

Mommy & Me

Early Childhood Music Program

Take-Home Percussion Activities for Preschoolers & Their Parents

an addendum to NAMM's Sesame Street Music Works Program
produced and distributed by the Percussion Marketing Council

Music making is essential to the healthy development of children.

The Benefits Of Making Music

Music provides a healthy, natural and invaluable opportunity for individual expression while encouraging the development of the whole child, and enhancing cognitive, social, physical, and emotional skills. 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. A family that plays together stays together!

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.

Where To Start

The Mommy & Me Early Music Program and Take-Home Activities were designed to provide the necessary tools to foster an early love of music making because of the undeniable benefits it can provide to children everywhere. Because children learn 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 Mommy & Me Early Music Program and Home Activities are only a starting point. Take it slowly and remember that *having fun is the name of the game!*

Thank you for participating in the Mommy & Me Early Music Program and for sharing the gift of music with your child!

How To Choose Your 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!

Percussion Activities for Preschoolers & Their Parents

1

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!

2

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!

3

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.

4

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!

Calling all cars! Calling all cars!

Cock-a-doodle-doo!

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

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

How much wood could a woodchuck chuck...

5

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 slow beat: Fine.

Three beats: How are you?

One beat: Fine.

Three beats: How are you? Etc.

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?

Three fast beats: How are you?

One slow beat: Fine

Two fast beats: ...and you?

Three fast beats: How are you? Etc.

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!

6

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. Etc.

7

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 in augmented (faster) rhythm. Practice the two together, coaching your child to copy your example at a faster tempo. The options are endless, but a few rhythms to start off with follow:

Hickory, dickory, dock!

Follow the yellow brick road!

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

Twinkle, twinkle, little star!

Then switch! To teach diminution, ask your child to copy your rhythms with a slower rhythm. 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!