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Connecting Big Plans' Parents to their Communities

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Music Therapy Techniques to Try at Home

Most people would agree that music can be calming, meditative, even healing. Music therapy takes that notion one step further by using music in a targeted way to help improve people's physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. Not only has this method been met with anecdotal support, but brain imaging shows actually measurable degrees of influence on the subject's mind in NMT, or neurological music therapy, one of the practice's many facets.

Practicing music therapy with kids may seem like just fun and games, but in truth "music activates and uses important, core structures in our brains," asserts Peggy Schaefer of Metric Music Therapy in Southern California. While nothing substitutes for clinical expertise, the principles of music therapy can be easily applied in the home. Here are some easy things you can do with your children to experience the many benefits of music therapy.

Music Therapy and the Cognitive Domain

The "Mozart Effect" made big news years ago. A 1993 study seemed to show temporary gains in spatial intelligence when subjects listened to music by the classical composer. While the theory has since been disproved, further research has shown that learning to make music truly does have an appreciable effect on the brain. Tap into the benefits of music therapy by using it to impact the cognitive domain of your child's brain.

• **Music mnemonics:** "Think about all the songs that you know all the words for," says Arizona-based music therapist Erin Benaim. "Music is a great mnemonic device." Use familiar tunes such as "Mary Had a Little Lamb" or "Happy Birthday to You" to teach new information and watch kids' cognition grow by building on what they already know.

• **Crossing midline:** For this activity, hold two drums (or drum substitutes, as nearly anything can become a drum) at about shoulder height for your child. Sing or play a song, having your child hit the right drum with his left hand and then alternate left drum with his right in rhythm with the music—offer cues if this becomes difficult. "Crossing midline is a very important developmental skill to increase inter-hemispheric communication as well as sensory perception," says Schaefer. "This also addresses sequencing."

• **Call to attention:** For continual attention, try using music as a cue for starting and stopping an activity, perhaps even associating certain songs and certain sounds with each activity. Music cues are especially beneficial to toddlers, Benaim points out, and can aid parents in transitioning their children from task to task with a minimum of anxiety. Rhythmic cues are frequently employed in the classroom by early elementary teachers; what better place to begin instilling these patterns than at home?

Music Therapy and the Social Domain

Music naturally echoes our patterns of communication. "Music and language use similar mechanisms in the brain, making it an ideal way to teach language and communication skills," affirms Benaim. These activities will help to address your child's social development.

• **Taking turns:** In this activity, one instrument is placed between two children. One child plays a rhythmic pattern on the instrument while the other listens. Verbal, visual or tactile cues can alert the partner that it's his or her turn to copy the first person's pattern. This process is particularly suited toward developing the "pacing and cadence" of normal conversation, says Schaefer.

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• **Question/response:** Music takes the place of yes/no responses in this game. One person questions and the other responds, using “yes” instruments and “no” instruments (think tambourine, maracas, etc., here) to answer questions.

• **“Drum” circle:** The drum circle works well for small groups of children. Each participant is given an instrument (alternatively, they can be assigned a body sound such as whistling or clapping) by the child who is selected as leader for that turn. The leader shows the children how to play their instruments (loud or soft, fast or slow), and the group decides on verbal or visual cues. The leader then gets a turn to lead the group in making music. “For a lot of children, being the leader is a new experience,” Schaffer says. The key to this activity is fostering support for each child’s turn as leader.

5 Reasons Why Music Education Rocks

1. **Music boosts brain power** – It stimulates parts of the brain that are related to reading, math, and emotional development.
2. **It improves memory** – Music stimulates different patterns of brain development that can improve their learning ability and memory.
3. **Music teaches patience** – When playing an instrument in a group, you have to work together and that sometimes means waiting your turn to play.
4. **It helps children socially** – Picking up an instrument and participating in a group can help a child break out of their shell.
5. **Music teaches discipline** – When playing an instrument, you not only have to practice in class but also at home on your free time.

Music therapists agree that music in the home is important—regardless of the parent’s perceived musical ability. “So many parents tell me they can’t sing, but kids do not care,” Benaim says. “Songs are so useful for teaching information and typical development.” Parents can also use music to set the mood at home. While your first impulse might be to put on a CD of lullabies when your child is bouncing off the walls, the trick is transitioning gently. Benaim recommends finding upbeat music to match the mood and then adjusting slowly into slower, mellower songs.

“Music therapy is also really accessible to children, as kids typically find music enjoyable and non-threatening,” she adds. Kids with social, behavioral and developmental issues see many benefits from it—but the principles behind music therapy make it a great fit for children at all stages and developmental levels.

By Merry Gordon. Reprinted with permission by Education.com. For more articles on Music and Children, visit www.education.com

Try This At Home!

