



## Music Together® Supports Parenting Programs and the Parent-Child Relationship

*As a parent-child<sup>1</sup> music and movement program that views adult modeling and involvement as integral to the development of young children, Music Together supports and fosters healthy parent-child relationships. With curricula and materials designed for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and their families, Music Together can serve as an effective and innovative addition to parenting programs by being an enjoyable way to help achieve many of the parent and child outcomes that are central goals of these programs.*

The Music Together curriculum provides parents and other primary caregivers with in-class music and movement activities that are engaging and empowering for them, developmentally appropriate for their child, and nurturing for the family system. The research-based curriculum includes materials and tools that support and encourage positive parent-child interactions, promote parenting skills, and build parents' knowledge of their child's developmental needs. This fosters parents' sense of efficacy and confidence in their child-rearing abilities. By building a sense of empowerment through knowledge, parents feel they can interact with their children in healthy and promotive ways, even in the face of life's adversities and stresses.

### **Common goals of programs that focus on parenting and the parent-child relationship include:**

- Educating parents about effective parenting practices;
- Enhancing parents' knowledge of, and interest in, their child's needs and developmental path;
- Enhancing the parent-child interaction and attachment relationship;
- Improving parental mental health, e.g., reducing depression, increasing feelings of self-efficacy and parenting confidence;
- Improving children's behavior problems and developmental outcomes in various domains, including cognitive and social growth;
- Enhancing the home learning environment.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "parent" is inclusive of a child's primary caregiver or important adult in his/her life who has taken on a significant share of parenting duties.

## How and why Music Together supports these goals

- Music Together classes incorporate “parent education moments” where teachers can help parents customize the Music Together activities to support and promote their child’s current developmental stage, both generally and musically. Additionally, the Music Together teacher provides parents with helpful information about developmentally appropriate expectations. Through this experience, Music Together classes can serve as a platform for parents to learn, demonstrate, and practice some of the following interactions that are integral to their child’s healthy development:
  - Sensitive, responsive, and affective (i.e. appropriately emotional) interactions with their child<sup>i</sup>;
  - Recognizing, interpreting, and appropriately responding to their child’s signals and needs<sup>ii</sup>;
  - Engaging in reciprocal imitation, which is integral to children’s social development, practice of new skills, and learning of new knowledge<sup>iii</sup>;
  - Intersubjectivity (a shared understanding and energy between a parent and child, which can include an infant’s gestures, looks, cyclical movements, and vocal expression in communication with another person and which contributes to a healthy parent-infant attachment relationship)<sup>iv</sup>;
  - Using music as a parenting strategy and technique (e.g., singing to soothe a fussy child or to ease transitions throughout the day).
- Supportive materials for the home (recordings and songbook) reinforce important classroom information and experiences, providing different ways for parents and caregivers to use music and movement activities at home. Through this multi-week, multi-modal method of presentation, parents not only become aware of the importance of modeling for their child, but also receive the tools needed to extend music-making throughout daily life with ease and delight.
- Recognizing that Music Learning Supports All Learning<sup>®</sup>, Music Together’s engaging and participatory music and movement activities help parents learn to support even the youngest child’s physical, cognitive, language, social, and emotional growth, all in a fun and playful music environment.
- Music Together’s recordings, songbooks, and Singalong Storybooks enhance the home learning environment by providing early learning and literacy materials for parents and family members to enjoy with their children.
- Research has shown that regular music-making can decrease depression and that singing and movement can reduce stress and anxiety in both children and adults<sup>v</sup>. The mitigating effects of music-making on these major mental health problems make participation in music activities an excellent supplement to appropriate mental health interventions and can even act as a preventive activity to relieve parental stress and foster resilience.
- Each week in Music Together class, there are ample opportunities to be silly and creative; each song collection in the curriculum is designed to provide parents with the chance to learn to play and have fun with their child.

- The Music Together teacher creates a sensitive classroom environment with no expectations of the children to “do” anything, inviting but never pressuring grownups to participate beyond their comfort level or ability. Because of the non-judgmental, emotionally and physically safe environment created in a Music Together class, grownups and children alike feel comfortable playing with music and even exploring their silly sides. The exploration creates a sense of enjoyment and connection to one’s self, one’s child, and the resulting music-making community that is created.

## **Adolescent parenting programs: Music Together can be a particularly effective and complementary addition to programs working with teen parents.**

- Research continues to underscore the profound impact that the early parent-child relationship can have on children’s development<sup>vi</sup>. Adolescent parents are particularly at risk of developing negative parenting practices, and their children are vulnerable to less than optimal social, emotional, and cognitive outcomes<sup>vii</sup>.
- Finding effective yet enjoyable ways to teach positive parenting practices to at-risk adolescent parents, while also providing them with a safe and fun platform through which to exercise these new skills, is essential in retaining participants and achieving results in parenting behaviors and child outcomes.
- Participating in this group music activity helps to foster social bonds among participants and also with program providers, giving young parents who may feel overwhelmed and alone much needed support and a sense of community.

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<sup>i</sup> e.g. Egeland, B. & Farber, E. A. (1984). Infant-mother attachment: Factors related to its development and changes over time. *Child Development*, 55(3), 753-771.

<sup>ii</sup> e.g. Landry, S. H., Smith, K. E. & Swank, P. R. (2006). Responsive parenting: Establishing early foundations for social, communication, and independent problem-solving skills. *Developmental Psychology*, 42(4), 627-642.

<sup>iii</sup> e.g. Meltzoff, A. N. (1999). Born to learn: What infants learn from watching us. In N. Fox & J.G. Worhol, (Eds.), *The Role of Early Experience in Infant Development*. Skillman, NJ: Pediatric Institute Publications.

<sup>iv</sup> Trevarthen, C. & Aitken, K. J. (2001). Infant intersubjectivity: Research, theory, and clinical applications. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 42(1), 3-48.

<sup>v</sup> e.g. Maratos, A., Crawford, M. J., & Procter, S. (2011). Music therapy for depression: It seems to work, but how? *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 199(2), 92-93.; Krout, R. E. (2007). Music listening to facilitate relaxation and promote wellness: Integrated aspects of our neurophysiological responses to music. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 34(2), 134-141.

<sup>vi</sup> e.g. Leerkes, A., Blankson, A. N. & O’Brien, M. (2009). Differential effects of maternal sensitivity to infant distress and nondistress on social-emotional functioning. *Child Development*, 80(3), 762-775.

<sup>vii</sup> e.g. Brooks-Gunn, J. & Furstenberg, F. F. (1986). The children of adolescent mothers: Physical, academic, and psychological outcomes. *Developmental Review*, 6, 224-251; Berlin, L. J., Brady-Smith, C., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2002). Links between childbearing age and observed maternal behaviors with 14-month-olds in the Early Head Start research and evaluation project. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 23(1-2), 104-129.