

TRAINING EXTRA 4

Music time

Music time is one of the best ways to have group time in a toddler group setting. Not only does it develop a child's musical, language, co-ordination and sequencing skills, but it also builds a relationship between carer and child. And as a whole group we can also enjoy creating something musical that we couldn't create on our own.

Confidence in leading a music time can only really be gained by, yes, you guessed it – leading a music time. Everyone has their first time, but by your third or fourth week you will be able to begin to relax enough to see what the children enjoy, and build on what you see is working well.

Preparation is essential. Make a short list (five or so) of the songs you want to sing. Take it to your bathroom and sing each three times, as high as you can. Most of us sing too low when nervous, so practising them high gives a more confident sound and a better lead for the children, whose voices are higher anyway. Practising in the bathroom just makes it sound better. Be sure you know the words off by heart.

Create a circle space with carpet squares, kneelers or seats. Ideally, it's better to have everyone on the floor so that children can sit on their carer's lap and the adult is free to bounce and rock with their child. Try to avoid having any toys in view.

Under-5s love knowing **what happens next**, so build a framework into your music time. Start with the same 'welcome' song, perhaps one that greets each child by name. Have a finishing song which remains the same each week. I like to finish by turning off the lights and singing a quiet rocking song, like 'Row, row, row your boat'. This generally leaves the children quiet and calm and having a nice cuddle while I give any notices in a gentle voice.

Percussion instruments are not toys. Treat them carefully and the children will too. Get them out just for specific songs, and see if the children can put them back 'as quietly as a mouse'. Play starting and stopping with a puppet hiding. Blow some bubbles and stop playing as the last bubble pops.

A steady beat is the principal building block of music. Any song that encourages children to move to a steady beat, by marching, walking, bobbing up and down, clapping, rocking, swinging from side to side, nodding, blinking or playing percussion is brilliant.

Singing for under-5s comes when they know a song really well. They are like mp3-players, downloading songs for a long time and only playing back in their own time - usually in the supermarket trolley! So don't be put off when they don't join in. They might just be staring at you, but this is their 'downloading' and an essential part of their learning. Pick songs which have just a small bit to join in with, for example Mother Duck's 'Quack, quack, quack, quack!' in 'Five little ducks'. Animal noises and fire engine sounds are a good way to enable children to find their singing voice.

Explore musical elements like start and stop, loud and quiet, fast and slow. You could use for example 'Wheels on the bus'. The children will show you what they enjoy and give you ideas. Repeat songs as many as 5-6 times in a row if they are enjoying it and don't worry about doing the same thing week in, week out – that's how under-5s love it!

Julia Plaut is a musician, songwriter and mum of three who has led music time in toddler groups as well as playing in orchestras worldwide. She has also produced several well-loved CDs of Bible-based toddler songs.

Training extras

Find out about Julia's music CDs in TRAINING EXTRAS Resource bank

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This article first appeared in *Playtime*, Autumn issue 2007.