Who knew you could make music with so many common kitchen items. Some of the fun is just discovering ways to make your own music.



Find various containers and fill them with different objects...rice, beans, cheerios and corn nuts! Have your child shake these containers and listen to the different noises. Try hot coco and nut cans to make drums and try using different spoons, and utensils for drumsticks. Depending on the material of the utensil you will hear different sounds.

Thank you to Holly from welopebeingmoms.blogspot.ca

Did you know you can try out a children’s music/play class for FREE?

Kindermusik - go to <http://www.kindermusik.com> for information on how to try a free preview class at your nearest location.

Kindermusik

Gymboree Play & Music - visit www.gymboreeclasses.com for a coupon to try one class for free.

GYMBOREE Play & Music



The Kindergarten Readiness Program

Families Matter, a not-for-profit society delivering learning opportunities to Calgary families, is once again offering a Kindergarten Readiness program for children who are eligible to attend kindergarten in the fall of 2014. This exciting program provides children opportunities to: be independent, learn social skills, learn critical thinking skills, explore and experience the World of Nature, and invent and build. They will learn through: music, drama, art, carpentry and storytelling. Families are welcome to join this fun program where their child will make friends, play and learn with other children.

Led by qualified program teachers, the program will run at three locations this fall, starting on September 17th on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Priority is given to parents who come from an ESL background or qualify as low income. Parents and younger siblings stay on site during the program and coffee/tea is provided.



- **52 Street Hub** – 158,1440 - 52 Street NE (Trans Canada Mall) time : 1-3 pm
- **Riverbend Location** 65 River Valley Drive SE (inside Riverbend school) 1:15- 3pm
- **Parent Link Centre** inside Bowcroft School in Bowness - 3940 - 73 street NW -1:15 -3:15 pm

Our Yearly Participation Fee of \$45.00 once a year per family applies.

To register, families can call Families Matter at 403-205-5178

If you have never been to a resource centre and wonder what it is really like, Families Matter put together a short video so that you can take a look inside one of the centres from the comfort of your own home! <http://youtu.be/CdZKv7f0SeM>



Try This At Home!



Save your empty containers and instead of recycling them, let your children use them for fun! Try stacking them to the ceiling and building pyramids. The best part will be knocking them down!

Thank you to Holly & Heather for the great idea and photos: welopebeingmoms.blogspot.ca

Books for Babies/Jumpstart Program

Empowering Parents in their Role as their Childrens' First Teacher

Books for Babies/Jumpstart, a program delivered by The Further Education Society (FES), is a family literacy program for the youngest members of your community. It recognizes, celebrates and supports parents as their children's first teacher. The program encourages parents to read to their children early in life because the time from birth to three years is an important window of opportunity for the brain to develop language skills.

Together with community partners, Books for Babies/Jumpstart provides to new parents:

- a bag of baby books
- parenting information
- Calgary Public Library information
- reading tips for families
- book suggestions

Jump Start sessions are held in community settings and are offered free to interested parents. Topics include: Helping Babies Grow, Helping Babies Talk, and Helping Parents Survive. These workshops are designed to assist parents with their parenting skills and to encourage parents to read to their children from an early age.

Jump Start sessions were developed to complement the Books for Babies program. Rather than just giving parents a book bag; it invites them to take part in a variety of learning opportunities. The hope is to give parents skills to use the books, and to give them more confidence with parenting.

The Further Education Society is a non-profit society whose mission is to strengthen communities, families and individuals through literacy and learning. Together, they empower parents in their important role as baby's first teacher. The Books for Babies/Jumpstart Programs are usually delivered in conjunction with one of FES's Community Partners. Immigrant Services Calgary, the Women in Need Society, or the YWCA, to

name a few, run sessions delivered by FES facilitators in their facilities. Families would normally access the programs through one of these Partners.

In addition to Books for Babies/Jumpstart, The Further Education Society also offers a program called Homespun, again run through their Community Partners. It is a four week program for adults who want to learn more about reading and interacting with their children. Parents learn which books are best for children and how to be a reading model. Parents practise simple activities they can do at home with their children, including crafts, making a story board, learning songs and rhymes, and making play dough.

If you know of an agency or organization that is interested in hosting a Books for Babies/Jumpstart program please contact **Jennifer Grey – Program Administrator at the Further Education Society at (403) 250-5034.**



Further Education Society
Strengthening communities

Are you looking for great playgrounds around Calgary?

For some inexpensive fun on beautiful fall days , check out this website: www.calgaryplaygroundreview.com. Not only do they list a variety of playgrounds (indoor and outdoor), splashparks and activities for you to do with your kids, but they have great photos and maps as well!

