

musical activities for preschool children & their parents

A large, light blue, stylized graphic of a drum is positioned in the background, tilted slightly to the right. It features concentric curved lines representing the drum's surface and a dark blue section on the left side.

developmental drumming
early childhood music program

Music making is essential to the healthy development of children

An addendum to NAMM's Sesame Street Music Works Program • Produced and distributed by the Percussion Marketing Council

Where To Start

The Developmental Drumming Early Childhood Music Program and Take-Home Activities were designed to provide the necessary tools to foster an early love of music making. Music participation can provide undeniable benefits to children everywhere and, because children learn by example, you are giving a child a wonderful gift by playing music with them. Not only will you be teaching the fundamentals of music making, but you will also be demonstrating that “new” and “different” things need not arouse fear or self-consciousness. You are teaching that life’s simplest “adventures” can be deeply gratifying.

The primary goal of these activities is to ensure that the children are having FUN— enough fun that they will want to continue to play music again, and hopefully, for the rest of their lives. The activities can be used for a single child and are easily adaptable for classroom or other group use. This is not a performance-based program and every effort should be made to “encourage” rather than “correct” participants. If a child hasn’t followed instructions exactly, congratulate them anyway and demonstrate the exercise again. Always keep in mind that this program was designed to be flexible, and you can (and should!) customize every activity to match the age and abilities of the participants. The Developmental Drumming Early Childhood Music Program and Home Activities are only a starting point. Take it slowly and remember that *having fun is the name of the game!*

For additional information on the powerful benefits of music to you and your child, including the most recent research on Music and the Brain, visit www.amc-music.org.

Thank you for participating in the Developmental Drumming Early Childhood Music Program and for sharing the gift of music with your child!

How To Choose The Instruments And Introduce Them To Your Children

An amazing variety of children’s percussion instruments are available in stores today. It is important to understand that these instruments have been designed specifically for children and it is recommended that you select only those that meet US toy safety testing standards ASTM F963-96A for the approved age. This government rating ensures that the products are safe in terms of mechanical construction, toxicity, small parts (that could pose choke hazards), sharp edges, strangulation hazards, etc. Beyond safety concerns, a child’s instrument should be the proper size and weight and should be playable without the need for dexterity beyond the capabilities of the child. Ask a qualified salesperson at your local music store to assist you when making your selection.

The initial goal is to make your child feel comfortable with their new instrument. Tell them what the name of the instrument is, and if they are interested, you can explain the historic origins of their new instrument. This information can usually be found in product catalogs or packaging. Next, show and identify for them all of the different parts of their instrument, while encouraging them to feel the different materials and textures. Some areas to consider include: the drumhead (playing surface), drum shell (sides of the drum), carry strap, mallet handle, mallet head (end), handle (on any hand percussion instrument), striker (for a triangle), and even shaker fill (although they can’t see or touch the non-toxic fill, they can still get a “feel” for it).

Invite your child to explore with you all of the different sounds that they can create with their new instrument. With any type of drum, experiment with the different sounds you can obtain by striking the drumhead in its center (deeper sound), the edge (higher sound), and the outer shell areas. Encourage them to try playing with the hands in a variety of ways: open-handed vs. closed-handed, hard, soft, fast, slow, and slap-release vs. slap-hold (muffled sound). Then ask them to try the same thing using the mallet head (end) and the mallet handle. They will even find a difference when holding the mallet in the center vs. the edge.

Any type of shaker can be shaken quickly, slowly, loudly, softly, and even in a circle to obtain different sounds. Hand percussion instruments are available in an amazing variety of shapes and sizes: clappers, knockers, jingles, bells, tone blocks, etc. Experiment and enjoy your discoveries!

Mimic The Familiar Rhythms Of Your Child's Environment

Always keeping in mind that there is no right and wrong way for a young child to play an instrument, help your child to develop their listening skills by encouraging them to tune into the sounds around them and try to mimic them. Some fun suggestions are: walking footsteps, skipping footsteps, galloping footsteps, running footsteps, a ticking clock, even the waves pounding the shore during a family excursion to the beach! The rhythmic possibilities are endless!

