

I'm a Nursery Aged Child

by Sharla Dance

If a nursery age child could speak to us about what he or she needs in nursery music, what would they say? Perhaps they would say this...

I am a nursery age child.

I need simple songs with a small range of melody.

Do the words repeat? Does the melody have big leaps? Are the concepts something I can touch or see or hear? Are the songs short?

I am learning how to keep a steady beat. I need to patsch,¹ beat, tap, swish, and way to a steady beat.

I need practice getting my head to hear and my body to follow the beat. Are there movements I can do simply to the beat? Are you showing me how to keep a steady beat even if my little body can't do it yet? Please don't make me clap yet... it is more complicated for me than tapping or patsching.

I need to sing a little faster than you do because my heart beats faster than yours. Could you sing the songs in a little faster tempo?

Did you know that my heart beats at 120 beats per minute?

I need to move to learn. How can I move my hands or feet, touch something, or sway as we sing this song?

Did you know that my brain cells are activated by purposeful moving to a steady beat? Once I use them a lot for movement, they will then turn into my thinking cells! Please have me move a lot purposefully and to a steady beat. I need to cross the midline with my movements, too.

I need to sing higher than you because my vocal cords are smaller. Could you sing the songs up in my range?

Did you know that my lowest note is middle C and most adults speak and sing below that normally? Are you singing between a middle C and the C eight notes above that?

I am learning where my body is in space. I need to put the manipulative on my shoulder, on my elbow, or on my knee as we sing.

Did you know you are helping me create a map of my body inside my brain as you sing and ask me to move the manipulative around? Thank you for helping me do that.

I am learning about object permanence. Sing, ask me to hide the manipulative, and sing again when we bring it out again.

When we hide the raindrop or rhythm instrument behind my back, I am creating a part in my brain that helps me know that things I can't see are still there.

I need songs that bear testimony of my Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ that are simple enough and short enough for how young I am.

I just came from heaven and I love hearing about my Father and His Son. I need simple songs, though.

1. A patsch is a rhythmic hit with the palms of the hands on your thighs.

I need you to repeat the songs a lot so that I can learn them. Can you help me by adding challenges to the song as we sing?

(Can you put the finger puppet on your toe? Can you dance the raindrop on your head? Hide your scarf behind your back! Tap the ground!) I love to follow your movements, especially when they have a new element like touching a toe or elbow, hiding something you have given me to hold, or moving to the beat. I like variety of things to do using the same song.

Most often I need to watch you do something as you sing the song before I do it.

My young brain can take in lots of information as I watch you, so sometimes all I can do is sit there while my brain is downloading all the information. So much of what you are doing is new to me!

Because singing is Re-producing, I need to hear a song over and over again before I can sing it. Don't expect me to join in singing until I have experienced the song over and over and over again.

I am learning the beat, the melody, the implied harmony, the phrasing, and so much more as I experience the song. It is all so new that I need to hear the song again and again to take it all in. (I do like it when you sing the same song, but do different things, though.) You may be the only one singing.

I need music to help order my brain, and to help me be happy. Music time is often my favorite part of nursery.

Music lodges in a different part of the brain than spoken directions. If you want me to clean up the toys, sing it to me. If you want me to enjoy my time in nursery, help me by singing simple songs with lots of movement and manipulatives. If you want me to learn how to calm myself, teach me by calming me with music. I can sense if you are calm as you sing.

I need to learn how to wait for good things to come. Teach me by helping me learn to start and stop with music. Help me by having small wait times built into the songs or fast and slow built into the songs.

When you pass out the manipulatives, do you instruct the children to wait for their turn, then praise the child who is waiting patiently? Is there always enough of something so that waiting pays off? When you sing, do you put in purposeful stops to the movement? Waiting requires the "brakes" that stopping helps me practice. Do you sing a song that goes fast, then slow?

I am learning to hear high notes and low notes. I want to practice with my voice to match what I am learning to hear.

Can you put the manipulative way up high in the air (said with a very high voice), then way down low (said with a low voice)? Can you hoot high like a baby owl? Now low like a daddy owl? Are you singing in my vocal range so that I can practice matching your voice? My vocal cords are smaller than yours, and need to sing higher than is comfortable for adults.

I am a nursery age child. Thank you for meeting my needs so that I can learn to trust you, so that I can learn to love nursery, and so that I can learn to love music.

SHARLA DANCE loves to teach children's music. She has published the book, *To Teach a Child a Song*, and has a Primary blog, TeachingPrimaryMusic.com