

Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl

Enhancing Family Life Through Music

“Music produces a kind of pleasure that human nature cannot do without.”

~ Confucius

ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL, the famous Polish rabbi who marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, once said, “First we sing, then we understand.” This saying provides a window into the wonderful benefits of communicating with and connecting to children through music. Mothers have traditionally sung to soothe their babies and teach them their first words through musical games.

Today those activities have become communal events; musical programs for parents of infants and toddlers to sing and dance together abound. It’s obvious that young children love singing with us. However, as children get older and want to learn to play an instrument or participate in a school chorus, we can easily forget the cohesive feelings of exploring music as a family.

Before radio and television provided entertainment, families often made a habit of making music as a satisfying pastime. For example, after dinner every night Albert Einstein would accompany his mother’s piano playing with his violin. Music has the power to unite people with a particular mood and even get them moving on to the next thing in happy ways.

Most teachers know that young children respond more readily to directions if they are sung. Try experimenting with the difference of saying or singing, “It’s clean-up time.” As children get older and identify with particular kinds of music, listening to the groups they like is a way of staying in touch.

Here are some ideas for using music to enhance your family life:

Make transitions through song. “Now it’s time to take our bath, take our bath...”

Encourage musical improvisation. A little girl was picking up golden leaves in the yard. I said, “Why don’t you sing a song about it?” She immediately burst into joyful melody and dance, and her friend eagerly joined in.

Make a list of family favorites. What are the songs you like to sing as a family while riding in the car or cleaning up after a meal? Writing down your family “hits” brings a sense of cohesion. Everyone gets a vote.

Create a song about a family event. Music can help us prepare for new experiences more easily than words. “Grandma and Grandpa are coming to stay, stay, stay...”

Drop everything when your child wants to dance. Recently my three-year-old grandson starting dancing on our way out of Nordstrom. I stopped and danced for a minute too, which delighted him and passers-by.

Encourage self-expression through rap. Encourage an older child to write down some of her feelings to create a rap song by choosing a topic, brainstorming some words, and choosing a beat.

Take music lessons with your child. Many music teachers will give lessons to adults and children; some will even come to your home.

Make family percussion. Let each person choose a way of making a percussive sound with his body—hand clapping, foot stomping, cheek popping, tongue clicking—and then establish a beat.

Attend music camp together. You don't have to have talent or skill to have fun at a family music camp. Look up camps online.

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