

KEEP KIDS SINGING

COMFORT, PLAY, TEACH

by Jacqui DeBique

Singing to children helps promote their development, so go ahead and give a “moo moo” here and a “moo moo” there; do the hokey pokey and turn yourself around. When it comes to children’s songs, it turns out that this really is what it’s all about—simple, silly lyrics that are fun to sing over and over again, with little more to



them than that. Parents and kids love singing songs like *Old MacDonald’s Farm* and acting out *The Hokey Pokey* together.

Making music and movement a regular part of our children’s lives supports their growth in joyful ways and brings beauty into their days.

According to the parenting and child development experts at Invest in Kids, Canada (*InvestInKids.ca*), a national charity aimed at helping parents improve their parenting skills, traditional classics sung routinely with our kids can have tremendous benefits. Invest in Kids’ thorough, research-based approach to parenting specifically aims to transform everyday parent-child routines and activities like singing favorite songs into teachable moments that actively support a child’s healthy social, emotional and intellectual development. Its positive approach to “opening a world of possibilities” is called Comfort, Play and Teach. Here’s how, illustrated via *Old MacDonald’s Farm*:

Comfort

If you do this: Repeat the song several

times, each time encouraging the child to say the name of a farm animal that she knows and make each animal’s unique sound (e.g., baa, cluck, oink, quack, woof-woof or gobble).

Your child will: Feel increasingly confident as you pay special attention to her when singing this familiar song. Older babies, who are now using 10 to 20 words, will proudly demonstrate what they know about animals and the sounds they make.

Play

If you do this: Suggest different farm animals that the child may be less familiar with. If he doesn’t know the animal’s sound, demonstrate the sound for him, or he can invent one.

Your child will: Build his imaginative skills as he tries to make these new sounds and pretends to be various farm animals. Toddlers are especially eager to try new things and love to pretend.

Teach

If you do this: Use a picture book about farm animals or puppets to make an activity visual and tactile. This supports a child with little prior experience with farm animals.

Your child will: Expand her vocabulary and build understanding of how farm animals differ from pets or jungle animals. Once a preschooler is speaking in complete sentences, she is likely to adore stories and will sit for longer periods as you read to her.

Songs like this one also can be used to build social skills. For instance, a group of young participants can take turns in activities and discussions. As they begin to experiment with sounds, words, word patterns, rhymes and rhythms, they also build speaking, listening and reading skills. Coming to identify familiar sounds in the environment encourages development of thinking and problem-solving skills, as well.

So, before you fade out, having decided that singing the chorus of a favorite tune once again is one time too many, remember, there’s more to the exercise than meets the E-I-E-I-O.



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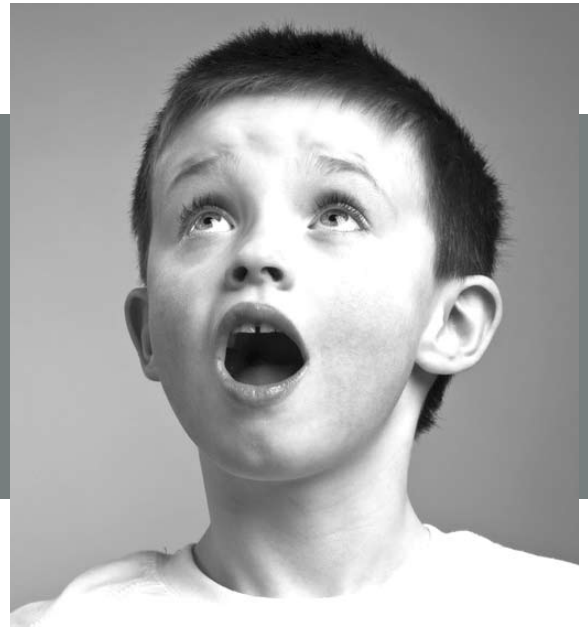
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Music Together®

with Sherri Almeida



“People are often afraid to sing out, to dance,” adds Sherri. “We dance a lot, and we can be silly. It’s all OK in class. Children connect with that, and they respect people who can be silly.”

There are several professionally facilitated groups for music with your children. An excellent one is Palmetto Children’s Music, a Music Together® program led by Sherri Almeida in Columbia at the Yoga and Wellness Center on Devine Street. A mom with a music background herself, Sherri fell in love with the program years ago and decided to train and get certified to teach it.

“The first thing,” explains Sherri, “is the bond that music can support between children and their parents—memories created that never go away. It’s a very special bond between caregiver and child, and it isn’t always a parent. It can also be a grandparent, nanny or any guardian.”

Children who participate with their parents are from infant to 5 years of age. No music background is required of either parents or children. It isn’t about music theory or practice, and there are no performances. It’s just meant to be a fun learning and bonding experience for children and parents that allows kids to be completely comfortable with expressing themselves through music.

“The number two goal is to help chil-

dren realize that they can do it—keep a beat, sing on pitch,” says Sherri. “Shy kids emerge, sometimes not until after they get home, and begin singing out loud what they heard in class that day. Children take what they need and experiment, and that’s how they learn. It’s such a boost in learning, self-expression, self-esteem and confidence. It helps many areas of development.”

Parents and their children sit on the floor in a big circle, and participate in chants and songs and use percussion instruments. When children see their parents or caregivers—the main person in their lives—enjoying music, they do, too. Class is only one hour per week, and children and parents take home what they learned to practice and explore through the week, where most learning happens at that age. “They learn to make music a part of their life every day,” says Sherri.

“People are often afraid to sing out, to dance,” adds Sherri. “We dance a lot, and we can be silly. It’s all OK in class. Children connect with that, and they respect people who can be silly. Often we laugh; it’s a lot of fun. So much is learned, but children don’t see it as a classroom.” In this nurturing environ-

ment, children can move about, dance around, and every child participates in crafting his or her own experiences. “Some kids stay close to their parents,” observes Sherri. “Some just watch; some play instruments. Everyone feels safe. I feel like my job is done if they can find comfort in music on the most stressful day of their lives. I hope they can find music as a familiar friend. That’s what it’s all about.”

Class is open to parents and caregivers with their children ages 0-5. For more info or to inquire about joining a class, call Sherri Almeida of Palmetto Children’s Music at (803) 546-7930 or visit PalmettoChildrensMusic.com. Classes are held at Yoga and Wellness Center of Columbia, 2740 Devine St, and in Lexington at Saxe Gotha Presbyterian Church, 5503 Sunset Blvd.

Other local parent-children music programs:

Music Makers of the Midlands, LLC, musicmakers@sc.twcbc.com, (803) 781-3344, 10071 Broad River Rd, Suite H, Irmo.

Kindermusik by Ally, kinderlady@gmail.com, (803) 730-9073, 207 Parsons Mill Ln, Columbia, and at Harmony School, 3737 Covenant Rd, Columbia.