



## **Music in the Lives of Children**

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Music is universal. It is a phenomena that excites, saddens, inspires, frightens, and thrills! Throughout a child's life, they are exposed to countless musical experiences that influence the six developmental domains: social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, motor skills, and values. This article explores the remarkable world of music, how music is critical to a child's overall development, and how Grounds For Play encourages development and growth through musical experiences in outdoor play environments.

### **Musical Influence of Newborns**

Musical experiences start to influence the growth and development of children when they are newborns. Why does a mother cuddle and sing to their child? Why do they rock the child and hum little, delicate melodies? Picture this: a mother is rocking her newborn child while singing a nursery rhyme. The baby is soothed, smiles, and looks into his mother's eyes while she continues to hum and sing; the baby reaches up and touches his mother's smiling face. How critical is this parent-child interaction? Just in the illustration above, we see social, emotional, cognitive, motor, and language development. The social connection and emotional connection between the mother and baby can be seen through the physical proximity and visual and physical interactions. Elementary constructs of language, singing, and cognitive elements such as sound, musical tones, and words are also imparted in this example. A child's overall development is impacted by music as an infant and continues to be impacted as they grow older and enter schooling.

### **Musical Influence of Child Development**

"Music is as important as recess, art, movement, and gym. As a matter of fact, all of these other disciplines can be assimilated into music!" said Ariel Templeton, a music educator at Greenfield Middle School in Greenfield, Mass. According to the National Association for Music Education early exposure to music impacts areas of the brain related to language and reasoning. When exposed to music, the left side of the brain is better developed and can more easily imprint information to the brain. This in turn greatly impacts memory and vocabulary. Furthermore, music provides sound pattern, rhythm, and repetition, which increases potential mathematical pattern recognition skills. Sense of rhythm, imagination, and emotions are also impacted. Molly Porter, a music educator and director for Gardner Public Schools in Gardner, Mass., believes that music is a "language of its own." It's universal and includes melody, poetry, and individual self-expression. As educators, both Templeton and Porter discuss the importance of music classes because musical play leads to creative and mathematical thinking, memorization, and body movements, such as hand clapping and finger snapping.

“OK children, let’s make a circle. Everyone take hands and let’s sing our circle songs. Now, Norberto is new today, so you will have to help him with the words, OK?” said an elementary school teacher. All of the children looked over in Norberto’s direction and he smiled. They sang a few classic children songs such as “If You’re Happy and You Know It” and “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.” What are the goals of these songs in a classroom setting? These songs expose children to a mix of diverse rhymes, rhythms, and simple lyrics. Children learn to sing songs so they learn words, rhythms, and tempo. In doing so, we engage children in learning music, which impacts their continued interest and engagement in school and other activities. Those students involved with music education are more likely to not only stay in school, but also excel in the other subject areas well.

Here is a list of 10 popular children’s songs. At a young age, these songs and stories expose children to music and impact a child’s imagination and curiosity.

1. “Happy Birthday”
2. “Ring Around the Rosies”
3. “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes”
4. “London Bridge”
5. “The Itsy Bitsy Spider”
6. “Old MacDonald Had a Farm”
7. “Mary Had a Little Lamb”
8. “Rock-a-Bye Baby”
9. “Five Little Monkeys”
10. “The Hokey Pokey”



*Melodious Butterfly*



*Bongo Panel*



*Imbarimba*

Dr. Ani Patel, professor of psychology at Tufts University, wrote “Music, Language and the Brain”, which raises questions as how music and neuroscience may have an impact on exploring how the brain functions and how more complex structures and mental capacity may indeed have a connection to music. Patel states,

If we know how and why music changes the brain in ways that affect other cognitive abilities, this could have a real impact on the value we put on it as an activity in the schools, not to mention all the impact it has on emotional development, emotional maturity, social skills, stick-to-itiveness, things we typically don’t measure in school but which are highly important in a child’s ultimate success.

Christopher Chau and Theresa Riforgiate in their work, “The Influence of Music on the Development of Children,” share that some researchers and musicians believe that musical ear training may have an impact on reading skills, rhythmic accuracy, musicality, and sight-reading skills. Melissa Locker, in her *Time* article “This is How Music Can Change Your Brain,” states,

There's little doubt that learning to play a musical instrument is great for developing brains. Science has shown that when children learn to play music, their brains begin to hear and process sounds that they couldn't otherwise hear. This helps them develop "neurophysiological distinction" between certain sounds that can aid in literacy, which can translate into improved academic results for kids.

### **Grounds For Play Encourages Development and Growth Through Musical Play**

Just as that mother sang to her baby a little lullaby, children can hear, see, and experience a diversity of music. With the continued support of family, schools, and community, children will continue to learn and make music. Your children can make music by exploring sounds and rhythms through using their hands, feet, and voices as instruments. What if we provided children with musical instruments to explore on a daily basis on their local playground? Let's now look at the diversity of musical play opportunities that Grounds For Play has to offer.

#### **Rhythm**

Very young children start off experimenting with sounds by clapping and moving their bodies, heads, and torsos. Later, they'll begin snapping their fingers and moving to the rhythm of music. When they become old enough, they can begin using musical instruments to make music. Grounds For Play provides many musical instruments that encourage children to use their hands, fists, palms or fingers. All of the instruments are designed to be accessible to children of all abilities! The Cajon Bongo, Palm Cajon, Jr., Palm Drum, Palm Lap Drum, Single Post Bongo, and Bongo Panel all provide children with the opportunity to engage in a variety of percussive sounds, beats, and rhythms. Children can play off of each other and echo back and forth on the diversity of drums that are available.

#### **Percussion and Musical Notes**

A percussion instrument creates sound by being struck or scraped by a mallet or hand. The Bongo Panel, Tuned Drums, and Sing Post Bongos allow children to discover pitch and judge sounds as higher or lower in scale. Grounds For Play's Akambira, Amadinda, and Metallophone present children with actual note variations; children can play using mallets or even their hands. The Marimba, Imbarimba I, Sound Wave, Rhythm, and the Jamaican Steel Drums provide opportunities to seek out and play different notes. The whimsical Lady Bug Drum also offers interesting sounds and notes.

#### **Musical Notes, Scales, and Harmony**

The Piper, Griffin, Merry, and Duet provide your outdoor play environment with a fun musical ensemble. These instruments allow children to experiment with the rich diversity of musical instruments both familiar and exotic. It is clear that Grounds For Play is encouraging musical play in children.

Music starts influencing children's lives as newborns and continues as they grow and become school-aged children. With the help of Grounds For Play products, you can incorporate musical instruments into your outdoor play environment to help children develop social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, motor skills, and values.

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