

Music and Movement for Little Learners: First Steps in Music Parent Handbook

Philosophy:

This handbook is designed to give parents and caretakers the information they need in order to get the most out of their little learner's music classes. Our mission, through *First Steps in Music*, is to lay the musical foundation for all children to reach their musical potential by encouraging them to be tuneful, beautiful, and artful through singing, instrument play, and movement exploration and to provide their caretakers with activities to continue their musical learning at home.

The *First Steps in Music* curriculum's focus is on nurturing the joys of childhood. Each class is designed to appear playful while providing carefully planned and age-appropriate activities. Many researchers agree that beginning music education at a young age is important including Dr. John Feierabend who created several curriculums specific to fostering musical growth at this young age.

Parent and caregiver participation is the key ingredient for success in *First Steps in Music*. Parents and caregivers will be given the tools they need to repeat quality musical experiences at home. Repetition is very important in the development of musical skills.

Expectations for Teacher, Parents and Children:

1. The teacher is responsible for leading the class in music and movement through planned activities and guiding student learning.
2. The child is responsible for observing and/or participating depending on the child's comfort level
3. The parents are responsible for participating in class activities, focusing on his/her own child, and handling any discipline problems that arise in a timely manner.
4. The parent is responsible for learning the activities and repeating them at home with his/her own children during receptive moments. "Repetition is the mother of all learning," as Dr. Feierabend states.
5. Children may wander through class; however, if the behavior becomes distracting to the other children, it is the parent's responsibility to correct the behavior. It can take up to 4 weeks for children to learn a new routine.

Please and Thank You:

1. Please focus on your child and avoid holding conversations with other adults during class activities.
2. Please remove your child from class if your child is having a hard time settling in. A noisy child can distract from the activities. Once calm, please bring them back for musical fun!
3. Please keep personal items (teddy bears or blankets) out of the activity area.
4. Please restrain your child from hitting or throwing instruments for the safety of all.
5. Thank you for keeping all food and drink out of the room.
6. Thank you for practicing these musical activities at your home.
7. Thank you for understanding the importance of limiting sibling attendance to one class per session if needed as siblings can add additional distractions.

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Class Structure:

Infants/Waddlers/Toddlers

Class begins with 10 minutes of unstructured play with assorted musical instruments and sound-making toys. Free play concludes with singing a favorite song, followed by group activities for infants, including the following:

- Bounces – Parent bounces infant to the beat of song or rhyme
- Wiggles – Parent wiggles infant’s toes or fingers to beat of song or rhyme
- Tickles – Parent tickles toddler at the end of a song or rhyme
- Tapping/Clapping – Parent taps infant’s feet or hands, eventually encouraging the child to do the tapping
- Simple Circles** - Parents and toddlers walk around in a circle to a song
- Simple Songs – Parents/teacher sing simple songs to infants that they will later be able to sing themselves
- Beat Motions with Recordings – Parents and toddlers tap, walk, or move to the beat of recorded music
- Lullabies – Teacher sings a lullaby while parents snuggle and rock their infant

**Waddlers and Toddlers only

Class Structure:

Preschool

Class begins with 10 minutes of unstructured play with assorted musical instruments and sound-making toys. In some cases, a trampoline and rocking horse are available for a child to jump on or ride while a parent speaks a rhyme or sings a song to the child’s beat. Free play concludes with the group singing a favorite song, followed by group activities, which include:

- Pitch Exploration – Warming up our singing voices
- Echo and Call-and-Response Songs – Echoing or responding to the teacher
- Simple Songs – Limited vocal range songs for children to sing independently
- Fingerplays – Songs with motions for hands and fingers
- Action Songs – Songs with motions for the whole body
- Simple Circles – Songs with games or dances in circles
- Beat Motions (Child initiated) – Each child performs a beat to be followed
- Beat Motions (teacher initiated) – Teacher leads all in performing a beat
- Beat Motions with Recordings – Walk, tap, or move to recorded music
- Arioso – All spontaneously make up original songs
- Songtales – Song and story for all to listen to

NOTE: Parents learn all songs and rhymes for repetition at home

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Technique:

As we go through the 8-week session, you may wonder why we are doing certain things the way we do. All the techniques used are a part of *First Steps in Music* curriculum. Please feel free to ask any questions about this curriculum or for more information on these techniques, refer to John Feierabend's series of books including *First Steps in Music* curriculum (available through GIA Publications).

My goal is to provide activities to help develop your musical child. Keep in mind that each child is born with a different level of raw musical potential. **In order to nurture whatever ability your child was born with, commitment to repeating quality musical experiences at home is key.** The best way to tune into your child's musical potential at home is to make sure they are in a receptive mood. Forcing "music time" on your child each day can build negative associations with music. It is best to allow musical activities to fit into the natural flow of your everyday experiences.

Repetition is key. **Research tells us that 4 is the minimal number of repetitions to encourage musical learning.** The teacher will attempt to include each song or rhyme 4 times in each lesson and in 4 different lessons throughout the sessions.

Infant/Waddler/Toddler

When doing **bounces, wiggles, and tickles** in class, children will mostly be facing outward, so they can see the other children and the teacher. When bouncing at home though, have your child face you so they can see and hear your expression as you say the rhyme.

During **beat activities and pre-music unstructured play**, spend a lot of time tapping the beat on your child's body. As your child gets older and gains experience with these types of activities, be sure to allow your child to tap or clap their own beat.

For **participating in class**, feel free to join the teacher on songs and rhymes. Make sure you feel comfortable with a song or rhyme before joining in, so we can sound like one voice. Singing something differently can interfere with a child's hearing as they are learning a song.

When **engaging in musical activities at home**, never hesitate to sing for or with your child. It is important for your child to hear you sing regularly and see that you are comfortable with singing. This teaches children that singing is a normal part of life. Have fun with singing! Sing while doing chores or driving in the car. Have fun making up your own songs and rhymes. Research shows that children prefer the sound of their own parent's voice, so once again have fun singing!

When **moving to classical music in class**, it is important that you perform the beat motions. You are your child's best model.

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Preschool

The most important rule for teachers to follow at this age level is what we call “Dr. Feierabend’s Golden Rule”:

The teacher should sing *for* the class and not *with* the class.

This is why the teacher will ask you to sing “in your brains” while introducing a song. Research tells us that children need to hear a song a certain number of times before they can be successful in their own attempts to sing the song. The teacher will always make it clear who should be singing out loud and who should be singing “in their brains.” The teacher will always give the class the opportunity for parents and children to sing together without the teacher’s help, and for the children to sing without the help of the parents or the teacher.

NOTE: Certain songs (like **Songtales** at the end of class) are too difficult for young children to sing independently. They are intended for listening only and will not be taught in the same way as the other songs.

When participating in **child-initiated beat activities**, it is best not to “assist” your child in keeping the beat on their body or instrument. The teacher will give each child the opportunity to keep the beat on their body or an instrument. The teacher will perform the song or rhyme to the child’s beat. This is the best way for a child to have success in keeping the beat.

During **Arioso activities**, please understand that the goal is for each child to spontaneously make up simple songs about different things. We are not looking for them to sing a song they already know. This is a very basic experience with improvisation, so it is important that you avoid “assisting” your child in the creative process. This is a very difficult concept for students to grasp. The best way to help your child be successful is to practice making up songs at home as you go through your day. For example, washing dishes or folding laundry can become a song.

Resources –

First Steps in Music Parent Handbook by Connie Greenwood

First Steps in Music for Infant and Toddlers Curriculum by Dr. John Feierabend

First Steps in Music for Preschool and Beyond Curriculum by Dr. John Feierabend