



Why music with babies?

Congratulations!

A new baby has just entered an busy, routine, adult world. The parent will hear tiny cries, a murmur as their baby adjusts to light, sounds and movement. New-born babies observe their environment amodally (Bower, 1977). That is, holistically through all the senses.

Over the ensuing days and weeks sounds and movements by a newborn baby become more pronounced, seemingly decisive, and assertive. If, in those moments a parent pauses, he or she might notice brief musical patterns emerging. Little snippets of melodic phrases surging momentarily up and down, a sudden jerk, a curl of the hand and then release; taut, then softly relaxing.

Musical beings

Musical? Very. We know that 'babies begin their journey as an innately musical/poetic being (Trevvarthen, 2009).' Imagine violins moving along in great melodic waves, a hiccup, sonorous notes of a cello, trills from flutes, then silence again. Even in that great moment as the new baby emerges, she or he will experience orchestral waves of booming heart beats, digestive drum rolls, with muscles crashing out their melodious responses to accompany that last shove towards the Great Outdoors, and life.

A baby is intrinsically musical during pre-birth growth because of the combined experiences of motion and sound inside. We know that a baby's aural sense is developed at around 16 weeks post-conception. This means that expressive rhythm and intonation of a mother's voice is experienced from within. Her speech will be 'known and sought for after birth' (Flohr and Trevvarthen (2008). If a mother appreciated that pre-birth experiences were not only spontaneous and musical, but also largely of her doing, then she might consider enjoying music together, when ready. Engaging in musical activities with a new baby is a deeply personal experience, and one that should be celebrated and shared in gentle, appropriate ways.

Why music?

Why pursue musical experiences with a new baby? What indeed are the benefits apart from having a lovely time and enjoying dancing, singing silly songs and experiencing a range of different instrumental sounds? That is the point. Enjoying music together is a positive and life-enriching sensation. Musical games nurtures attachment between a baby and parent.

Music and musical experiences comes from the voice, an instrument, a cd or a vibrant aural environment creating surround-sound. Musical play together gives a young baby a sense of belonging, a sense of community and acknowledgement. Endorphins come alive through musical engagement. The enriched experiences are shared and mutually positive. Musical play relieves stress, routine, or difficult moments. Regular musical experiences help a parent and baby to understand each other, and be mutually attuned (Stern et al, 1985).

Music opens up all those neurons that are furiously developing as each one absorbs every life experience. A new baby will develop listening, aural focus, the dissemination of information, the ability to make choices, to be creative, understand structure, ... the list is endless.

New parents often struggle to nurture their babies due to life's general demands, particularly if both work and have siblings and other domestic distractions. Perhaps too, there is an element of 'just getting on with it' and influences from other parents who may demonstrate practical routine and behaviour patterns that may not fit with your new baby's responses. Feelings can often be overwhelming as new parents face enormous life adjustments and complex emotions.

Creating sounds and miniature songs

Vocal communication appears to be an important component for the maintenance of emotional attachment between a baby and her parents (Braun and Bock, (2008). Throughout the centuries parents all over the world have sung to dissolve emotional turmoil and to help their baby to feel calm.

Sound making and humming are often a precursor to lullabies, which in turn can be composed on the spot, or have been passed down through the generations. It is not the words that get them to sleep but the language of the music: the rhythm and the rhyme, the repetition of phrases and sections, the rise and fall of melody and, of course, the use of silence.

What we also know is that by murmuring lullabies or repeated sounds, parents are also alleviating stress for themselves. In turn their baby feels this and responds accordingly. Like a musical wheel, mother and infant responses are rich in timing, rhythmic lilt and pitch relationships, all of which is employed in music making (Hutchinson, 2012).

Musical suggestions

So, what sort of musical things can you do? Concerns by parents often include "but I cannot sing" "I have a rubbish voice". A mother or father's voice is the most beautiful sound a baby will hear. Hearing a mother's voice will do more to support attachment and overall development than any professional recording, app or musician ever will.

Use gentle rocking movements and with just two notes (think of the doorbell or ambulance sound). Try singing "baby, baby, I love you" or "sleepy, darling, moon's up high". Although the words may only make sense to you the lilting melody is vital, nurturing and reassuring to your baby. A rhythmical melody (think skipping rhythm) can enhance whatever you might be doing when singing – bathing, dressing or walking with your baby.

Sing your favourite song with your baby held close to you. Making eye contact is such an obvious thing to do, but so many people forget this in the rush to catch the phone, to text, or nip out, with the pram facing outwards, and the baby forced in an upright position. A tiny baby will benefit more in the earliest stages lying flat, towards their parent, with lots of eye contacts and conversational sounds.

Musical activities together

Lie your baby on a bed or cushion. Create circle movements on his tummy whilst you utter gently

“Lolly, lolly Pop! Lolly lolly Pop!

Lolly lolly lolly lolly lolly lolly Pop!”

Clap your hands gently or pat baby's tummy on “POP!”

Whilst rocking sing

“Sea saw Marjory Daw, baby shall have a new master,

He/she will have but a penny a day because he/she can't work any faster”.

Substitute “baby” with your baby's name.

Whisper the following whilst facing your baby with lots of eye contact and gentle bouncing:

“Gallee Galle gallee,

galloo, galloo, galloo,

gallee, galloo,

gallee galloo gallee!

Weeee!”

On “weeee!” gently lift your baby up, still retaining eye contact.

This is a wonderful motion/vocal activity. By creating sound and strong movement with your lips, you will, in time notice your baby imitating you in the smallest detail.

Make water sounds as you hold your baby close, rocking gently. Using the two-note idea (think “nee nor”), sing the following again, with lots of eye contact:

Make a wave for me

Make a wave for me

Far across the sea

Up (lift baby up) and down (bring baby down)

Up and down (as before).

Over the deep blue sea (as with lines 1 and 2). © 2007

Where is your head?

Lie your baby on a bed or cushion. Gently sing, touch and tickle to the following:

“Where is your head? Where is your head?”

Ticklylaylee, ticklylaylee, 1,2,3!” © 2008

“Where are your arms?” (as before)

Music supporting language

Acknowledging and responding to regular aural stimulus helps a new baby is the earliest form of language acquisition. Melodic utterance such as ‘coos’ and nonsense sounds (often known as baby babble) provides not just amusement for the baby and parents, but prepares a baby for linguistic development, social engagement and the confidence to be heard amongst others.

Love music, love yourself and love your baby. Go on; grab your coats, scoop up your baby and head to the nearest music class. But, be warned, it must be the best for your baby as well as for you.

Emma Hutchinson MA

Early Years Music Specialist

emma@musichouseforchildren.com

www.musichouseforchildren.com

www.musichousecourses.com

© Emma Hutchinson 2017