How can I encourage more creativity in my toddler?

Most children are born with the ability to sing and move rhythmically. From birth, they can make sounds which vary in pitch and intensity, and love to move their arms and legs freely. However, how children develop their creative and artistic abilities largely depends on the creative environment in which they grow. Therefore, this environment needs to be carefully planned, even before birth and parents and caregivers need to encourage this natural creativity!

If children do not receive creative and artistic modelling and positive attitudes which they can copy, their interest and development in the arts could be slowed down quite considerably. The role of the home and child care environment of young children is of utmost importance. By participating enthusiastically WITH your toddler in all kinds of music, movement, creative play, drawing and painting your obvious pleasure and enjoyment will pass on to your child. Remember, attitudes at 'caught and not taught'!

Examples of Encouraging Creativity in Toddlers

• Find a LARGE box and create a dolls house from it! Cut out windows and doors, then let your toddler draw on bricks, climbing roses, window frames, eaves, tiles and other decorations. Then work with them to create furniture for the inside of the house - use paddle pop sticks, thick cardboard, lego blocks, egg cartons, matchboxes, etc to make tables, chairs, beds, cupboards, etc. and use plasticine or play dough to make cups, saucers, ornaments, toys, appliances to put inside the house.

• Crawling, seat-sliding, rolling and toddling with your toddler involves the whole body and will prepare the children for active participation in movement and music games. Put on music that promotes body movements and join your toddler as they jump, run, gallop and skip around the room. Children will respond to these activities with their own speed, don't try to impose your speed on them! Accompany these movements with spontaneous singing, or playing a drum, the piano or other instrument.

• Encourage spontaneous movement with an accompaniment of mouth sounds (choo, choo; chug, chug, etc), clapping or singing. Try to pick up the children's beat if possible. Then see if your child can begin to get the feeling of 'keeping the beat' with you.

• Sing traditional nursery songs, folk songs and composed songs of good quality to your toddler, letting them hear a variety of songs. Encourage them to join in the song, clap their hands, sing the chorus, and move to the music. Make up a scrapbook with your child with each page depicting a different song or chant that they love to sing or listen to. Let them choose their favourite song to sing by pointing to the appropriate pictures. For older children, write the title of the song next to the picture, to encourage word recognition.

• Read or, better still, tell a story to your child and use your voice to differentiate between the different characters, e.g. for the story of The Three Billy Goats Gruff, a low voice for the Big Billy Goat Gruff, a medium voice for the Middle Billy Goat Gruff and a soft, high voice for the Little Billy Goat Gruff. Use a very loud voice for the ugly
troll and a short, sharp voice for the ‘trip, trap over the bridge’ and a smooth voice for the green grass on the other side. Encourage your child to join in making their voices low and high, loud and soft, sharp and smooth. Act the story out with them as you tell it, then have them draw their favourite parts of the story.

Suggestions for getting into music play

- Use a lot of nursery rhymes, both chanted and sung. The value of these lies in their rhythms, repetition, good humour, nonsensical words and imagination. Check out the songs in the Music resources section of artsMMADD.com!
- Children's interest in sound can be developed through different qualities of sounds, pitches (high and low sounds) and rhythmical movements.
- Crawling, seat-sliding, rolling and toddling with the young child involves the whole body, preparing the child for active participation in 'movement and music' games.
- Repeat simple nursery rhyme songs and chants, or sing spontaneous improvisations during care-taking routines.
- Play nursery rhyme CDs as the child plays, or goes to sleep. Sing with the CD and encourage the children to do the same.
- Let the children play some home made and bought instruments. Choose rattles and bells that are safe and comfortable for the children to play. Too many sounds are confusing.
- Repeat finger plays, short rhymes, chants, games and songs with simple rhythmic texts, encouraging your child to join in.
- Try to match the child's own pitch when singing songs, and avoid imposing your own pitch and expecting the child to sing in tune with you.
- At this stage children could learn to recognise and sing parts of many songs with an approximation of the melody.
- They may enjoy listening many times to a song before actually joining in.
- Provide the children with simple props such as scarves, hankies, hats, puppets and instruments for them to use with their musical activities.
- With children of this age, pitch, pronunciation and word sequence are uncertain because these skills develop slowly.
- Repeat familiar songs and gradually introduce new ones.
- Introduce humorous, active songs which the children enjoy.
- A simple, repeated, rhythmical action such as clapping, patting, pointing or swinging encourages and supports the singing.
- Too many complicated actions, often invented and used by the adult, will inhibit the singing of the child.
- Introduce instruments (home made and purchased) that produce sound vibrations from metal, wood or skin (bells, rhythm sticks, drums) to help the child recognise and listen for contrasting tone quality.
• Name the instruments and talk about the differences in sound and how they are played.
• Encourage spontaneity, experimenting and short ‘free play’ experiences with instruments.
• Noisy banging is not music! It may also cause damage to instruments and caregivers should encourage appropriate experimentation.
• Keeping the beat is not important yet.
• Encourage your child to listen to you as you sing, and to pay attention as you ask them to listen, imitate and differentiate between contrasting voices and sounds (animals, birds, machines, etc.).
• Sing songs about animals, events, stories or people, to your child.
• As children frequently chant and sing about what they are doing, this kind of play with words and music should be encouraged.

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