



Music & Communication

Tips

INTRODUCTION

Because singing and speech share many similarities, yet are accessed differently by the brain, music strategies can be an alternate way to practice functional communication. Music is also an effective means to organize speech by “chunking” phrases into predictable patterns and offering timing cues to assist in pacing. Since many early speech phrases are taught through repetition and imitation, these same phrases can be modeled through song as an initial teaching format, followed by fading of the music and use of the language in more natural settings. Below are classroom-tested tips to help your students tune in!

FILL IN THE BLANK TECHNIQUES FOR SINGING

Students with emerging speech can be encouraged to fill in a missing word or phrase left out at the end of a song lyric. For example, “The wheels on the bus go round and _____. All through the _____.” Live singing is the most effective way to implement this technique in order to give the student adequate response time. Start with familiar children’s songs or chants, and then try moving on to songs with more functional language such as a greeting or name song.

PICTURE CHOICE SONG ACTIVITIES

For students using picture-based communication, gather simple pictures that correspond to familiar children’s songs. After singing a lyric that goes with one of the pictures, pause and ask the student to select the correct picture. For example, after singing the lyric “...and on that farm he had a pig.” during “Old MacDonald” present the student a picture of a horse and a pig to choose from. After the student selects the correct picture, continue singing the song until the next animal choice.

SONG STORIES

A variety of books that accompany familiar songs can be used to increase motivation and speech initiation once the child is familiar with the song. See the “Musical Stories” link on the www.coastmusictherapy.com tips page for ideas. Song cues can also enhance basic comprehension and the understanding of “wh” questions. For example, if the student is asked where the star is in “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star”, the instructor can provide the song cue “Up above the _____” and let the student fill in the blank in order to answer the question.





SONG SEQUENCING ACTIVITIES

For students who are reading, type out the lyrics to a familiar song in large text and cut apart each verse or line into a separate strip of paper. Have the student put the lyrics back in order to work on sequencing skills. For nonreaders, provide pictures that can be arranged in a sequence.

CREATING YOUR OWN SONGS TO TEACH FUNCTIONAL LANGUAGE

Students who learn best through rote techniques often respond more quickly to information presented through song or chant due to the predictable patterns involved. Therefore, a functional word, phrase or language script set to song may be easier for students to memorize and use. First determine the designated phrase or script, and then fit those words into a familiar children's tune. It is best to repeat the phrase or script multiple times within the song, and encourage the student to sing along or fill in the blanks. For example, to the tune of "If You're Happy and You Know it" sing "When I want some more, I say more" or to the tune of "Are You Sleeping" model "I want water, I want water. Water please, water please."

TEACHING RESOURCES

Much of traditional children's music contains fast paced and complex lyrics that can be overwhelming for children who have communication difficulties. The Tuned in to Learning® program was designed with the needs of special learners in mind, including appropriate pacing, simplified language, and additional response time for children to practice each target skill. This 9-volume music-assisted learning curriculum uses an engaging combination of inventive songs, movement, and vibrant visual supports to boost motivation and lock in core concepts. Volumes useful for teaching speech, receptive language, pragmatics, and augmentative communication include:

- Volume 1:** Social Skills & Pragmatics
- Volume 2:** Basic Language Concepts
- Volume 4:** "Wh" Questions
- Volume 6:** Discrete Trial & Learning Readiness
- Volume 7:** Emerging Speech & Oral Motor
- Volume 8:** Skill Building for Students with Multiple Disabilities (augmentative communication)

