



The Importance of Music Around the Holidays and in Life

Quick! Think about your favorite holiday memories from childhood—the ones so precious, you recreate their essential elements each year for your own children.

Whether it's singing along to songs from iconic TV specials "Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer", merrily singing "Dreidel, Dreidel, Dreidel" or even giggling together at "Santa Got Run Over by a Reindeer," chances are, your recollection might include music.

In fact, doesn't hearing iconic holiday tunes actually help trigger these vivid memories? It turns out, you're doing your kids a loving favor by linking happy memories to the joy-filled melodies that accompany celebration. There's a powerful developmental linkage to providing a music-filled childhood! For insight, we turned to **Sharyn Muhammad-Bakeer, Program Leadership Supervisor** at Child360, who explained that musical rhythms are part of life from the very beginning.

"It begins in the neonatal stage: The mother's heartbeat, her inhales and exhales—these are the rhythms babies are used to hearing." When infants start babbling, they experiment with different tones and rhythmic patterns: later on, toddlers often spontaneously clap their hands and dance, testing different ways of responding to sound. "They light up," says Muhammad-Bakeer, "Because it provides a familiar connection and comfort that began well before they were born. Rhythms and music are intrinsically soothing."

When young children reach the classroom, the developmental link strengthens.

"Music is a wonderful way to introduce new vocabulary to children and develop their language and literacy skills," says **Alex Himmel, Director of Strategic Initiatives** at Child360. Just think about the alphabet, and try to recite all 26 letters without singing the "A-B-C" song in your head! Colleague Muhammad-Bakeer agrees, explaining that music helps with memorization: Organize information with a melody, and meaning follows. "I taught my son how to spell his name using a tune because it was so long," she shares. "Music brought familiarity and confidence to this process, and he learned his name in no time."

There is a similar connection between music and the development of mathematical thinking. "Music...provides a context to experiment with patterns, a key math concept," according to Himmel. Counting songs reinforce this mental process early, as does formal training later on, to read music and play an instrument.

The presence of music in the learning environment has far-reaching benefits for young learners, and is one of the items in the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, when assessing the quality of an early care program. Some of the broader benefits include increased physical and athletic fitness; when children respond to music with their bodies, they develop coordination and muscles, and gain a sense of their current physical capabilities. Music and movement also teach children acceptable outlets to express emotion and relieve tension. We can't forget that music stimulates creativity and experimentation, as kids turn a broom into a dance partner or make up new lyrics for familiar songs.

“Just like with adults, music can provide comfort, joy, generate excitement and touch us in a way that speaks to our social-emotion development,” Himmel explains. If children have established musical fluency from a very young age—through shared experiences as diverse as focused instrument training, family sing-a-longs, participation in a church choir or the habitual use of background music in the home—it further enhances the developmental benefits in the classroom.

So cue up your favorite holiday music this year as you partake in your traditions! It will be a lasting gift for your little ones.

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