria: Nursing Mothers, Association of Australia (NMAA).

Music in a Long Day Care Centre and a Family Day Care Scheme

Recent interviews with a director of a Long Day Care Centre and the coordinator of a Family Day Care Scheme revealed many similarities in their approach to providing music experiences for young children.

Diana Hirsch the Director of KU Centennial Parklands Childrens Centre has children from 6 weeks of age to school age attending the Centre. Diana talked about the Centre's emphasis on the arts in the program. The arts are seen as very important in the lives of children, with music planned for and made available to all children on a daily basis.

Lynne Tivendale is the Children's Services Coordinator at Bayside City Council. The Bayside Family Day Care scheme has been offering a music program for more than 10 years. It is available for up to 25 children each term. They attend with their carer who must be an active participant in the group. The group goes for about forty five minutes and includes babies through to children up to 5 years of age.

Neither program is dependent on a staff member with particular training or expertise in music or on the ability to play a musical instrument. Rather there is a focus on using the voice and enjoyment of making music with children. Both programs have a collection of CD's, taped music and musical instruments which have been gathered over many years and these represent many cultures. The experiences are planned, although spontaneous music also occurs in both settings.

The programs include:

- Singing including songs from other countries and sung in other languages. Simple action songs, clapping games and finger plays for the babies and toddlers with more complex actions for the older children.
- The provision of a range of music for children of all ages to listen or move to, including classical, Gregorian chants, blues, rock and roll and jazz.
- The playing of musical instruments which are available for use by the children in the Centre program and at playgroup in Family Day Care. These are also used in planned group experiences. The instruments include traditional ones such as tambourines, maracas, small drums, castanets and bells but also a collection from other lands with different sounds and played in different ways. These include various types of rhythm sticks, guiro, chimes and gongs.
- Opportunities for the children to make instruments such as using a firm cardboard cylinder covered at both ends with rice inside and attaching lids (not sharp edged) to a stick to make a shaker or rattles with different sounds.
- Movement to music including dancing, moving to different rhythms such as running, walking and galloping - games that require children to listen and respond in different ways including learning to stop and use a range of materials such as scarves or ribbons as they move.
- Games such as the Hokey Pokey and Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush.
- Invitations to musicians to visit and play and sing for and with the children.

Parents learn the words of some finger plays and songs so families can sing them together. The resource library in the Family Day Care scheme has music and instruments for carers to borrow.

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