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# 13 Music in Family Day Care

# Why is music so important in early education?

Almost everyone who has worked with children for any length of time knows that children love music. They love singing. Dancing. Following a beat. Creating rhymes.

Human beings seem like they are basically hardwired for musical experiences from birth, or even before then – while they are in their mother’s womb. People use music to communicate. To express themselves. To show love and to create.

Because music is so important to human beings, it is vitally important that children’s educators understand this and therefore understand why it is so important that they learn how to nurture children’s innate musicality.

- ▶ **Music** is important to help build children’s brains – it uses both sides of the brain and helps children build critical neural pathways in their brains.
- ▶ **Music** improves children's memory, cognitive development, learning skills and the ability to express themselves. Music also improves the children's physical skills.

- ▶ **Music** is a key building block for literacy and for numeracy. It expands children’s vocabulary and helps in speech recognition and learning mathematical concepts.
- ▶ **Music** helps children learn how to use and move their bodies through playing instruments and dancing.
- ▶ **Music** helps children meet the outcomes of the learning frameworks – shared songs and dances help children interact with others and help children forge their identity.
- ▶ **Music** helps build social skills such as taking turns and playing together.

In Family Day Care, ensuring that music is a key part of every day is important because in addition to the above, it helps:

- ▶ foster children’s language and hearing skills
- ▶ children to express themselves
- ▶ promote motor skills (from the fine motor skills to play an instrument to the gross motor skills of dancing)

- ▶ create intimacy between a child and their educator
- ▶ expand babies' communication
- ▶ create a sense of belonging
- ▶ create fun! It can make both educators and children happier.

**Did you know that children breathe differently when listening to different classical composers? Or that babies listen to lullabies for twice as long as they listen to adult speech.**



# Music and the developing human brain

Being exposed to music help children form strong neural pathways in their brain. How does it do this? Music helps create pathways in the brain by:

- ▶ **Giving children sounds they can mimic.** By being able to mimic the sounds they hear in music children can make sense of the world around them.
- ▶ **Helping to build intimacy.** People often sing to babies when holding them, sharing music with older children in car journeys, or when dancing with them – this creates bonds between an adult and a child.
- ▶ **Creating pathways for fine and large motor control.** Playing an instrument creates pathways for fine motor control – dancing and drumming is good for controlling joints and other parts of the body, and for gross motor skills.
- ▶ **Helps create social skills.** Instruments and dancing often involve concepts such as turn taking and other social skills.
- ▶ **Helps children feel and express emotions.** “If you are happy and you know it clap your hands...”

- ▶ **Strengthening the connection between the body and brain so they work together as a team.** The body moves to music as the brain listens and recognises the beat and melody.
- ▶ **Helping children develop a love of music.** Music is one of those things that needs to be enjoyed early in life to develop a love of it. Miss this critical phase when a child is receptive to music and they miss out for life.

**Did you know that the years from birth to six are critical to developing a child’s musical skills? When listening to music young children and babies unintentionally differentiate things such as frequency, tone and melody. They unscramble the different parts of music and then build up a mental organisation system to memorise it. Without this exposure in the early years they never build this important mental organisation system.**



# Music and movement

Making music and moving to music by tapping, clapping, dancing, swaying can help develop children's fine and large motor control. Music, when moved to, helps the brain and body work together.

From the moment babies are born they are learning to do things with their bodies. Very young children can often do things or explain things using movement that they can't think of the words for.

But dancing and moving to music is also important because it helps children use different muscles than they use when walking or standing or running.

Playing instruments or clapping out rhythms help children learn fine motor control.

Think about:

- ▶ dancing with ribbons
- ▶ marching to a drum
- ▶ jumping to music

- ▶ using cultural instruments and playing music from around the world
- ▶ slow dancing to classical music
- ▶ moving like animals to music
- ▶ banging on a big drum using the whole body
- ▶ singing action songs
- ▶ finger plays
- ▶ clapping songs
- ▶ leading beat patterns and asking children to follow you.

Remember that because children's bodies are smaller than adults their natural beat is faster. They enjoy songs with faster beats.

Remember that songs need to be played many times to learn the rhythms – and learning the rhythm and beat of a song is important to be able to dance to the song.



Movement  
is how the  
body sings.

