

Singing Songs with Your Baby

Bring the joy of music to your little one

By Alice Sterling Konig

Infants

As you stroke your baby's round tummy and croon singsong words of love, have you noticed how she responds with more coos and wiggles? By 3 weeks of age, infants respond to human voices with gurgling pleasure. Young babies even "practice" singsong melodies while they lie in their cribs. Croon to your little one no matter how tiny she is. Sing soft songs as you dress or bathe her. Sing and comment on what toy your baby is playing with or how her mouth moves when she is munching on cereal "o's."

Singing soothes babies

Use soothing songs, such as the classic Brahms's Lullaby, to lull your restless baby into sleep. Feel free to use slowly sung show tunes as lullabies. "Summertime, and the living is easy/fish are jumping and the cotton is high" are words from a favorite tune from *Porgy and Bees*.

Babies respond with pleasure to cradlesongs of many cultures. Perhaps your baby's grandparents can sing a lullaby from the land of their parents. African-American lullabies are poignantly beautiful, as are traditional folk songs. "All the Pretty Little Horses" promises:

Hush-a-bye, don't you cry;

go to sleep little baby.

*When you wake, you shall have
all the pretty little horses.*

*Dapples and grays, blacks and bays
a coach and six pretty horses.*

If you are worried about staying on pitch, then just hum two tones with the simple soothing sounds, "Ah-uh, Ah-uh."

Compose simple words to well-known melodies to personalize songs. Your baby will feel unique and treasured as you "customize" your lilting chant: "Ofira is smiling a happy smile, a happy smile, a happy smile" to the simple tune of "This is the way we wash our clothes."

Hum wordlessly as you dance slowly with your precious bundle in arms. Juggling a very young baby against your warm tummy as you dance can even soothe colic while you reassure your baby emotionally that you are there to help.

On entering non-parental care, some babies are initially distressed at separation from parents. Ask your care provider to cuddle your baby and sing a song to reflect your

baby's wishes. The caregiver can try: "You want your mama to come back soon" or "Soon your papa is coming back" (to the tune of "The Farmer in the Dell") to satisfy a fretful or worried baby. Singing has deep emotional healing power. Create a simple melody to sing over and over to comfort a sprawling baby who gets a bump or a baby scared by a loud noise.

Singing benefits babies

Songs inspire a love of beauty. As you sing richly rhyming words, you are providing aesthetic pleasures for your baby. By about 8 months, babies love when words start with plosive sounds, such as *P* or *F*. Your baby will chuckle as you chant such alliterative sounds in a made-up song.

Singing also boosts early learning. Songs can help your baby learn body parts and the names of important items such as *blankie* and *ball* and *doggie* and *banana*. Watch your year-old baby grin as you sing "This little piggy goes to market" and wiggle each precious baby toe. Often your baby shows pleasure by thrusting out toes for you to begin singing the song again. "More!" is an early baby word that signals how welcome your singing is! Remember to sing over and over a much beloved song like "Twinkle Twinkle, Little Star." Song repetition builds mental muscles as your baby learns to anticipate the rhythmic and verbal patterns of the song.

By 7 or 8 months, babies bounce naturally and rhythmically to music, and songs help babies develop grace and motoric skill. Songs with accompanying finger plays, such as "Pat-a-Cake" or "The Itsy-Bitsy Spider," promote hand dexterity.

Toddlers

Young toddlers chant to themselves. In their cribs, they play creatively rhyming nonsense words (such as "oogie woogie poogie") in musical rhythmic tones.

The power of song

Singing is a powerful tool for letting your toddler know that you understand his feelings and needs. Make up songs that include your toddler's name. Chant a song about how you are changing Edu's diaper to help him feel all clean and fresh and how he wants to wiggle away. Or make up a song to reassure a fussy and just-waking-up toddler that you are there and ready to comfort him with your personalized song.

Hearing his own name substituted into a familiar song makes a young child feel very special. Try spelling out your toddler's name in a song about a dog named Bingo.

For example:

There was a family who had a child

And Harold was his name-o

H-A-R-O-L-D, H-A-R-O-L-D,

H-A-R-O-L-D,

Harold was his name-o.

Use songs to ease daily routines. When it is time for your toddler to put away blocks or get ready for lunch, melodies and singsong chants with made-up words will prepare her more easily for a transition. To get enthusiastic toddler cooperation after lunch, sing “This is the way we brush our teeth, brush our teeth, brush our teeth.”

Singing has a connection to early learning

Songs will help stretch your toddler’s memorizing powers. Long rhyming-couplet songs, such as “Hush little baby/don’t say a word/Papa’s gonna buy you/a mockingbird” or “The fox went out on a chilly night/and he prayed for the moon to give him light” stretch your toddler’s powers of organizing and remembering long sequences of words. Singing boosts your toddler’s learning! Some toddlers can cheerfully sing parts of the alphabet by 2 years of age.

To develop early thinking skills, try singing “The bear went over the mountain/to see what he could see.” Watch for your toddler’s tell-tale grin as the realization dawns about how humorous this song is. Each time the bear climbs over the mountain, he sees another mountain. When he climbs that mountain, he sees yet ANOTHER mountain.

Toddler singing games with actions, such as “Ring Around the Rosie” and “The Wheels on the Bus Go ‘Round and ‘Round” encourage organized movements and body gracefulness. “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” galvanizes vigorous toddler movements. “Sally go ‘round the sun/Sally go ‘round the moon/Sally go ‘round the chimney tops/ every afternoon/BOOM!” is a simple circle song particularly beloved of younger toddlers who love to fall down on a soft rug giggling at the word BOOM.

To boost eye-hand coordination, you may want to provide simple musical instruments such as wooden blocks to click together, shakable maracas, a triangle to tap with a metal stick, or Velcro-fastened wrist bells to shake.

Some toddlers carry tune early, some later. Toddlers differ immediately in their ability to carry a tune or learn song words. After you have sung a song for months, notice whether your toddler begins to join in to sing “Ba ba black sheep/have you any wool?” Some toddlers cannot carry a tune yet, but they bounce, march and dance delightedly around the room to the gentle melodic rhythms of your spontaneous singing.

Try singing as often as you can with your little one. You will increase cozy, warm feelings in the family, ease anxiety, and increase your toddler’s sense of mastery with words and tunes. Your singing spreads happy feelings throughout the day!

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