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of friendly autism advice

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For Parents and Carers of Children with Autism Spectrum Conditions



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4 extra
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Christmas!



In Harmony With Autism

The Duo by Percussion Play © Robin Ashfield

How Musical Instruments Help Kids on the Spectrum



VICTORIA DOXAT is a writer and lecturer at Havant and South Downs College, with a keen interest in music therapy. She has been collaborating with Percussion Play, a leading manufacturer of outdoor musical instruments, to research the benefits of music for children with autism.

We know that no two children are the same, but there does seem to be one activity that is guaranteed to appeal to all children everywhere - music! Music never fails to engage us and even hard-to-reach children seem able to connect with and respond to music on some level.

The health benefits of playing musical instruments are well known and you will no doubt have noticed that your child seems calmer and less anxious after they've heard their favourite song being played or taken part in a music class. When musical instruments are placed within an outside space, children also experience the many health benefits of playing in the fresh air including increased levels of vitamin D, improved sleep and better mental health.

Here's some more ways in which music can help children with autism:

1 Fun for everyone

Everyone in the family can get involved in playing musical instruments no matter what their age, ability or level of mobility. Music encourages people to play together and grandparents, parents, children and even babies can enjoy making music and spending time with each other in a fun, enjoyable and relaxing way.

This gives their confidence a powerful boost and with encouragement your child can start to apply this new confidence to other areas of their lives such as work or education.

For children who are non-verbal, the ability to connect and communicate with others through music is particularly powerful. Some children find it difficult or impossible to express themselves verbally and this can be very frustrating. Playing musical instruments can help your child to overcome these frustrations by teaching them to express themselves without fear.

2 Music is good for your health

Playing musical instruments has been proven to reduce anxiety and depression, lower blood pressure, decrease heart rate and improve our ability to fight viruses. Music therapy is now recognised as being one of the most accessible forms of therapy and is now being used in a range of settings all over the world to help people living with a range of conditions and disabilities.

3 Increases attention span

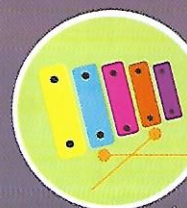
Music is a universal language and is very well suited to the needs of autistic children because playing music can capture and maintain your child's attention in a way that other activities do not. Playing musical instruments in a group requires watching, listening and copying the movements of others and when these actions are repeated over a period of days, weeks and months the concentration levels of those involved will improve.

4 Improves self-confidence

Playing musical instruments can also increase your child's self-confidence and improve their self-esteem. Creating music is empowering and teaches children that they *can* achieve.



Vicky's Tips to Get You Started



GIVE ME FIVE!

Invest in a Pentatonic xylophone - pentatonic instruments have five notes that are

tuned to the pentatonic scale. When your child plays with a pentatonic xylophone they can play the notes in any order and it will always sound good, so less frustration! Check out the Metallophone from New Classic Toys on Amazon for around £10.



PERCUSSIVE PASTA!

A shaker is free and so easy to make. Take a plastic bottle with a lid and fill with pasta, rice or buttons, and then

Sellotape or glue the lid on.

An instant way for your child to beat a rhythm. You can turn this into a craft activity by painting the bottle first or adding stickers.

5 Reduces feelings of fear and anxiety

Music therapy helps children learn how to relate to others and very young autistic children benefit from playing musical instruments because music motivates the child to follow more impulsive play patterns. Autistic children often find it difficult to act in a spontaneous way and activities which encourage impulsive play can help them to become more rounded.

The familiar sounds of the musical notes can also promote feelings of security in children who are resistant to change or who experience anxiety. Music has a soothing quality which helps to calm children during or after a meltdown and it can also help make bedtime routines or daily tasks easier when specific songs are used to accompany particular tasks.

6 Boosts brain power

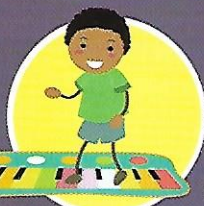
You may have heard of the 'Einstein Effect' - there has been a lot of research into the effect of playing music to babies and there is some evidence that playing classical music in particular can boost brain power. Music stimulates both the left (analytical) and right (creative) hemispheres of our brain and this is why playing musical instruments is linked to improved cognitive function and increased language development.

