

Improve Your Child's IQ Through Music

by Dr. Jenn Berman



Music is not just enjoyable to listen to but is actually beneficial to your child's brain development. Believe it or not, music can help make children healthier, smarter, increase memory, improve math and science skills, help relaxation and sleep, make kids more disciplined, not to mention, create social enjoyment. Research shows huge benefits from music exposure at all stages of life.

Benefits for Developing Babies

The potential for benefit actually starts prior to birth. A study of pregnant women who exposed their developing fetuses to five to ten minutes of music per day found that, two to five years later, the children who had been exposed to music in utero had stronger memory skills, earlier speech, greater articulation, more sophisticated speaking patterns and organization when compared to their siblings who had not been exposed to prenatal music.

Music has also been shown to help premature babies in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) improve their health and leave the hospital sooner than their counterparts. A Brigham Young University study of premature babies who were played lullabies for 40 minutes each day found that after four days the babies who were played music gained more weight, had lower blood pressure and had stronger heartbeats.

Building a Better Brain

Study after study has shown that music increases spatial-temporal reasoning, which is the mind's ability to form images of objects and be able to compare and find relationships among patterns and details. This type of reasoning is used in both math and science. A study of three-year-olds conducted at a Los Angeles preschool divided children into two groups: the first group received eight months of weekly music lessons that consisted of 10-15 minute private keyboard instruction and 30 minutes of singing time, along with daily practice periods; while the second group, the control group, did not receive any music training. When researchers measured their spatial reasoning, the control group increased by only 6 percent whereas the music-training group improved by 46 percent.

Learning an instrument can also be extremely beneficial to the overall development of kids. In addition to teaching discipline, perseverance, responsibility, creativity and an ap-

preciation of the arts, it can actually help test scores. A study of fifth graders enrolled in public school music classes found that they all scored better on tests than students not enrolled in music classes. The length of time that they played their instruments influenced their overall academic performance as well. The study found a direct correlation between the length of these children's musical studies and academic achievements.

Musical training can have positive effects on brain development well into the adult years. Brain scans of musicians have found that their cerebellums are 5 percent larger than those of non-musicians. In addition, MRIs found the planum temporales (a part of the brain that plays an important role in language and auditory processing) and corpus callosums (transfers information from one brain hemisphere to another) of musicians to be significantly larger than those of their non-musician counterparts. This difference was further heightened in those who started training before the age of seven.

What Parents Can Do

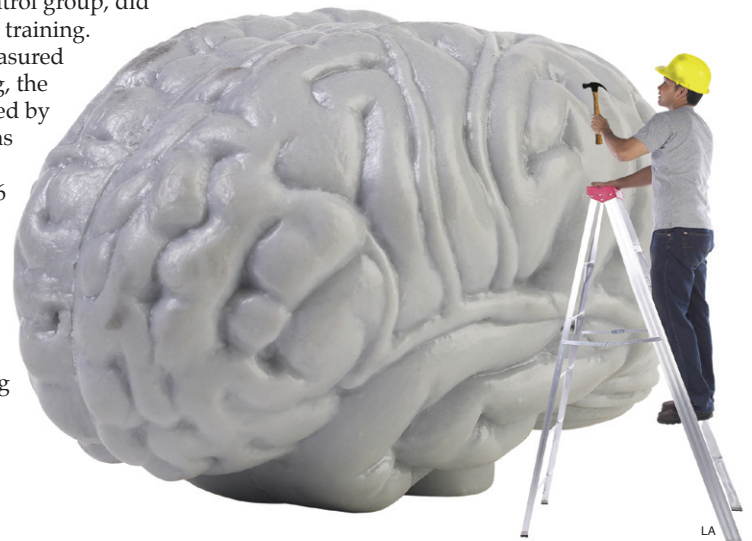
Sing lullabies to your children. Studies show that when mothers sing to their infants, their babies develop stronger emotional bonds to them. In addition, the sound of a mother's song can cue a child that it is safe to sleep.

Play music around the house. Exposure is the key to a child developing a love of music. Since kids take cues from their parents, if parents demonstrate a love of music, it is likely to help children love music too.

Help young children develop a repertoire of songs they know. Teaching children fun songs is a great way to connect, share in the joy of music and improve memory.

Make up songs about every day activities. Try making up songs about clean up time, naptime, going to school, and morning time. This adds music to your child's daily route, helps then transition from one activity to the other, increases vocabulary and can be fun.

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Have age appropriate musical toys around the house. Allow kids to experiment and make "noise" with their instruments. This kind of fun can be the beginning of a lifelong love of music.

Draw music. Put on some classical music and ask your child to draw the feelings that the song brings up for her. This allows her to develop a deeper appreciation for music and explore her creativity.

Dance! Turn on music and have fun dancing and be silly. This can teach children rhythm and coordination and help younger kids learn to control their bodies.

Make up songs to help your child remember important facts. Setting words to music can help people retain information which makes sense since scientists have found that music involves the left, right, front and back portions of the brain. This is why it is much easier to memorize a song than a monologue.

Allow your child to have a stereo/CD player/MP3 player in their room instead of a television. This freedom will allow them to develop their own musical tastes and play what they love.

Enroll your child in music classes. Music classes can be a fun social time while children start to develop their love of music. Experts recommend that children not begin private lessons until sometime between the ages of three and eight years of age, depend-

ing upon their interest and development.

Take your child to age appropriate concerts, shows, and performances. This can expose them to live music which can be exciting and inspiring, especially for young musicians.

Get to know your kid's musical taste. Spend time listening to your child's favorite tunes, even if you hate his choices. This will give you a window into his world and can open dialogue, especially with teens.

Dr. Jenn is a licensed Marriage, Family and Child Therapist in private practice. She is the author of the Los Angeles Times bestselling book "The A to Z Guide to Raising Happy Confident Kids". Her "Dr. Jenn" column won the prestigious Parenting Publications of America award in Parenting and Child Development. She has appeared as a psychological expert on hundreds of television shows including The Oprah Winfrey Show, The Today Show, and The Tyra Banks Show. Dr. Jenn lives in Los Angeles with her husband and twin daughters. For more information on Dr. Jenn go to: www.DoctorJenn.com.



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