# Music and literacy

Music has been shown to:

- ▶ increase children's vocabulary
- ▶ help children's knowledge of the sounds of words
- ▶ encourages children to use words (changing the lyrics in songs for example)
- ▶ help children reinforce new words – by singing words or parts of a word repetitively

**Educators need to foster all children's natural musicality not just for the sake of their musical development but also because it helps with development of key literacy skills.**

- ▶ help foster a range of skills that aid later literacy such as listening, counting, reproducing words, recognising words and using rhyming words
- ▶ expose children to the patterns of language such as basic spelling patterns, sentence patterns and parts of speech
- ▶ helps children understand story development and sequences which is important for sentence construction and writing
- ▶ create successful learning experiences– mastering the lyrics of a song helps a child feel positive about their learning capabilities
- ▶ improve children's attention and memory – both skills which are required for reading
- ▶ help develop critical and complex forms of thinking
- ▶ help children to coordinate and time movements – these skills are key parts of learning to read and write

## Music and maths

- ▶ promote automatic skills in movement which are thought to improve automatic skills in language and reading – these are needed so children become fluent readers and writers
- ▶ help children learn about the sounds and the order in which they're spoken through learning language patterns, such as those found in rhymes – this ultimately helps children to recognise and write text.
- ▶ help children learn the order of sounds in words – a skill they need in order to be able to learn to write. Repeated songs and rhymes help to embed language sounds in their brain.
- ▶ learn grammar – by constant repetition of songs and rhymes children learn the way words are put together
- ▶ help children develop a strong memory because humans remember songs more easily than rhymes, and rhymes more easily than other prose.
- ▶ helps children to subsequently be able to attend to differences and changes in language sounds.

Did you know that as well as helping with early literature, music is always mathematical?

- ▶ Beats mark out time in equal proportions. (Beat is the steady pulse that you feel in the tune, like a clock's tick.) Beats are often in groups of 4 (or 2 and 2).
- ▶ Rhythm is mathematically connected to the beat. (Rhythm is the way that the song builds up around a beat – often connected to the lyrics).

Music is also a good way of teaching maths – think of songs like,

- ▶ ***The Ants Go Marching.*** The ants go marching one by one. ...
- ▶ ***Ten Green Bottles.*** Ten green bottles. ...
- ▶ ***One, Two, Buckle My Shoe.*** One, two. ...
- ▶ ***Ten Little Fingers.*** Ten little fingers, ten little toes, ...
- ▶ ***Ten in a Bed.*** There were ten in the bed. ...

# What does quality musical education look like in Family Day Care?

Many educators use music as part of their curriculum. There are ways to ensure that music is not just used to fill the time or to put babies to sleep!

Even an educator who thinks they have few musical skills can ensure they are providing a quality musical education to children by following a few simple rules about what to do and what not to do.

## What not to do

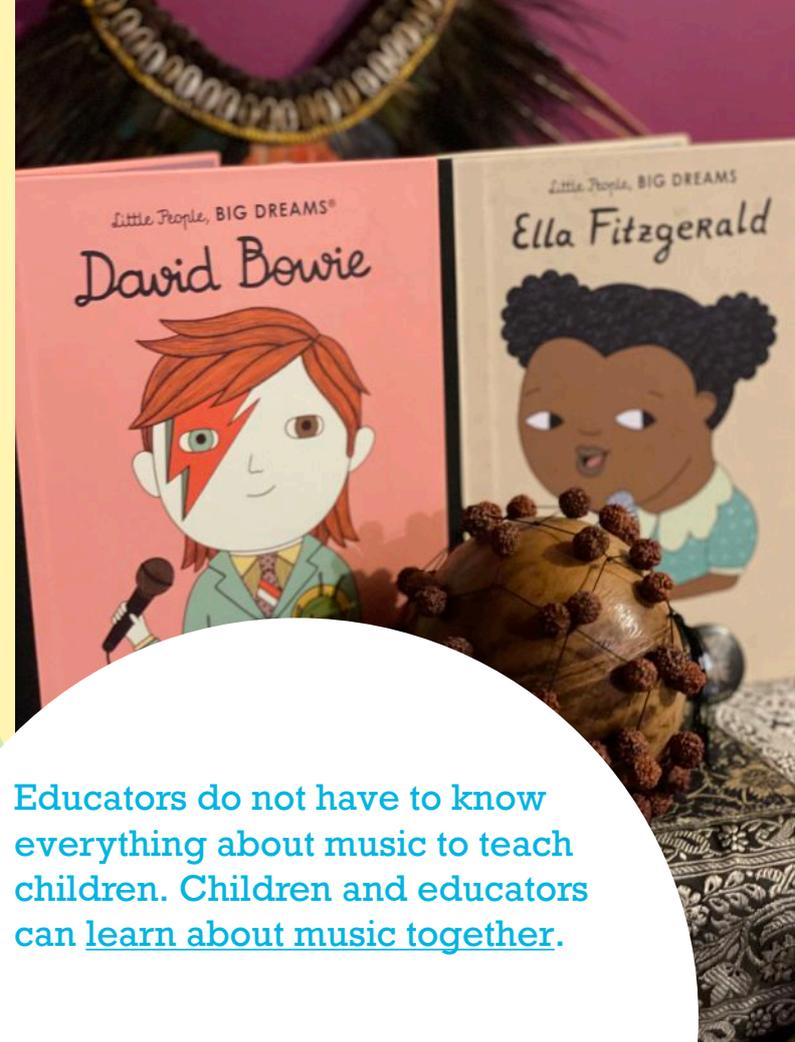
- ▶ Don't have music playing at all times. Young brains have to learn to pay attention to some things and not to others. Because you learnt how to do this, you can do something with background music playing. Children haven't yet learned to tune that out while they concentrate on other things.
- ▶ Don't always do the one sort of music activities. Vary things – percussion one day, dancing the next, listening to classical music at rest time the next.

