The Therapeutic Effects of Music and Rhythm Activities

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Young children are naturally drawn to sounds, rhythms, and movement. In addition to adding to the fun factor of library programming, musical activities can play a transformative role in physical, emotional, and cognitive development. Sharing music in the early years helps children connect with their adults, enhances moods, builds self-confidence, and assists with self-regulation.

Clapping to a steady beat or participating in a call-and-response song helps children practice their listening skills. Opening and shutting hands, doing fingerplays, and playing musical instruments build fine motor skills. Dancing develops gross motor skills, balance, and coordination. Playing freeze games helps children pay attention and practice stopping. Music also provides opportunities to practice counting, discriminate between sounds, and learn about patterns. Singing together creates a sense of community. Lastly, participating in musical activities lays the foundation for language and literacy learning by reinforcing listening skills, vocabulary, and phonemic awareness. Read on about the benefits of using music and rhythm activities, along with strategies for supporting skill development in storytimes and beyond.

Benefits

The Power of Rhythm: Singing, Dancing and Moving into Self-Regulation and Learning by Barbara Sorrels

https://bit.ly/4kDPr24

In this free Early Childhood Investigations webinar, Sorrels shares research on the connection between rhythm activities and brain development and provides strategies and resources for designing learning environments that support social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. Her delivery is clear and comprehensive, and the premise is rational; we're all rhythmic beings (e.g., circadian rhythms regulate our sleep; life cycles are rhythmic; seasons follow a rhythm) and gravitate toward rhythmic (i.e., repetitive, consistent, predictable) environments. Rhythm regulates the brain and lays the foundation for further learning, so it's crucial for children to engage with music, rhyming books, instruments, dancing, and musical games.

The Influence of Music on the Development of a Child

https://bit.ly/465mCYJ

This theoretical piece in the *Journal of Effective Teaching Methods* explores the impact music has on child development. Music has been shown to engage a number of areas of the brain, including those related to working memory, language processing, spatial-temporal processing, emotional regulation and self-control, problem-solving, and flexible thinking. The authors claim that music has the most influence on the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development of a child. Research has shown, for example, that music stimulates motor activity and helps with





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coordination and muscle development. It also positively affects memory, attention, problem-solving, language, and math skills. Children who participate in musical experiences have also been shown to have greater empathy and social skills, and they are also better at expressing their emotions.

Beyond Twinkle, Twinkle: Using Music with Infants and Toddlers

https://bit.ly/3ItfMCm

This piece by Zero to Three begins with a short vignette of an interaction between a toddler and his teacher, revealing just how powerful simple musical exchanges can be. It goes on to explain how musical activities can support social-emotional (e.g., self-regulation, understanding emotions, building relationships), physical (e.g., gross and fine motor development, body awareness), cognitive (e.g., counting, patterns, discrimination, symbolic thinking), and language and literacy (e.g., receptive and expressive language, phonemic awareness) skills, giving examples along the way. A chart of musical activities for infants, young toddlers, and older toddlers across the four main domains is also provided.

Music and Toddlers: Benefits of Music and Movement in Early Childhood

https://bit.ly/4mdAepJ

Bulleted lists detail a variety of benefits of music for toddlers and infants. While some of the benefits mentioned are obvious (e.g., lullabies help to calm babies and have a slower tempo), others may be new (e.g., "Deaf toddlers with cochlear implants also love music, despite the tones being suboptimal"). Because most of the bullet points are succinct, they can be used as developmental tips to share with parents and caregivers during storytimes.

Sesame Street Brochure—Sing It, Strum It

http://bit.ly/4l9JauY

The National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM), a nonprofit dedicated to the joys and benefits of music making, lists a number of ways music and movement activities positively affect infant and toddler development. Connections between rhythm and prereading skills are cited, along with other benefits.

In partnership with Sesame Street, NAMM designed a full-color, printable brochure (available in English and Spanish) sharing the importance of music and providing caregivers with playful engagement activities (e.g., use different parts of your body to make music; use music to signal events in the day).

Activities

Music in Child Development

https://bit.ly/44t2sGP

Brief vignettes and information are interspersed throughout this piece from Head Start to illustrate the value of music in children's lives. Readers are offered valuable guidelines for being intentional and culturally responsive during the music-selection process. Several recommendations are made, including offering families the opportunity to provide input on music selections, finding songs with lyrics that can be translated, inviting caregivers or musicians to sing songs in children's languages, and including instruments from all over the world.

Beyond the "Cleanup Song": Supporting Young Children's Development with Music

https://bit.ly/3TE1AsM

In addition to discussing the benefits of music, this post from the Center for Early Education and Development (CEED) at the University of Minnesota provides suggestions from a board-certified music therapist for integrating music into routines. She reminds us that children learn through engagement. If we want to help children develop prosocial skills, then we should plan song-based activities that require children to work together. If we want to scaffold leadership development, children should be given opportunities to choose songs, and adults should accept their suggestions even if they're silly.

Easy Ways to Support Social-Emotional Learning with Music

https://bit.ly/46MMLvs

This brief piece provides sample music activities that support social-emotional learning. Using substitution songs that invite children to offer suggestions helps build self-confidence and leadership. In "Wiggle," from *Music Together Family Favorites 2*, for example, children can suggest other ways to move instead of wiggling (e.g., jumping, stretching). Songs that change tempo and familiar songs like "B-I-N-G-O" help children practice self-regulation and impulse control. And when children engage in movement and music-making activities together, they practice social skills and work on building empathy as they learn how to read cues for participating and understanding moods.

PBS Kids for Parents: Music and Movement

https://bit.ly/3UcpMCU

This piece for parents offers some easy-to-implement activities for homes, libraries, and classrooms, along with extension

activities available on PBS Kids. For example, crafting homemade instruments is suggested, and parents are then connected to instructions for creating a water xylophone, along with a video of a parent and child exploring pitch with their instrument. If you're looking for additional ways to incorporate arts, culture, and media into musical experiences, a wonderful collection of resources is offered on how to use *Alma's Way* to introduce children and their families to the Puerto Rican bomba musical genre. A viewing guide is provided that explains the origins and elements of the genre, provides video clips and discussion questions to guide conversations, and offers resources for extended learning.

Why Singable Books Belong in Every Storytime

https://bit.ly/singable-books

This engaging Jbrary blog post by Alyssa Jewell, MLIS (a.k.a. La La Librarian), and music therapist Rachel See highlights picture books that are easy to sing aloud and discusses how they use auditory, vocal, and visual elements to enhance children's learning experiences. Music is processed in both hemispheres of the brain, thus enabling multimodal learning (visual, linguistic, aural, gestural, and spatial) while also building print motivation and phonological awareness. This is an uplifting article with lots of great tips and storytime resources. &