

music to their years

Jenny Wilkinson, Hey Dee Ho Music

Children are fascinated by music. Jenny Wilkinson of Hey Dee Ho music explains how we can develop a love of music during the early years.

For most of us, music is part of our everyday lives – you'll find it in every culture, every age group and every heart. We listen to the radio, we play our favourite CDs and we attend concerts and musicals. We enjoy music because of its ability to affect the way we feel – it can relax us, and make us feel happy, elated or reminiscent.

For children, music has the same positive affects on mood and temperament, and it also benefits mental and emotional development. For children, music is brain gym. Studies show that music for children of any age, especially before six years of age, helps develop not only the brain but also spatial awareness and gross motor skills. Parents of young babies attending our music classes have told me they've seen changes in their children's response to music and awareness of different styles. They also note improvements in sharing, taking turns, patience and listening skills because music brings children together and has a positive effect on social skills.

Most music starts with a beat, and a baby's first introduction is the heartbeat.

In utero, the beating of the mother's heart, the consistent drumming sound of comfort and familiarity is talked about frequently in birthing hospitals. Mothers are encouraged to hold their babies to their chest so they can hear their heart.

CHILDREN WERE BORN TO BOUNCE, SWAY AND JIGGLE, EVEN TO THEIR OWN BEAT

Children are fascinated by music and introducing it at an early age has lifelong benefits. Even though we're not all musically inclined, we can still show children the many delights music has to offer. The best age to introduce music to a child is before the age of three, but it's never too early or too late, and there are many different ways to provide musical experiences for children at each stage of their life.

• Birth to 6 months: Simple music

Imagine as if each sound has to be introduced one at a time. Music that's too loud or too complicated can become just noise to a little baby. Singing is always the best option at this age – and words aren't overly important. You can hum or sing using a neutral syllable such as 'la', 'dah' or any sound that feels comfortable.

Nursery rhymes are short and sweet and often have actions or hand signals that babies love. Sign language is a powerful tool of expression and, when used early in conjunction with speaking, can help toddlers communicate even before they speak.

Babies also respond well to bells, clapping hands, whistling, cooing, raspberries and mimicking of their own sounds. Use your imagination and baby will let you know what he or she likes best!

• Six months to 12 months: Joining in

So now baby has discovered her hands! What an amazing instrument in itself. Clap hands, hit pots and pans with spoons, crumple up paper, fill empty water bottles with rice or pebbles and encourage little ones to bounce and dance to the music. This is a great age to teach them simple songs with repeating words as they're learning to speak. Use actions and flowing movements when singing – this helps a child to develop a sense of how the body moves through space and creates a visual reference point to understand the music.

• One to 2 years: Let them lead

This is a wonderful age of expression and self-discovery. Music of all sorts should be used at this age and different tempos introduced. Teach children about dynamics of music; high, low, soft, loud, fast, slow. Ask what the music sounds like, or get them to act out the music –





if it's really loud it might be like a dinosaur, or quiet like a mouse.

High pitched music might mean dancing on tippy toe – while low pitched music means getting down low and crawling along the ground. Find songs they're interested in and learn the words yourself. Encourage them to sing them to you. It's best to sing in a higher key at this age as it helps them become aware of correct pitch as our talking voices are often low which makes it hard to hear the note.

• **Two to 3 years: Put your left foot in**

Can you pat your head and rub your tummy at the same time? It's time to introduce song with dance. Music is an excellent learning tool. Use it to teach them their left and right hands/feet and basic coordination. Children love to imitate your every action and will follow even more difficult instructions at this age. Use music to initiate packing up time and mealtime. Music is also enjoyed before bed to soothe and relax.

• **Three to 4 years: What an actor**

Music can express almost every emotion. They'll be able to tell the difference between a happy song and a sad song, just by the tempo. Talk about the story behind the song, its emotional story, and encourage children to demonstrate their emotions too. Let them teach you a song/dance and empower them to be proud of their achievements.

• **Four to 5 years: Steals the show**

At this age most children will become more modest within themselves and won't always jump at the chance to sing for an audience anymore! Allow them to feel confident when they're ready to express themselves. It's a great age to pick up an instrument. Choose an instrument like piano or drums, as they're often easier to play giving the child more confidence as they accomplish simple songs. This is also when children really start to notice different styles of music, and are very influential – so this is the time to let a child experience lots of different genres.

Overall, music is a powerful contributor to children's moods and can help with quiet times or when playing a lively game. Pick and choose which music you want to use in which environment; for example using lullabies in the evenings and uplifting tunes in the mornings when it's time to get up and going. However you use music make sure you enjoy yourself. When an adult is having fun with music so will the children and this will help them find a love of music that will last their whole life long. 🎵

Jenny Wilkinson has been performing professionally for over 25 years. She runs Hey Dee Ho music and founded Fun-Key music singing and performance classes for school-age children in 1998. For more information visit the Hey Dee Ho music website at www.heydeehomusic.com.au