- ▶ Don't play music with lyrics that are tricky. If you would not read a book to children about a concept, don't play a song about it.
- ▶ Have music too loud or too soft. All of us have different hearing levels, different levels of comfort. Watch the faces of your children to see if something is too loud or soft. (Remember that your hearing may have gotten worse as you have aged!)

## What to do

- ▶ Try to do something with music every day. Playing instruments, dancing, listening, singing.
- ▶ Play a variety of music. Classical music. Jazz, country music, pop. Not everything has to be special children's music.
- ▶ Talk to children about music in their lives. Do they listen to music in the car with Mum? Does Dad play music as he does the dishes?

- ▶ Learn the basics of music – things like melody, tone, pitch, rhythm, tempo. Name them for children. Help them learn to listen for the beat of a song, help them to learn the melody.
- ▶ Have earphones available and selections of music so that children can choose their own music to play and listen to. Talk to them about their choices.
- ▶ Help children develop strong aural (listening) skills by pointing out changes in pitch and rhythm.
- ▶ Give children lots of opportunity to experiment with instruments and voices and to experience making music with each other.
- ▶ Give children opportunities to listen to music from lots of different cultures.
- ▶ Allow children to be music creators, performers and appreciators.



**Educators do not have to know everything about music to teach children. Children and educators can learn about music together.**

# Types of musical education in Family Day Care

## 1. Dance

Dancing and other movement to music helps children learn key motor co-ordination skills; it can be embedded in lots of different types of play and can happen to a range of different music types. Nearly every culture has their own dances – you can teach about different cultures through a country's music and dance.

## 2. Listening

Children aren't born knowing how to decode the language of music. They need to be taught to listen to rhythm and beat. They need to learn about choruses and verse. They need to learn how to listen to music so they can learn lyrics. They need to learn about low notes and high notes. Listening doesn't mean sitting and listening – you can listen while you dance or listen as you learn lyrics or listen as you use instruments to tap out a beat.

## 3. Playing instruments

Playing instruments, especially non tuned percussion instruments such as cymbals and shakers, castanets and drums

and tambourines allows children to follow beats of songs and to create beats of their own.

## 4. Singing

Children love singing and they love listening to adults and other children sing. Teach them new songs as well as playing familiar songs. Introduce them to your favourite singers. Take them to concerts in your community so they can hear other people singing. Play them videos of children's choirs so they can see that singing isn't just for adults!

## 5. Performing

Children can perform the songs and dances they learn at Family Day Care – to each other, to you as their educator or to families.

## 6. Creating

Children need to be given space to create their own music. Their own songs. Their own rhythms. (Most children do this naturally but by noticing and nurturing what they do, you can give them confidence as music creators.)



Children rarely need to be encouraged to take pleasure from music, but as educators we must make sure they are given that chance as often as possible.

# Music for differing ages

At different ages children need different forms of music.

For babies try:

- ▶ singing when holding them – this promotes intimacy and closeness
- ▶ playing classical music as they go to sleep
- ▶ playing music or singing during nappy changes
- ▶ making up silly songs about what you are doing during care routines
- ▶ holding them as you dance with older children
- ▶ mock waltzing with them in your arms at any time.

For toddlers try:

- ▶ singing and dancing with music – this is the best age to play familiar songs and rhymes
- ▶ introducing songs at key transition times
- ▶ clapping games

- ▶ stamping games

- ▶ percussion instruments – give your toddlers drums, maracas, rain sticks.

For preschoolers try:

- ▶ playing instruments
- ▶ performing
- ▶ dancing
- ▶ music from around the world
- ▶ development of listening skills
- ▶ making music in the playground
- ▶ letting them choose their own music to listen to.

For all ages find music in the community you can access. Free concerts, school performances, dance performances, cultural events. Children love concerts!



Children will participate more in musical activities as they grow but babies are soothed or stimulated by music well before they can hold a maraca or dance.

# Aboriginal music

A great way of helping embed Aboriginal culture across your program is to introduce Aboriginal music and dance into your program.

