

Disability Campaign.org

10 Benefits of Music for Children with Disabilities

Many children LOVE music. Whether it's dancing to a favorite tune or falling asleep to relaxing sounds, music can have a very positive effect on children. In fact, multiple studies have investigated the impact of music on children, identifying benefits associated with music and child development. Moreover, research shows music as therapy can improve the relationship between parents and their children.



It's why if you have a child with a disability or developmental delays, we encourage you to consider how you might incorporate music into your child's life. Below is a list of ten benefits of music for children with disabilities.

1. **Positive parent-child relationships.** In a 2008 study published in the *Journal of Health*



Psychology, it was found that musical activities promote positive parent-child relationships.ⁱ Another study published in 2012 by the *Journal of Music Therapy* found evidence for improved parental mental health and positive parenting through group musical therapy.ⁱⁱ

2. **Promotes development of auditory skills.** The *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* reported in 2010 that music training leads to changes throughout the auditory system, helping to develop a child's ability to listen and process sounds.ⁱⁱⁱ

3. **Help with literacy and language skills.** In 2003, the *Neurosciences and Music* published a study on dyslexia and music. It was found that musical lessons in the classroom had a positive effect on the children’s spelling skills — a common challenge for children with dyslexia.^{iv}



Furthermore, the Institute of Education Services reported in 2008 that music education may “effectively contribute to young children’s awakening to reading and writing” — regardless of whether they have learning disabilities.^v

4. **Enhances social skills.** In a 2005 article of the *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, a study investigated the effectiveness of music therapy in enhancing the social skills of children with intellectual disabilities. Significant improvements in imitation, turn-taking, and eye contact were found.^{vi}

5. **Improves fine motor abilities,** such as small movements involving the wrists, hands, and fingers. The *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* published in 2005 a study that compared the fine motor abilities of children who participated in 2 years of piano instruction against those who had never received formal music training.



Children receiving music lessons showed significant improvement in fine motor skills, as well as a statistically significant difference in the speed of their motor responses.^{vii}

6. **Boost memory.** Learning to play an instrument can enhance a child’s memory development. In a research paper published by the University of London, it was found that musically trained children remembered 17% more verbal information than those without musical training.^{viii}

7. **Improve pain levels and reduce fear.** In a clinical trial published in 2010 in the *Journal of Pediatric Oncology Nursing*, scientist studied whether music influenced pain and anxiety levels in children undergoing lumbar punctures. The results showed lower pain scores, as well as heart and respiratory rates in the children who were exposed to music while undergoing this painful procedure.^{ix} This suggests that children were more relaxed and in less pain. Another study explored the effects of music therapy on pediatric burn patients, and found that children who listened to music while undergoing nursing procedures experienced less pain and anxiety, but were also more compliant — meaning they were more willing to follow instructions and undergo medical procedures.^x

8. **Support mental wellbeing.** Children with psychological disorders can benefit greatly from music therapy, according to a study published in 2004 in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*.^{xi} Also, the *Psychiatric Times* reported in 2017 that music therapy has been successful in treating children with emotional disturbances, helping to reduce anxiety, treating impairments in affective functioning, and improving emotional responsiveness.^{xii}



9. **Improve focus and attention span.** Children with autism or learning disabilities may find themselves easily distracted. Music, however, can help. The *Journal of Music Therapy* has published multiple studies on how music influences attention span. In a 2006 study with children who have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), the findings suggested music could reduce ADHD symptoms in the classroom.^{xiii} Another study, published in 2009, showed that music significantly helped sustain young children’s attention during auditory distractions.^{xiv}

10. Promote relaxation and improve sleep. As stated by the American Academy of Pediatrics, “Sleep disturbances in children with neurodevelopmental disabilities are common and have a profound effect on the quality of life of the child, as well as the entire family.” The *Journal of Advanced Nursing* published a 2008 report that demonstrated a significant improvement in sleep quality of students with a history of poor sleep who listened to classical music.^{xv}



Music can be so calming for children, that it was found to be a safe and effective alternative method to achieve sleep/sedation in infants and toddlers in a study published in 2015 in the *American Journal of Electrodiagnostic Technology*.^{xvi}

For more information on parenting children with special needs, visit our Kids' Corner website at <http://www.joniandfriends.org/kids-corner/> or our resources page on kids' health at Disability Campaign, <http://disabilitycampaign.org/help-resources/>.

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