

ARTICLE

## The Benefits of Playing with Sound

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“Do you hear what I hear?” Taking the time to expose children to a world of sounds is so important for child development. Listening activities, such as listening to a parent sing, hearing a parent talk, and playing games supports young children in developing important listening skills. Engaging in these activities also develops their speech and language, enhances learning to read, and can support them in feeling closer and more connected to their caregivers.

When children experience sound, there is so much happening. They are learning about their world and developing their thinking. When a child hears different tones of voice, they are learning about emotions. When babies babble and a parent responds, the child learns communication. Playing with sounds is a great way to support brain development.

Here are some ways to play with and explore sounds:

- **Read children’s books every day.** When reading storybooks, parents can change the pitch of their voice and playfully talk about the pictures. Sing the words of the story. It can also be fun to read books that repeat phrases and rhyme, like *Is Your Mama a Llama?* by Deborah Guarino. Reading stories written in rhyme can support children to develop listening skills, phonemic awareness, and increase their vocabulary.
- **Take turns with sounds.** Children enjoy learning through play and learning how to take turns. Play games like peek-a-boo or make a sound and wait for the child to imitate the sound. The more children hear voices and sounds in this way, the more they get the opportunity to practice communicating.

- **Sing lot of songs and play music.** Singing songs that have rhymes and patterns can be a fun way to have children listen to sounds. Research finds that it is beneficial for children to hear music and sing at home. In a recent study, preschoolers who had families who were more musically active at home had more linguistic skills (Politimou, Bella, Farrugia, & Franco, 2019). So, play music and sing songs every day.
- **Explore sounds:** Take a cardboard paper towel tube and make different sounds with the tube close to the mouth. Or give a child a pot and a spoon and let them bang away. Playing with sound like this gives children a way to hear different pitches and rhythms.
- **What do you hear?** For children 3 years of age and older, invite them to stop, be quiet, and then see what they hear. Go outside and listen to the sound of the wind. Turn this into a game of being quiet and hearing no sounds or being quiet to listen to what sounds are around you.
- **Get excited about sounds.** When hearing a robin, cardinal, blue jay, crow, or other bird, ask the child “Did you hear the crow? Listen. I wonder what he is telling us today.” This will help the child focus their attention and begin to identify and understand the other animals who share our neighborhood. Getting children excited about sounds in this way helps them to begin understanding that animals have different ways to communicate.
- **Imitate sounds.** To help children pick out the sound of a specific bird, imitate that bird sound: “Did you hear the crow say Caw! Caw! Caw?” Encourage children to imitate sounds as well.
- **Use Your Body:** Parents can tap their legs, clap their hands, or stomp their feet. This is a wonderful way to use different senses to make sound.

One of the most important sounds for children is their parent’s voice. Remember that playing sounds is a great way to grow relationships with children and it supports their development. During this holiday season, it’s a great time to sing and play festive music. It is okay if songs are sung out of tune. Just remember to have fun. Children will have fun and be learning too.

## References

Politimou, N., Bella, S.D., Farrugia, N., & Franco, F. (2019). Born to Speak and Sing: Musical Predictors of Language Development in Pre-schoolers. *Frontiers in Psychology, 10*, 948

URL=<https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00>

## Additional Resources

- **Listening Skills**

This collection of audio promotes listening skills for pre-school, Reception and Key Stage 1 children with fun sound discrimination games...

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/school-radio/eyfs-listening-skills/zbc4y9q>

- **Supporting Language and Literacy Skills from 12-24 Months**

The idea of babies and toddlers talking, and reading can seem incredible. It isn't necessary to "teach" very young children but learn how you can begin to help your child develop their language and literacy skills...

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/1285-supporting-language-and-literacy-skills-from-12-24-months>

- **Playing with Music at Home**

Young children love to sing, make music, and move to the beat. They feel competent when they learn a new song, powerful when they pound a drum or shake a tambourine, and proud when they invent a new dance...

<https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/playing-music-home>