Play Along With Music That Appeals To You And Your Child

After familiarizing your child with the variety of sounds that they can create with their instrument, a terrific way to get started playing is to drum, shake, tap, or jingle along with a recorded song. Any lively piece will do, but selecting your child's favorites will guarantee their delight. Simply beat a drum, shake a shaker, or jingle a jingle stick to the beat. This is a time for experimentation and discovery. Make an effort to refrain from correcting your child at this early stage of the game. Remember that there is no right and wrong and don't be surprised when your child starts to request songs they've heard on the radio to play along with! This is a very healthy sign that they would like to expand their musical repertoire!

The Rhythmic Memory Game

Once a child has learned to listen for the rhythm in recorded music, the well-known game of Memory (with a new rhythmic twist!) is a natural next step. When you can hear that the child is successfully mimicking the rhythm in the piece, stop the music and encourage the child to continue playing solo for as long as he can. No matter how "perfectly" they perform, congratulate them for a job well done! Gaining self-confidence is far more important than percussive excellence. With practice playing along with their favorite tunes, it is only a matter of time before they can recall the rhythmic parts without first hearing the whole piece.

Rhythm-Talk

Now that your child is familiar with the different "voices" that their instrument can make, inspire them to create simple rhythms. Explain that every spoken language has its own unique beat, and within every sentence, music can be found. Demonstrate how to clap, rattle, tap, clap, or drum the rhythm of the following phrases, and invite them to do the same. If you can say it, you can play it!

All aboard!

Listen to the clock: tick-tock, tick-tock.

Calling all cars! Calling all cars!

Hey, diddle-diddle, the cat and the fiddle...

Cock-a-doodle-doo!

How much wood could a woodchuck chuck...

Mary had a little lamb...

Rhythmic Dialogs

Once your child is able to create simple rhythms, inspire them to take it one step further to rhythmic dialogs. Start a dialog between the different sounds- try a call and response, back-and-forth, back-and-forth approach. Coach them to think of the rhythmic responses as “conversations” that go in a repetitive cycle. Recite the following conversation aloud and ask the child to beat, shake, clap, or jingle along with you to the rhythm.

*Three fast beats: How are you?
One beat: Fine.
repeat*

Once they're comfortable with the exercise, you can progress to something like this:

*Three fast beats: How are you?
One slow beat: Fine
Two fast beats: ...and you?
One slow beat: Fine
repeat*

Once they've mastered a rhythmic dialog, you can keep the game interesting by adding to it or by changing it altogether. If you run out of ideas, ask your child to come up with some “scripts” of their own!

*Six fast beats: Nice weather we're having
One slow beat with two fast beats: Yes, it is!
repeat*

Rhythmic Follow The Leader

The much-loved game of “Follow the Leader” becomes a whole new game when rhythm is thrown into the mix! To this point, the group is probably still speaking the words to the dialogs as they play along with their instruments. This activity is slightly more advanced in that it does not use accompanying vocalizations and will focus participants more on rhythm. Clap a simple rhythm with your hands and encourage them to copy you as they beat a drum, shake a shaker or strike a tone block or triangle. If you aren't feeling creative, use any of the rhythms from the previous exercises, but don't vocalize! If that doesn't inspire you, what about a rhythmic interpretation of a section of a favorite song, nursery rhyme or TV jingle?

A slightly more advanced version of this exercise is to hide your hands when clapping, training participants to rely solely on sound. This is a great way to encourage focused listening skills. Another variation puts one of the parents in charge, thereby promoting their self-confidence and teaching abilities. You can play along with the group and mimic the new “Leader's” rhythms.

Fast-And-Slow

This is a slightly more advanced exercise. Select any one of the rhythmic phrases from the Rhythm-Talk exercise and beat, tap, clap, or shake it for your child. The next step is to demonstrate how to play it at a (faster) tempo. Practice the two together, coaching your child to copy your example at a faster tempo. The options are endless, but here a few rhythms to start off with.

Hickory, dickory, dock!

Row, row, row your boat gently down the stream.

Follow the yellow brick road!

Twinkle, twinkle, little star!

