

Making the Most of Your Music Together Experience

Model for Your Child: Your participation in class is the most important element in your child's musical journey in Music Together. So, participate at whatever level you find fun and comfortable. We send a wonderful message to our children about the value of music in our lives when a roomful of grownups forms a musical community and enthusiastically makes music together.

Your full and active participation in class will model behaviors and attitudes that your child will "catch" that will help encourage his or her lifelong enjoyment and participation in music. Find a way to let your child know that you enjoy making music together, even if you feel musically inexperienced or are shy about singing in a group. Remember that your voice is the most important voice for your child to hear.

Model and Observe: Children have varied personalities and styles of learning and we want to respect them all. Some children may actively participate in class. Others may quietly observe and absorb all the musical information and experiences. They may wisely choose to observe others (and you!) in class then go home to "practice". Many parents report that their children prefer to practice musical sounds privately at home or in the car instead of in class and this is perfectly appropriate.

In class, try not to have participation expectations of your child or compare your child's musical behaviors to those of others. Instead, try to find a way to enjoy the activities with your child at his or her level of participation.

Encourage Exploration Rather than Performance: Some parents are eager to help their children play an instrument or do an activity the "right" way. But in early childhood, children learn most effectively through exploration. It is not unusual for children to suck on instruments, for instance, or to use them in unconventional ways. So, in class, try to encourage exploration with instruments and activities rather than expecting "correct" performance. We don't want to deny your child the joy of discovery.

Try not to interfere with the learning process by giving verbal instructions. We want children to have the pleasure of responding spontaneously to the music at their own developmental level. This is a very effective way for them to learn. However, please help your child choose instruments that are appropriate for her/his stage of development. For example, we have double egg shakers or mini maracas in our egg baskets because they are a good choice for those prone to putting things in their mouths.

Maintain a Musical Environment in Class: Our experience is that classes with focused and attentive parents are the classes with the most focused and attentive children. It is in these classes that we see the most musical progress. So, it is important to resist the urge to chat with other adults during class, tempting as it may be. We want to create a truly musical environment for the children and we need everyone's help to accomplish this.

Also, any silence immediately after songs is very important. During the silence, children will begin to audiate—to hear the music in their heads—and this is a crucial step in tonal development. Other musical milestones can occur in the silence between songs as well and we don't want to miss them.

Keep the Classroom Environment Safe for All: Children are allowed to move freely during the class because this is developmentally appropriate for children of their age. We ask that parents or adult caregivers carefully supervise their child or children at all times in class so that accidents don't happen. Parents and adult caregivers are responsible for the children in their care at all times during class.

Wandering is fine and is developmentally appropriate; toddlers are very capable of absorbing musical information even if they appear to be interested in something else.

Running in class is not safe. So, please step in and help redirect your child's attention if he or she is running or is involved in some other kind of behavior that is distracting to the rest of the group or that could lead to an accident. If your child is distressed, please step out of the classroom to help him or her settle down before rejoining the class.

Be Informed: Please take the time to read both the introduction to your songbook and watch *"Music Together at Home: Helping Your Child Grow Musically"*.

They are full of great information to help you make the most of your Music Together experience. Also, don't forget to use the songbook at home. Children often love to look at the pictures while singing or listening to the songs they represent. Many families have successfully made the songbook a regular bedtime book, looking through the pictures, singing the corresponding songs and ending with a lullaby.

Allergies: Please let both your teacher and the director know if your child has any severe allergies such as a peanut or milk allergy. Because we share space and share instruments, it is essential that we are aware of severe allergies so that we can take the steps necessary to accommodate your child's needs and keep him or her safe.

Remember to...

- Listen to the CD often to become familiar with the songs.
- Sing along with gusto to model music making for your child.
- Participate joyfully in class at your comfort level and have fun with your child.
- Enrich your class experience by reading the introduction to your songbook.
- Understand your child's musical development by watching *"Music Together at Home: Helping Your Child Grow Musically"*.
- Enjoy the songbook regularly at home. Try the activities suggested with each song and look at the illustrations with your child.
- Assemble an instrument basket at home—or just bring out the pots and pans!