

Singing with Babies

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Many babies are attracted to music like moths to a flame. They lock eyes with you, turn your way, crawl if they can, pull themselves up on your guitar and kick with rhythmic glee. Sometimes they are soothed from crying, other times their utterances echo your words. They pay attention, and they are totally engaged with the musical environment you create.

As the music teacher at an infant center in Manhattan who has been singing with preschool kids for more than 10 years, I've seen babies who literally live for music. Nothing could have prepared me for the intensity and joy of singing with a group of children under a year, those lying on their backs looking up at me, the children you might ordinarily assume aren't doing much because they [don't yet speak](#) and they don't yet sing.

When you give a child a song, you create an emotional bridge for crossing both ways. You invite the child to be with you, to come closer, and experience the vibrating tone, the face in enjoyment, and the moving body. In turn, they drink you up with their attention and curiosity. They want to know you, your song, and to understand how music works, especially if you come with a guitar.

A recent study by scholars at Oxford University revealed that when people sing together they develop an almost immediate bond. For babies who aren't yet able to use expressive language, songs can help them get to know their adults and the larger world more deeply. Music is a sure way to touch your baby's heart and to nourish your unique bond.

Here are 9 ways you can bring song into your baby's life during the first two years.

1. **Choose songs strategically.** A small song might be quiet, slow and short, and possibly accompanied by hand or finger movements. A medium song might involve a book, some bigger movements, more volume. And a big song, is louder, more frolicking in rhythm, faster, and simply captivates all the senses. When singing with children it is important to vary between these types of songs and to read your audience. Don't sing a fast and loud song to a child who is overstimulated and needs to be calmed or lulled. Introduce a frolicking song to an energetic child who needs to move now!
2. **Pay attention to children's signals.** If the child is not really with you, needs quiet time, or indicates through their body language or utterances that they are done, respect that.
3. **Children benefit from a huge amount of repetition.** Infants and toddlers don't get bored. Hearing the same songs over and over, like reading the same [book](#) many times, is a great comfort to children. They learn through repeated exposure.
4. **Props of various kinds can help infants and toddlers focus attention.** Your hands are a kind of prop. They can be birds, clap a rhythm, strum in time. Motions that are predictable help ground the infant as they take in new information. Puppets function similarly, especially if you always use a particular puppet when you sing a certain song.
5. **Illustrated songbooks are great for those less comfortable with our singing voices.** Books make us feel more confident, and the images are captivating to everyone. With four or five books, you can sustain a musical interaction for a very long time, showing how a passionate engaged infant defies our stereotype of what they can do and for how long.
6. **Don't judge the audience by their behavior.** When sharing music with infants and toddlers, remember that their behavior won't conform to your notion of a good audience. Depending on their age, development and temperament, they will be more or less quiet, still, interested, etc. They may turn the other way, play with toys, climb on a friend, and they still could be very involved in what you are doing, soaking it all up.
7. **One song can serve many purposes.** Infants and toddlers enjoy many of the same songs, though they will enter them, use them and respond to them differently. For example, as you sing and do a finger play to Two Little Blackbirds, a group of babies on their backs may watch your hands and mouth, 15-month-olds might intermittently try out the moves, and those just over two will integrate words, motions, pace etc.
8. **Reaction to music will vary and may come when you least expect it.** Just as expressive language presents after so much listening, expressive music will come with time. A toddler who has listened at music time may arrive [in the bathtub](#) having memorized every word of every song. Music can be private, intimate, and reveal itself differently in every child.

Music is a sure way to touch your baby's heart and to nourish your unique bond. Relax and enjoy!

Image [source](#).