Ideas to try:

- ▶ Did you know several nursery rhymes such as Twinkle, Twinkle, little Star and Heads Shoulders, Knees and Toes have been translated into some Aboriginal languages? Maybe you could teach your children the Aboriginal versions? Translations [here](#).
- ▶ ABC Kids has commissioned new Aboriginal lullabies. They can be heard [here](#).
- ▶ Have you heard or do you sing the traditional Yorta Yorta lullaby Inanay? Listen to it [here](#).
- ▶ Watch some Aboriginal dancing with your children. See if there is any happening at any time in your local community. If not look at it on the internet such as [here](#). Dancing is used by Aboriginal people as a form of storytelling – often about the land, animals and dreamtime. Modern Aboriginal Dance is performed around the world by dance troupes such as Bangarra Dance Theatre. Watch [here](#).
- ▶ You can view Aboriginal dances about animals such as
  - [cranes](#)
  - [kangaroos](#)
- ▶ Listen to contemporary Aboriginal music. Explore the music of:
  - [Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu](#)
  - [Kev Carmody](#)
  - [Baker Boy](#)
  - [Coloured Stone](#)
  - [Thelma Plum](#)
  - [Yothu Yindi](#)
- ▶ Explore Aboriginal instruments such as [didgeridoos and clapsticks](#).
- ▶ Research Aboriginal [Songlines](#).



# How to make instruments

There are lots of good websites that give ideas for making instruments with children. Think about homemade:

Percussion instruments: castanets, egg shakers, drums, bell bracelets, rain sticks, clapping sticks – all can be made with simple materials you have in your homes.

String instruments: paper plate banjos, box guitars, finger strummers – again, simple to make, fun to play.

Wind instruments: harmonicas, French horns, xylophones made of pipes, kazoos from toilet rolls, panpipes from paper straws.

Check these websites out for instructions and more ideas:

- ▶ [5 instruments kids can make](#)
- ▶ [10 DIY musical instruments for kids](#)
- ▶ [25 easy DIY musical instruments](#)





“The best part about making musical instruments is that it combines both art and music! What’s not to love about that?”

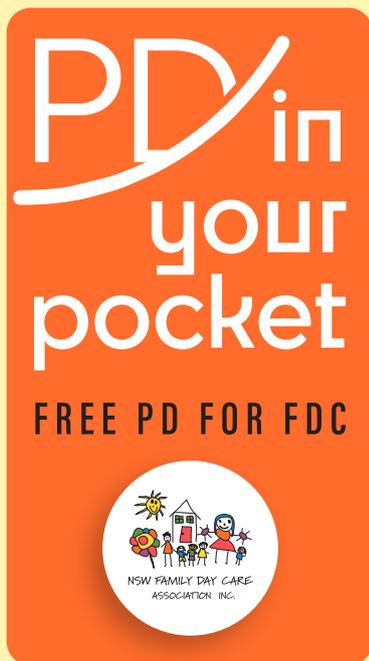
# Using recorded music

Playing recorded music is a good way to help children develop good ears for music.

- ▶ Use CDs or vinyl records or subscribe to an electronic music service like Spotify. (There is a free version or you can pay \$11.95 to listen without ads.)
- ▶ If you are using Spotify or another music streaming service create playlists with different songs for different activities. You can help older children choose songs to create their own playlists.
  - Dance songs
  - Children’s songs
  - Packing away music
  - Classical music
  - Pop/rock music
  - Aboriginal music
  - Music from a range of different cultures
  - Songs to sing along to.

- ▶ Use other people’s playlists. ABC Kids Music has a list of the 100 best songs for toddlers and preschoolers. Find it [here](#).
- ▶ You can often pick up CDs cheaply at markets and second-hand shops. Get a cheap CD player and some headphones so children can listen to music of their choice.
- ▶ Sometimes music can be listened to while doing other activities such as clearing up or creating art. Check out children’s faces and bodies to see if this is working for them or not.
- ▶ Try lots of different recorded music to dance to. Some children may love classical music, others hip hop or heavy rock.
- ▶ Repetition is key. Children (and adults) need to hear songs 6 times at least before there can be any degree of familiarity.
- ▶ Recorded music can be a great way of introducing different cultures to children.

# This booklet is part of the PD In Your Pocket professional development program.



This topic – **Music in Family Day Care** – has an accompanying webinar and video, both of which can be viewed as videos or listened to as podcasts.

There is also a Facebook Group where you can discuss the topic with other Family Day Care educators in NSW.

For more information about PD In Your Pocket, go to:

[www.nswfdc.org.au/pdinyourpocket](http://www.nswfdc.org.au/pdinyourpocket)



NSW FAMILY DAY CARE  
ASSOCIATION INC.

“If children are not introduced to music at an early age, I believe something fundamental is actually being taken from them.”

Luciano Pavarotti

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April 2022



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