

Learning Links

Helping parents, caregivers, and early childhood professionals make the link between media and learning

I am researching the effect cartoons have on children, i.e. stereotypes children view from cartoons. I was just wondering how much of a long-term effect there really is?

- Carly, Scarsdale, NY (teacher)

Because cartoons are just one source of the messages a child hears, it is hard to decipher how significant their influence is. [This] largely depends on what else is going on in a child's life. If a child picks up an idea from a cartoon, such as a stereotype about the way girls are supposed to act, and then acts out that stereotype while playing or talking, parents can reinforce, contradict, or ignore it.

While cartoons may capture the attention of young children, as children get older they often begin watching other types of programming. Some of this programming is more sophisticated and introduces children to a wider range of characters and cultures, and some of it contains new versions of the same stereotypes. When a stereotype gets repeated often enough — and goes unchecked — the cumulative effect is what becomes powerful.

Stomping Out Stereotypes

- **Let your child know that girls can be anything they want to be.**

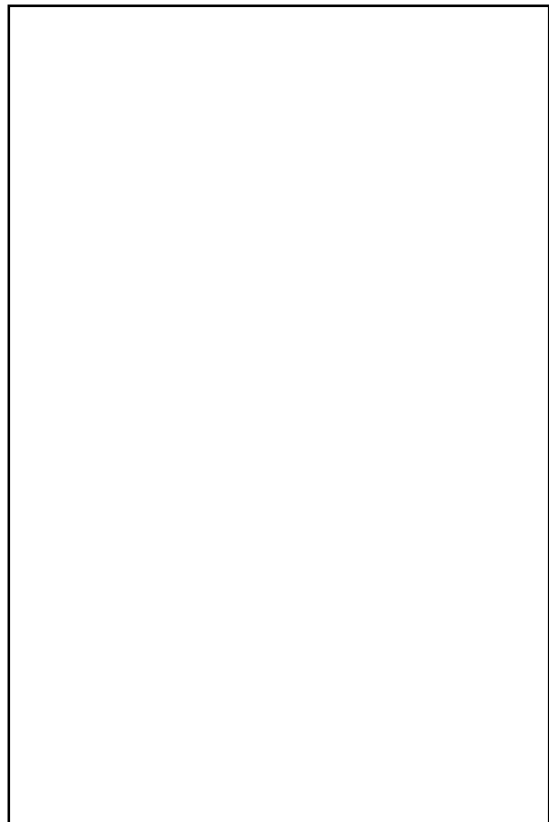
Watch out for cartoons that portray girls as passive or performing what is defined as "woman's work." Some common female stereotypes are "the bratty sister," "the girlfriend" and "the know-it-all."

- **Let your child know that boys can be anything they want to be.** Avoid shows and movies that feature male characters with stereotypical traits such as strong and all-powerful or rude and dumb. Also, let your child know that villains and heroes can be both female and male.

- **Talk to your child about multiple cultures.** Be on the lookout for the use of accents and skin color to connect a negative behavior with a cultural group. Pay attention to which characters are portrayed as dumb, unimportant or aggressive and what they might be saying about an attitude toward a culture.

- **Watch out for physical ability or appearance as the sole signal of value.**

Let your child know that what somebody looks like is not the basis for knowing who he or she really is. Also, tell your child that things like wheelchairs, braces and glasses are special tools some people use, not reasons to make fun of them.

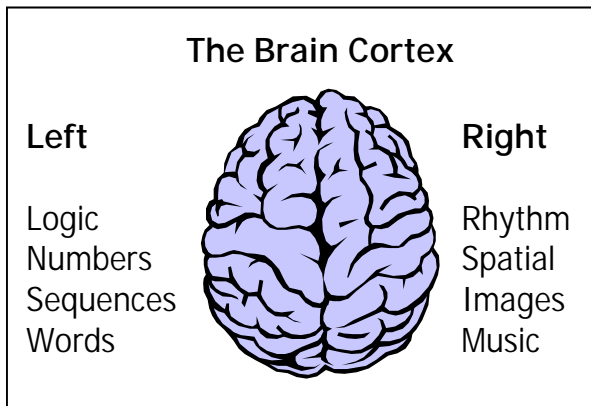


“I’ve Got The Music In Me”

by Donna Repaty, Guest Contributor
North Country Prenatal/Perinatal Council

We are born musical and music is an important part of all children’s development. The heartbeat is the first rhythm babies hear/feel. Infants learn movement as they “dance” in the arms of a caring adult. Toddlers enjoy songs and finger plays that introduce rhyming. They use music and rhythm to learn about language, literacy, and how their bodies move. Preschoolers develop new language, math, and motor skills through music’s words, patterns, and rhythms. Social and emotional skills are enhanced through music experiences, as children learn to express their feelings. Concepts like

fast/slow, high/low, soft/loud, up/down, and many more, are experienced through music.



Music truly supports “whole child” development. This includes physical, intellectual, emotional and social experiences. Music encourages all kinds of physical movement, both fine motor (small muscle) and gross motor (large muscle) movements. A song’s repetition of lyrics aids a child’s language development. Music can bring forth many emotions. Children can have fun doing activities around how music makes them feel. They may even discover some new ways to

express their feelings through music. Music and dance are ways in which children can easily feel part of a group. Providing opportunities for dramatic play which guide children into group activities such as dancing or pretend band, help children learn cooperation and turn taking.

Brain research has shown that songs, movement, and musical games of childhood are neurological exercises that help children learn speech patterns and motor skills. The part of the brain that stores memory becomes fully functional at 9-10 months. Simple activities like rocking a baby stimulates brain growth. Bouncing and rocking are prerequisites for crawling. Talking and singing to babies significantly speed up the process of learning language.

Musical activities engage both left and right sides of the brain.

Try these activities:

1. Try to remember your earliest experiences with music. How do they make you feel?
2. How do you (could you) use music in your home? “You Are My Sunshine” to wake your child up in the morning.
3. What programs do you watch with your children that provide music experiences?
4. How will you share music with your child(ren)?
5. What kinds of movement activities do you do with your child(ren)? Dancing to music from the radio or a CD? Singing songs or doing finger plays (“The Itsy Bitsy Spider”)?
6. How does music influence you? Make you feel? (Commercials, Scores from movies, song from the children’s programs on PBS etc.)