Then switch! To teach slower rhythms, ask your child to copy your patterns at a slower tempo. Keep the game interesting by asking your child to suggest portions of their favorite songs, nursery rhymes, or theme songs from their favorite TV shows!

High-And-Low

To help the group learn to differentiate between high and low pitches, demonstrate the two on the featured instrument. Demonstrate how to obtain a low pitch by striking the center of a drumhead and a higher pitch when striking the edge. If you featured bongos in the music program, show the group that the larger drumhead produces a deeper tone than the smaller drumhead. A myriad of shakers are available on the market in different shapes, sizes and sounds. A tone block will produce a higher pitch when struck near the top edge, and a lower pitch when struck near the handle.

After a few moments of demonstration, ask the group to stand up and reach to the sky to identify each note you play as high or to touch their toes to identify the note as low. Once they've become comfortable with identifying high or low notes, you can teach them to play a high or low note on request.

A more advanced version of this activity incorporates high and low pitches into the rhythmic phrases and dialogs from Exercise #4.

Short-And-Long

To teach participants to differentiate between long and short notes, begin with a simple demonstration. Strike a triangle while suspending it by its handle or a string to produce a long note. Then strike the triangle while gripping one of its sides to produce a very short note. A large drum is another excellent instrument for this exercise. Striking the drum with one hand while muffling it with the other will produce a short note. Striking the drum without muffling it will yield a longer, sustained note.

After this demonstration, ask the group to stand up and open their arms wide to identify each note you play as long, or to close their hands together to identify the note as short. Once they've become comfortable with identifying long and short notes, you can ask the group to play them on request, once again using kid-friendly phrases to create a series of long and short notes. For example:

Oh, Susannah!
(Long-Long-Short-Long)

Then I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow the house down!
(Short-Short-Long, Short-Short-Long, Short-Short-Long-Short-Short-Short)

Quiet-And-Loud

A great way to teach loud and quiet sounds is to play this simple game: demonstrate loud and soft rhythms, and alternate between them. Ask your child to stand and listen, lifting their arms over their head when hearing loud rhythms and touching their toes when they hear quiet rhythms. Once they've understood the difference between the two, you can teach them to play loud and quiet on request. Take this activity one step further by incorporating quiet and loud rhythms into the rhythmic dialogs from above. Suggest to your child that it is a conversation between two people: one very loud, and the other very quiet! For example:

Loud man: Nice weather we're having.
Quiet man: Yes, it is.
Loud man: Nice weather we're having.
Quiet man: Yes, it is.

Understanding The Developmental Benefits Of Making Music

Music has the power to engage, relax and energize us... and has been proven to play an incredibly important role in the healthy development of children. In scientific studies conducted by early childhood specialists, preschoolers who participated in organized music making over several months showed marked advantages over their playmates that did not. The children involved in music dramatically improved their abilities to work mazes, copy patterns of color, and draw geometric figures. These skills reflect spatial intelligence, the foundation for more complex types of reasoning (such as those used in math and science).

Music provides a healthy, natural and invaluable opportunity for individual expression while encouraging the development of the whole child, and enhancing cognitive, social, physical, emotional, cultural and recreational skills. Although the ability to learn continues throughout life, hands-on participation in music between the ages of three and ten seems to train the brain for higher thinking and children who miss out on the fun of playing music may also miss some critical developmental opportunities. Playing music benefits children by:

- Aiding academic aptitudes in mathematics, science, and the arts
- Promoting large and small motor development
- Increasing scholastic participation
- Cultivating concentration and focused listening
- Fostering early vocal development and enhanced social abilities
- Bolstering self image and self assurance
- Encouraging parent/child bonding (when music is practiced together)

Being a truly universal language, music creates a sense of community, and brings people together by bridging any number of cultural, age, racial, gender, political and other differences. By giving a child an instrument, you are providing them with a powerful voice to communicate that which doesn't come easily with words. Stimulating, amusing activities like playing music will capture and hold a child's interest and satisfy their craving for fun, while providing them with invaluable lessons that will endure the rest of their lives. The family that plays together stays together!