

Using Music and Art with Children with Autism or Other Learning Disabilities

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Music and art can help increase learning for children, particularly those who have autism or other learning disabilities, since these activities provide unique sensory input and stimulation to the mind and body. Music and art can engage physical and mental focus for tasks. When children have success with music and art, you may see an increase in self-confidence, in the use of proper social skills, and in overall communication (McCord, ¶ 7).



Tell Me More About Music

Singing and dancing to music helps children develop proper voice control, motor planning/control, and fine and gross motor skills. Repetition through song can help children with autism or other learning disabilities learn to anticipate words, rhythms, and concepts. This can help them participate more easily in music-based classroom activities since they know what to expect.

Tell Me More About Art

Art activities, ranging from drawing to acting, require different levels of complex thinking and problem solving. Art allows children to show thoughts and feelings in a creative way, often through nonverbal communication. Children with autism or other learning disabilities can express emotions through art that they may not otherwise be able to state.

Is There Recent Research?

Recent studies show that children with autism can be more eager to listen to music than their peers. These same studies indicate that children with autism are more likely to be able to differentiate variations in pitch. Music-themed lessons can help increase patience, voluntary attention, memory, social interaction, eye contact, and the *enjoyment* of learning (Evans, 2007, ¶ 8). Through music, children can work on sound imitation and speech production skills as well. However, even though many children with autism, or other learning disabilities, show improvements in learning by participating in music-related activities, there is still a need to gather more evidence to document the long-term effects of music as an intervention. At this time, there is no recommendation for the “clinical effectiveness” of “music therapy” for children with autism or other learning disabilities, nor is there a report to deny that it makes a difference for some students (Bell, 2003, ¶ 2).

Art can also play a huge role in the development of language, expression, confidence, motor planning, and fine motor skills. For students who have difficulty learning, art can open up a new way to access the curriculum. Art provides a creative outlet for the proper expression of rage, sadness, excitement, and other feelings. In therapy, art can provide healing. The creative process can trigger a

sense of achievement and an increase in self-esteem. For children with autism or other learning disabilities, art can provide a nonverbal outlet for feelings and emotions.

What Are Some Music Activities I Can Use?

- Play soft, soothing music as children are working in class or playing quietly at home.
- Play/sing songs with repetitive words or choruses that make learning fun (alphabet songs, songs that teach math facts, songs that give direction: "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes," "Hokey Pokey," "I'm a Little Teapot").
- Sing songs with an echo microphone or "pretend microphone."
- Make simple musical instruments with things you find at home: rice tambourines, spoons with pots and pans, plastic milk cartons with small pebbles inside, paper towel rolls, etc. Be creative!
- Enroll your child in music programs at school or in the community.



What Are Some Art Activities I Can Use?

- Provide materials for drawing or painting. Ask the child to draw a picture of his/her day, the playground, a trip to the store, etc. and have them explain the scene.
- Display art projects at home. Have the child title the projects or explain them. Not only does this instill pride in his/her work, but you are creating keepsakes, too.
- Move art to the outdoors by choosing and planting flowers in arrangements of different colors and garden shapes, or filling large pots with a variety of plants to create a beautiful arrangement.
- Use sidewalk chalk to color driveways and sidewalks.
- Visit your local craft stores and ask someone to direct you to crafts that are age-appropriate and fit the needs of your child.

Resources

Bell, C.M. (2003). Music therapy for children with autistic spectrum disorder. Wessex Institute for Health Research and Development, University of Southampton, 11. Abstract retrieved December 3, 2008, from National Library for Health: Learning Disabilities Specialist Library.

Evans, R. (2007). The relationship between music and autism: Understanding the benefits. Retrieved on December 4, 2008, from <http://ezinearticles.com/?The-Relationship-Between-Music-and-Autism---Understanding-the-Benefits&id=643361>

McCord, K. (n.d.). Adapting music technology for students with learning disabilities. University of Northern Colorado. Retrieved on December 3, 2008, from <http://music.utsa.edu/tdml/conf-IV/IV-McCord.html>



Helpful Products

The list of Super Duper® products below may be helpful when working with children who have special needs. Visit www.superduperinc.com or call 1-800-277-8737. Click the links below to see the product description.

"I Have Autism" A Child's First Look at Autism

Ask for item #BK-329 <http://www.superduperinc.com/products/view.aspx?pid=BK329&stid=>

Interactive Sing-Along Big Books – Set 1

Ask for item #TPX-18409 <http://www.superduperinc.com/products/view.aspx?pid=TPX18409>

Interactive Sing-Along Big Books – Set 2

Ask for item #TPX-18410 <http://www.superduperinc.com/products/view.aspx?stid=481>

Sensory Diet Cards

Ask for item #CRD-33 <http://www.superduperinc.com/products/view.aspx?pid=CRD33&stid=>

Webber® Photo Cards – Emotions

Ask for item #WFC-264 <http://www.superduperinc.com/products/view.aspx?pid=WFC264&stid=>