

## **Musical Play**

Developmentally appropriate play is an important element of Early Childhood Music Therapy. Music therapy involves the use of play-based music activities to address a broad range of social, emotional, cognitive and physical goals. By engaging a child in musical play, the music therapist aims to foster a trusting therapeutic relationship and to elicit responses that support interaction, communication, learning, and self-expression.

Schwartz (2008) points out that in the play-based model, the music therapist needs to be aware of the qualities of play and respond to the child in a playful manner. She writes that:

- Play is spontaneous
  - Play is child-centred
  - Play is child-directed
  - Play happens when it happens
  - Play does not require a product
  - Play has meaning to the child
  - Play can be solitary or with a group
  - Play can be with objects or thoughts
- 
- Being playful means responding in the moment
  - Being playful means playing at the child's developmental level
  - Being playful means focusing on the child and the child's needs
  - Being playful means not limiting experiences
  - Being playful means valuing the experience
  - Being playful means respecting the child's boundaries
  - Being playful means making objects or thoughts for play available

(Schwartz, 2008, p 126)

Reference: Schwartz, E. (2008). Music therapy and early childhood: A developmental approach. Gilsum NH: Barcelona Publishers.

[www.pathwaysmusictherapy.ca](http://www.pathwaysmusictherapy.ca)

### Strategies for Facilitating Music Play

- **Repetition** – Children love repetition and learn by singing a song or participating in a favourite activity again and again. Try at least four repetitions of a song to give the child a chance to practice and internalize it. Extend the activity by introducing small changes to the song.
- **Pause and Wait, Stop and Go** – active silence gives time for those with latency of response to process the information. Silence also engages the attention of children. Children respond enthusiastically to stop and go games. The stop builds the anticipation and excitement for what is coming next.
- **Change of Pace** – slow the pace or tempo of the music to entice children to bring down the level of excitement or to match the participation level of the children. Speeding up can focus attention and encourage higher levels of engagement.
- **Props, Instruments and Multisensory Opportunities** – use of instruments/props/toys that provide stimulating visual, tactile, aural experiences or draw children into group play (gathering drum, parachute). Books with repetitive musical refrains teach musical elements and literary skills. Toy microphones and puppets can promote dramatic and creative musical play'
- **Eye Contact and Expression** – be at the child's level, be close enough to establish eye contact, be expressive and dramatic in facial expressions, speech and body language.
- **Free Play** – put on music and move, dance, and play instruments freely. You can model ways of playing and moving but accept and include all ways of participating. You don't have to stick to children's music – play music from all genres and from around the world.

Adapted from Humpal, M. E. & Colwell, C. (Eds.). (2006). Effective clinical practice in music therapy: Early childhood and school age educational settings. Silver Spring, Maryland: American Music Therapy Association Inc.  
[www.pathwaysmusictherapy.ca](http://www.pathwaysmusictherapy.ca)

**A Model For Facilitating Musical Play**

Developmentally appropriate play is central to a play-based model of music therapy. Music therapists, parents, teachers and support staff can help to facilitate play both in music and non-music settings. Linder (1990) recommends six ways to facilitate play. Humpal (2006), MT-BC (Music Therapist – Board Certified) adds examples of musical play.

Facilitation Skill	Musical Example
<i>Follow the child's lead and the child's choices.</i>	Put out instruments and allow total freedom in playing. Imitate the actions of the child.
<i>Parallel play with child; occasionally comment about the child's action.</i>	Play an instrument next to the child; sing a simple phrase describing the playing.
<i>Encourage any mode of communication the child may use by imitating or responding in a turn-taking manner.</i>	Play instruments and imitate both motor and vocal actions, echoing dynamic, pitch, and tempo levels. Pause and offer child another turn (via eye gaze, gesture, words, etc.)
<i>Let the activity govern the interaction; limit talking.</i>	Hum along with the instrumental play or sing a nonsense syllable to draw attention to the play.
<i>Limit questioning; <u>wait</u> – convey that the child's comments are valued.</i>	Wait until the child pauses then sing a comment ("John played the blue bell") or play an answering phrase.
<i>Once the child is comfortable at play, try to "<u>bump up</u>" the level of play</i>	Observe the music skill the child is performing. Model the next step on a task analysis or show the child <u>another</u> way to do the skill.

Table taken from:

Humpal, M. E. & Colwell, C. (Eds.). (2006). Effective clinical practice in music therapy: Early childhood and school age educational settings. Silver Spring, Maryland: American Music Therapy Association Inc. (p165).

Additional work cited:

Linder, T. (1990). Transdisciplinary play-based assessment: A functional approach for working with young children. Baltimore: Paul H. Brank.