



## Beyond the Lullaby: The Benefits of Song

Singing with your children is a tool that can increase ease and joy. Song can offer a combination of connection and redirection, which can soothe a difficult moment. It is a form of creative expression and like other art forms there is ample room for individuality. You may include a song in anticipation of a transition or during a non-preferred activity. Taking a step back, we see rhythm is all around and within us, and using song brings that to the forefront. Even the youngest children can respond to rhythm. You may find it helpful to use the same songs at certain times of your day to reinforce your daily flow. Songs can offer a gentle cue and at times may be better received than words in the same situation. Even humming the tune can shift a difficult moment.

Once you open yourself to this possibility, you might find that songs you already know jump to the top of your mind. It might be helpful to start collecting songs. Try adding one song at a time and using it regularly for about a week or two. Building your repertoire will allow you to call upon beloved favorites as well as add new and interesting tunes.

There are several ways you can begin building your song library to use with your children. In our home, songs may appear in response to what is happening around us. With the onset of rain, a gentle “Pitter patter, pitter patter, listen to the rain...” When it is time to clean up, “I’ve been working on the railroad...” During nail clipping, “5..4..3..2..1.. Blast off another rocket ship run.” If encouragement is needed to take off a shirt, an enthusiastic “... hands up baby hands up give me your heart...” might do the trick.

In the songs above, you notice a range of music: children’s songs, well-known songs, and even popular culture songs. As you build your collection, you can select songs that are just right for the moment. You might find you need a song to meet you in the middle of where the mood is and where you wish it to be. Don’t forget you can absolutely make up a song on the spot!

If you feel hesitant to jump into singing, having music playing in the home or car can be a helpful way to start adding songs to your day. You might find you enjoy seasonal songs or maybe a song that is on theme for the night’s dinner. If you “don’t sing” or don’t think you have a “good enough voice,” know that you don’t need to have a musical background to experience the dynamic benefits of singing with your children. You do need a willingness to give it a try. That willingness may come more readily if you learn about the physiological benefits of singing...

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## The Vagus Nerve

This multidimensional parenting strategy has notable physical and emotional benefits for parents, caregivers, and our children. Singing stimulates the vagus nerve. This wandering nerve travels from our brain throughout our body, affecting nearly all our organs. It is a key component of our parasympathetic nervous system, which is how we rest and digest (aka de-stress). The vagus nerve is reported to play a role in the release of oxytocin. Stimulating this nerve happens during singing when the vocal cords and associated muscles vibrate. Humming and chanting both can have a similar effect. This is likely at the root of how singing has been shown to bring pain relief, improved mood, as well as improve cognitive function and confidence.

With this information, we have context for the ubiquitous vision of a parent singing to an infant. Singing can promote bonding and support postpartum healing. Singing can strengthen the muscles of our core, reducing injury and improving posture. If you have the opportunity to sing in a group, these effects can amplify.

Singing is an accessible and powerful tool to support wellbeing in body and mind. Let's hear those voices!

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*Appears in Pathways to Family  
Wellness Magazine Issue #83*

