

*If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands.  
If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands.  
If you're happy and you know it, and you really want  
to show it, If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands.*

## How music helps your toddler's development

BY POORNIMA JAYARAMAN  
THE SOUTHERN

**T**hrough the centuries, kids everywhere have clapped their hands, slapped their knees, stomped their feet, snapped their fingers and nodded their little heads to this popular nursery rhyme.

While it may be just a song at its most basic level, on a more complex level it also teaches kids hand-eye coordination and helps them express emotions and feelings.

"Music is a powerful stimulus," says Catherine McHugh, professor emerita at the School of Music at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

"It stimulates both sides of your brain simultaneously and assists in the overall development of the individual child."

McHugh, now 94, was instrumental in starting the music and special education program at the SIUC School of Music. The program was discontinued in later years.

"We worked with Archway Services for Children in those days and tried to stimulate the imagination and learning processes of special children with music," McHugh says.

While the benefits of music therapy for special populations have been well-

documented, more and more parents are now looking at early childhood music programs for their babies, toddlers, preschoolers, and kindergarteners, to help them learn through the stimulation of multi-sensory experiences.

Experts say it is a motivating and fun way to develop cognitive, academic, communication, social interaction and motor coordination skills.

Nana Wendt, an early childhood music and movement teacher with the international program Music Together, is the director of Heartland Music Together in Carbondale and Carterville.

The Music Together program that Wendt teaches believes in the musical ability of every child.

"All children can learn to sing in tune, keep a beat, and participate with confidence in the music of our culture, provided that their early environment supports such learning," Wendt says. "For example movement is a big component; we integrate finger play and exercise and improvise a lot, while talking about issues such as separation anxiety through music."

Other topics could include "Mommy went to hospital" or something as basic as "We painted the bathroom."

"When you work with kids you are trying to find a whole different language to relate to and reach them on a very personal level," Wendt says. "Music is a fantastic tool."

Wendt, who holds a master's degree from Germany in psychology with a focus on psychotherapy and child development, believes

music can provide an emotional and intellectual catharsis of sorts and is a wonderful way to bond with a child on a very deep level.

"Unfortunately our society doesn't really foster the musical ability of the child," she says.

A mother to three musical girls, Wendt holds musical conversations time and again with her kids.

"Its playful, fun and helps express feelings," she says.

Alyce Ward, Suzuki piano educator and preschool music educator at Carbondale-based Talent Education School of Southern Illinois, believes the earlier you expose your child to music the better.

"Surround your child with quality music and see what a difference it can make to your child's overall development," she says. "I didn't realize how important it could be until I had a child myself. And I can tell you, it has made a difference in my son's life."

Ward teaches an educationally-based music and movement program called Wiggles n' Tunes targeting kids 8 months to 4 years old. Parents and children participate in a colorful world of music and movement.

"There is so much value in it; it's a group experience, a family experience and a bonding experience," Ward says. "The parent is an important part of the triangle made up of the child, teacher and parent."

poornima.jayaraman@thesouthern.com  
351-5019