Music is used effectively in autism therapy because playing musical instruments stimulates the autistic brain to make new connections and strengthens existing ones; resulting in improved mental health and increased cognitive ability.



OUTDOOR AMBIENCE

Take your child to an outdoor musical park. Percussion Play have installed their musical instruments in hundreds of parks, museums, zoos, children's farms and other outdoor attractions.



JUMP TO THE BEAT

Piano mats are a cheap and easy way to get your child moving. Your child can jump, dance and roll over the mat to play the notes. Great for children to play together. The piano mat can be rolled up and stored away when not in use. Prices start from £9.99



TUNE IN TOGETHER

Stick on the radio! Find a radio station that you and your child enjoy and have a boogie. Dancing is great exercise and releases feel-good endorphins. Encourage your child to keep to the rhythm by clapping along together. Free!

7 Better communication skills

Children with autism often find it very difficult to communicate with and to interact with others and so any activity which involves participation is to be encouraged. Introducing musical instruments can be a great way of initiating communication with others because your child has to first learn how to connect with and communicate with an instrument.

Some musical instruments, such as 'The Duo' by Percussion Play have even been specially designed to appeal to children and adults with autism and allow for close social interaction without forcing close physical proximity or requiring direct eye contact between players.

Music helps communication because music making goes beyond words and often creates powerful emotions in those who play. When these emotions are shared with others we are able to connect with each other on a deeper level and non-verbal communication is established. When children who struggle with verbal communication play musical instruments with others there is often evidence that their verbal communication improves as a result.

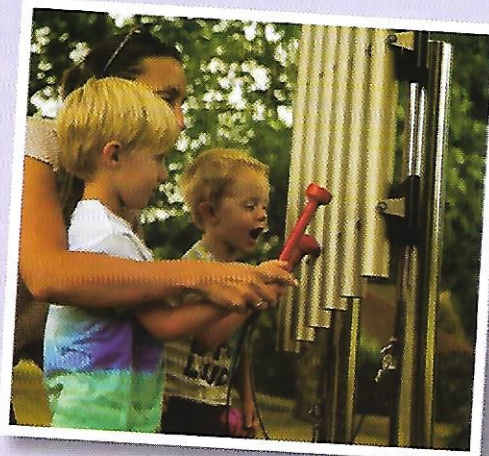


8 Encourages socialisation

When we play music together we develop social skills without even knowing it. Playing musical instruments helps children to participate in a socially acceptable way and reinforces desired responses such as turn-taking. Research tells us that music therapy helps children to interact positively with those around them and so it is no surprise that when autistic children are encouraged to play musical instruments with others their social skills improve, often dramatically.

9 Motor skill development and coordination

Playing outdoor musical instruments is brilliant for developing both fine and gross motor skills and encouraging physical activity and coordination. Children will run between instruments, use their whole bodies to dance or sway to the music and will use beaters to make a sound. Playing the instruments requires hand-eye coordination and some children even use the instruments as climbing frames! This means that even a short outdoor music session can result in a lot of physical benefits.



10 No wrong notes

Some musical instruments are 'pentatonic'. This means that the instrument is made up of notes that are taken from the pentatonic scale. There are five notes in the pentatonic scale and these notes always sound good together no matter which order they are played in. If your child is anxious, shy or reluctant to engage in activities, try introducing them to pentatonic instruments. It is impossible to play a 'wrong' note and the pentatonic scale has a very pleasing sound which even the most reluctant child will want to play.

Because there are no boundaries with music and no rules, there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to access musical instruments and so your family can use music and musical instruments in a way that suits your individual needs and preferences. Playing musical instruments also assists your child to participate in socially acceptable ways and helps to reinforce desired responses.

For a child living with autism, music may well be the most effective, as well as one of the most accessible, forms of therapy available to them today and encouraging our children to play musical instruments from a young age may be one of the very best things that we can do for them.

Further Information

You can access the original findings of Victoria's research on the Percussion Play website at www.percussionplay.com. If you would like to contact Victoria, e-mail hello@victoriadoxat.com

Save for your School with Percussion Play!

AuKids has teamed up with Percussion Play to offer a 10% discount off any Percussion Play product/s ordered before 31st March 2019. Pass the code on to your child's nursery, school, or Friends of Park group! All our images feature Percussion Play instruments. Use the discount code **AUK10** at www.percussionplay.com