

Songs and Fingerplays

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Introduction

Helping your child learn new songs and fingerplays will encourage language development. While singing, your child is learning:

- New words and sentence patterns
- Memory skills
- To listen
- To imitate
- To express thoughts and feelings through actions, facial expressions, and words

Songs

Early songs for children usually involve body movements. These movements help children remember the words to the songs. If you think about it, words are invisible. As we say words, they disappear. We can't see them and we only hear them for a split-second. But we can see and do body movements. Children usually imitate these body movements before they imitate the words to the songs. By repeating the songs over and over, the movements help children to remember the words. The melody of the songs also helps children learn the words. So it's good to sing children's songs with a lot of expression.

1. One of the earliest songs that children learn is:

This little piggy went to market.
This little piggy stayed home.
This little piggy ate roast beef.
This little piggy had none.
And this little piggy cried, "Wee-wee-wee!"
all the way home!

Before they can even say the words, children learn that each one of their fingers or toes will be wiggled. They anticipate the ending, when they will be tickled. Afterwards, they offer you their hand or foot for you to repeat the song.

2. "Pat-A-Cake" is another song for very young children. These early songs teach skills that form the beginning of speech and language development. They teach social interaction, listening, and memory skills. Children wait for actions to happen (clapping, tickling) and they listen for key words.

3. "Open, Shut Them" is a good song to practice because it includes easy hand movements, easy sentences that are repeated, and a fun ending.

Open, shut them. Open, shut them.
Give them a little clap.
Open, shut them. Open, shut them.
Lay them in your lap.
Creep them, creep them. Creep them, creep them,
Way up to your chin.
Open up your little mouth.
But do not let them in!

4. "Knees and Toes" also involves repetition of words, and pointing to and naming body parts.

Head, shoulders, knees, and toes. Knees and toes.
Head, shoulders, knees, and toes. Knees and toes.
Eyes and ears and mouth and nose,
Head, shoulders, knees, and toes. Knees and toes.

Encourage your child to sing the words as well as perform the movements.

Fingerplays

Fingerplays are songs that use finger motions. One of the most popular finger plays is the "Eensy-Weensy Spider." Another well-liked fingerplay is "Where is Thumbkin?" As with the other songs, children learn the words and actions as the fingerplays are repeated. Learning the songs can help your child develop memory skills and learn new words, **concepts**, and sentence patterns.

1. "My Balloon" helps teach the concept of large and small:

Here I have a new balloon.
(Make a circle with thumb and pointer finger.)
Help me while I blow.
Small at first, then bigger,
(Make a circle with both thumbs and pointer fingers.)
Watch it grow and grow.
(Make a circle with arms.)

Do you think it is big enough?
Maybe I should stop,
For if I give another blow,
My balloon will surely POP!
(Clap hands.)

2. "The Rain" is related to the weather:
Pitter-patter, raindrops,
Falling from the sky.
(Wiggle fingers to imitate falling rain.)
Here is my umbrella
To keep me safe and dry!
(Hands over head.)
When the rain is over,
And the sun begins to glow,
(Make a large circle with arms.)
Little flowers start to bud,
(Cup two hands together.)
And grow and grow and grow!
(Spread hands apart slowly.)

Songs as games

1. Preschool children enjoy these songs which are also games: "Ring Around the Rosy," "London Bridge is Falling Down," and "Farmer in the Dell." These songs involve repetition of a small number of words, making them easy to learn. "Old MacDonald" is another fun song because it combines words with animal sounds. It also teaches children to associate certain sounds with each animal.
2. Preschool and school-age children enjoy the lively tune and actions to "The Wheels on the Bus." This song also includes environmental sounds.
- The wheels on the bus go round and round,
Round and round, round and round.
The wheels on the bus go round and round
All through the town.
The horn on the bus goes beep-beep-beep . . .
The wipers on the bus go swish-swish-swish . . .
The door on the bus goes open and shut . . .
The money on the bus goes jingle-jangle-
jingle . . .
The people on the bus go up and down . . .
3. Another song where you make up verses is:
- This is the way we wash our clothes,
Wash our clothes, wash our clothes.
This is the way we wash our clothes,
So early in the morning.

Verses and actions can be made up to tell the sequence of morning activities. (This is the way we get out of bed, wash our face, brush our teeth, comb our hair, etc.) Or, the verses can sequence just one activity, such as making lunch. (This is the way we take out the bread, spread the mustard, cut the sandwich, etc.) "So early in the morning" can be replaced with "In the afternoon," or "When we make lunch." This type of song can be adapted to household chores, making the chores more fun. (This is the way I clean my room.)

Songs and Nursery Rhymes

Repeating nursery and Mother Goose rhymes is also good for working on speech and language skills. You can make up tunes for these rhymes. Some nursery rhymes include "Jack and Jill," "Humpty Dumpty," "Hickory Dickory Dock," "Mary Had a Little Lamb," "Little Miss Muffet," "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star," and "Jack Be Nimble." "One, Two Buckle My Shoe" and "Ten Little Indians" are songs that also develop counting.

These songs may not all have body movements to go along with them. But you can make finger puppets to use instead. For example, have your child draw a small mouse and a clock. Tape each one to the end of a straw or small stick. Your child can now act out "Hickory Dickory Dock" while reciting it. You can also take a strip of paper and tape it in a roll to fit around your child's finger. Tape the mouse (or any other character) to the top of the roll to make a finger puppet. You can sometimes find song or nursery rhyme books with pictures to look at while you're singing. You can also cut up magazines and coloring books to match characters in the songs. Put a small piece of felt on the back of the characters and you can now act out the songs on a flannelboard.

Songs and fingerplays help children release a lot of energy. When you want them to settle down, try "I Wiggle" by Lucille F. Wood and Louise Binder Scott.

I wiggle my fingers. (Wiggle fingers.)
I wiggle my toes. (Wiggle toes.)
I wiggle my shoulders. (Wiggle shoulders.)
I wiggle my nose. (Wiggle nose.)
Now no more wiggles are left in me.
So I will be still as still can be.

Tips for language learning with songs and fingerplays:

1. Use lots of expression in your face, body, and voice
2. Pick repetitive songs
3. Encourage imitation
4. Act out songs with puppets and flannelboard
5. Make up words to go with familiar songs
6. Accompany words with body movements
7. Sing and repeat songs and fingerplays often

For more information

Look for records and cassettes of children's songs. There is a series of cassette tapes featuring "Wee Sing" ("Wee Sing for Christmas," "Wee Sing Nursery Rhymes and Lullabies") available at most book and toy stores.

An excellent source for fingerplays is *Rhymes for Fingers and Flannelboards* by Louise Binder Scott and J. J. Thompson (1960. McGraw-Hill). Ask your local librarian to locate a copy for you.

Vocabulary

Concept—A general idea or characteristic applicable to several objects or events, which helps to organize knowledge about the world.

Refer to:

- 3.5 Pairing Movement With Learning
- 3.7 Learning About Time and Space
- 5.6 Vacation Activities for Language Development

