

ARTICLE

Come Sing with Me

Article authored by:

Holly Hatton-Bowers, PhD, Assistant Professor and Early Childhood Extension Specialist, Child, Youth and Family Studies, UNL

Julia Torquati, PhD, Professor, Buffett Community Chair in Infant Mental Health, Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies

Babies and toddlers love when people sing to them. Parents do not have to carry a tune or be a great singer when singing to young children. There are many benefits for infants and toddlers when their caregivers sing to them; such as helping to soothe and calm them and promoting connection, bonding, and language development.

Studies find that [infants prefer mothers singing to them](#) over being spoken to and [infants remain calmer for a longer period of time when hearing songs](#) over someone speaking to them. In fact, infants prefer higher pitched singing and voices. It is not unusual for parents to find themselves talking in a higher pitched tone when talking to babies because they notice how babies respond with greater attention and joy to these vocalizations. ***Infants also prefer being sung to rather than listening to music.*** This is because they are enjoying the interactions that occur while being sung to and they also prefer familiar voices.

One of the greatest benefits of singing to babies is that it promotes connections, bonding and secure attachments; helping children develop a felt sense of safety, security and predictability. Through singing a baby learns to communicate with mutual eye gaze, smiling, and feeling comfort. Infants who are scared show decreased reactivity in their heart rate when they are sung lullabies. Singing lullabies can

also calm and bring comfort to the parent. Another benefit of singing is that supports [serve and return interactions](#) that are essential for early brain development.

As babies get older, they will enjoy participating in the singing and practicing the vocalizations. Singing is a great way to introduce new sounds and words and can support the development of concentration, listening skills, and language development. Songs provide a way for children to discriminate sounds and build their phonological awareness which is critically important for the development of reading. Singing also enhances memory skills by singing the same song over and over. Children love repetition and it is so helpful for their learning and development. For older babies and toddlers, it can be beneficial and fun to engage in playful singing. Parents can combine singing with body movements, such as tapping their leg or clapping their hands. Practicing singing in a playful way can also occur with a children's storybook that has a common rhyme or rhythm to it. Allow children to get creative and experiment with different songs and rhythms.

Singing can also help toddlers transition from one activity to the next. For example, as children get ready for bed, the parent can playfully engage them in a song to make clean-up fun by modifying *Brown Bear, Brown Bear What Do You See?* by saying the child's name and asking what they see. The child may respond or point to blocks! Then the parent can sing, "I see blocks looking at you. Let's clean them up!"

So parents, take time to sing to your infant or toddler and do not worry about being off-key. Be creative and have fun.

For additional resources and ideas:

[Rhyming Books that You Can Sing](#)

[Beyond Twinkle Twinkle: Using Music with Infants and Toddlers](#)



Helping kids grow healthier brains.

123connectwithme.org

Links:

Infants prefer mothers singing to them =

<https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/cdev.12647>

Infants remain calmer for a longer period of time when hearing songs =

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/infa.12114?deniedAccessCustomisedMessage=&userIsAuthenticated=false>

Serve and return interactions =

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/serve-and-return/>

Rhyming Books that You Can Sing =

<https://thisreadingmama.com/rhyming-books-you-can-sing/>

Beyond Twinkle, Twinkle: Using Music with Infants and Toddlers =

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/1514-beyond-twinkle-twinkle-using-music-with-infants-and-toddlers>