

# Music & Students with Multiple Disabilities



## Tips

### INTRODUCTION

Music is a powerful teaching modality that is highly accessible for individuals with physical and cognitive challenges. Because music impacts physiological functioning on a variety of levels, it is an effective way to stimulate movement and help students become more alert, engaged, and excited about learning. Research findings from the fields of music therapy and special education support the positive effects of music as a therapeutic tool for individuals with multiple disabilities. Documented results include increases in verbal responding, decreases in stereotyped behavior, learning of anticipatory, imitative, and initiating behaviors, improvements in purposeful hand use, improved visual attention, and greater activation of augmentative devices. Below are classroom-tested tips to help your students tune in!

### USING INSTRUMENTS TO FACILITATE MOTOR PARTICIPATION

- Hold up a visually appealing instrument that is accessible to the student. Move the instrument to different locations in the student's vicinity to promote purposeful hand use and visual tracking skills.
- Place a sturdy drum or tambourine near the student's foot to encourage gross motor participation. The student can kick the drum/tambourine to produce a sound.
- Place an instrument with a mount (see "Helping Hands" [www.musicselementary.com](http://www.musicselementary.com)) on a surface within the student's vicinity to promote independent motor participation.

### APPROPRIATE INSTRUMENTS FOR STUDENTS WITH PHYSICAL CHALLENGES

#### Instruments with High Visual & Sensory Appeal



CHIME TREE



CABASA



OCEAN DRUM



REMO PRISM TAMBOURINE



RAINBOWMAKER RAINSTICK

#### Adapted Instruments



MALLET CUFF



VELCRO WRIST BELL



VELCRO EGG SHAKER



HELPING HANDS INSTRUMENT MOUNT

For instruments visit [www.westmusic.com](http://www.westmusic.com) or [www.musicselementary.com](http://www.musicselementary.com)  
For adapted mallets visit [www.adaysworkmusiceducation.com](http://www.adaysworkmusiceducation.com)



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## MUSIC & COMMUNICATION

- Create photos or picture icons representing the student's preferred instruments or songs. Hold up 2 different pictures and encourage the student to choose through eye gaze or reaching. After the student selects one of the pictures, provide access to the target instrument, or sing/play the song the student has chosen.
- Record a repetitive part of a song onto a BigMack® switch (examples are provided below). Sing the song, pausing at the part where the student should fill in the lyrics. Encourage the student to hit the switch to sing along with the song.
  - Record "E-I-E-I-O" onto a switch for "Old McDonald"
  - Record "Hi ho the dairy-o the farmer and the dell" onto a switch for "Farmer and the Dell"
  - Record "This old man came rolling home" onto a switch for "This Old Man"
  - Record "All through the town" onto a switch for "Wheels on the Bus"
  - Record "No more monkeys jumping on the bed" onto a switch for "5 Little Monkeys"

## TEACHING RESOURCES

Much of traditional children's music contains fast paced and complex lyrics that can be overwhelming for students who are working on fundamental skills such as following one step instructions or engaging in basic communication exchanges. 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 students to practice each target skill. Although many of volumes from this music-assisted learning curriculum can be adapted for students at varying levels, Volume 8 detailed below was designed specifically for children and young adults with Cerebral Palsy, Angelman Syndrome, Rett Syndrome, and related physical or communication challenges.

### Tuned In to Learning™ Volume 8: Skill Building for Students With Multiple Disabilities

To learn more, visit  
[www.tunedintolearning.com](http://www.tunedintolearning.com)



Includes a 10 song Music CD, sample IEP objectives, and activities addressing cause & effect, visual tracking, motor skills, turn-taking, and augmentative communication.

