

KEEP KIDS SINGING

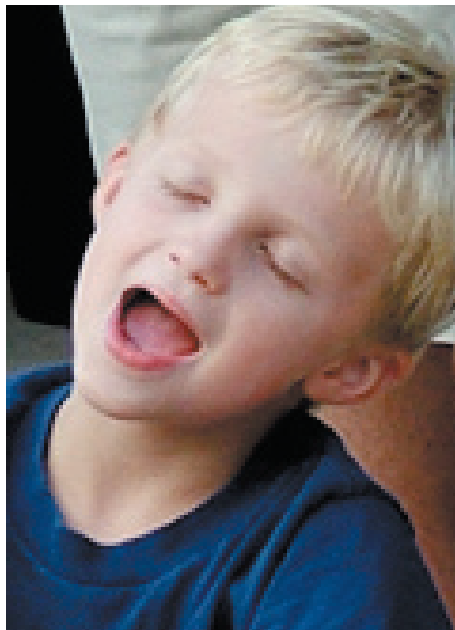
COMFORT, PLAY, TEACH

by Jacqui DeBique

Singing to children helps promote their development, so go ahead and give a “moo moo” here and a “moo moo” there; do the hokey pokey and turn yourself around. When it comes to children’s songs, it turns out that this really is what it’s all about—simple, silly lyrics that are fun to sing over and over again, with little more to them than that.

Parents and kids love singing songs like *Old MacDonald’s Farm* and acting out *The Hokey Pokey* together. Making music and movement a regular part of our children’s lives supports their growth in joyful ways and brings beauty into their days.

According to the parenting and child development experts at Invest in Kids, Canada (*InvestInKids.ca*), a national charity aimed at helping parents improve their parenting skills, traditional classics sung routinely with our kids can have tremendous benefits. Invest in Kids’ thorough, research-based approach to parenting specifically aims to transform everyday parent-child routines and activities like singing favorite songs into teachable moments that actively support a child’s healthy social, emotional and intellectual development. Its positive approach to “opening a world of possibilities” is called Comfort, Play & Teach. Here’s how, illustrated via *Old MacDonald’s Farm*:



Comfort

If you do this: Repeat the song several times, each time encouraging the child to say the name of a farm animal that she knows and make each animal’s unique sound (e.g., baa, cluck, oink, quack, woof-woof or gobble).

Your child will: Feel increasingly confident as you pay special attention to her when singing this familiar song. Older babies, who are now using 10 to 20 words, will proudly demonstrate what they know about animals and the sounds they make.

Play

If you do this: Suggest different farm animals that the child may be less familiar with. If he doesn’t know the animal’s sound, demonstrate the sound for him, or he can invent one.

Your child will: Build his imaginative skills as he tries to make these new sounds and pretends to be various farm animals. Toddlers are especially eager to try new things and love to pretend.

Teach

If you do this: Use a picture book about farm animals or puppets to make an activity visual and tactile. This supports a child with little prior experience with farm animals.

Your child will: Expand her vocabulary and build understanding of how farm animals differ from pets or jungle animals. Once a preschooler is speaking in complete sentences, she is likely to adore stories and will sit for longer periods as you read to her.

Songs like this one also can be used to build social skills. For instance, a group of young participants can take turns in activities and discussions. As they begin to experiment with sounds, words, word patterns, rhymes and rhythms, they also build speaking, listening and reading skills. Coming to identify familiar sounds in the environment encourages development of thinking and problem-solving skills, as well.

So, before you fade out, having decided that singing the chorus of a favorite tune once again is one time too many, remember, there’s more to the exercise than meets the E-I-E-I-O.