

# Multi-Sensory Songs and Rhymes: Hints and Tips

Sensory experiences can make songs and rhymes even more fun for children and adults. Adding multi-sensory elements can help make songs and rhymes engaging and meaningful for children with sensory impairments, learning disabilities and other additional needs. It's a great way to make songs and rhymes inclusive and engaging for everyone.

Sensory additions do not need to be expensive or complicated. Here are some ideas that can be used with many different songs and rhymes:

## Pat, pat, tickle! Including touch

Touch is generally the most inclusive of the senses and least likely to be affected by sensory impairments. Some children with additional needs can be 'tactile defensive' and very distrustful of touch. Follow the child's lead and be guided by parents and carers.

### Think about ways to include touch:

- There are many songs and rhymes that already use touch ('Round and Round the Garden', 'Creeping Creeping Goes the Little Cat', 'I have a Little Spider').
- Try also adding some touch into other rhymes and songs. For example 'If You're Happy and You Know It' could include 'If you're happy and you know it pat someone's knee' or 'The Hello

Song' could include a verse 'Shake Hands Everyone' where you shake hands with each other.

## Shake, shake, shake! Including vibrations

Almost all children seem to find vibrations interesting. Thinking about the vibrations you are creating can be a good way of making noisy props more inclusive.

### Think about including vibrations:

- Children may enjoy putting their hand on a wave drum, musical box, guiro (instrument with ridges and a scraper) or other noise maker to feel the vibrations.
- There are many toys available that shake when a string is pulled. Children can find these quite fascinating so you could include one or two as props for your rhymes.

## Ting ting! Adding sound effects and noises

There's often nothing better than a ting or



a squeak for getting someone's attention!

Think about ways of including interesting noises. As well as shakers you could try some of the following:

- A whistle for any song or rhyme that mentions tea (I'm a Little Tea Pot, Polly Put the Kettle on etc.)
- Bird toys that make a bird call when squeezed for any rhyme about sunshine, spring time, early mornings, woods or farms. You could include some bird noises at the beginning or end.
- Rain sticks and ocean drums are very soothing and lend themselves to being included in any rhymes or songs with water, rain, the sea or even sizzling sausages!
- Bicycle bells that make a gentle 'ting' (choose one that is not too loud) can be nice additions to songs about transportation (The wheels on the bicycle go round and round.)
- Giggle sticks and groan sticks are cheap and make people laugh. Use them to make the noise of the chatting mums for 'The Wheels on the Bus'. Little noise-makers that say 'baa' or 'moo' when turned upside down are also easy to find online.
- Squeaks are always funny so try to include these in your usual repertoire. (If you're happy and you know it give a squeak...). Charity shops are a good source of squeaky toys if you're on a tight budget.

Any interesting noise is good, but be aware that some children with additional needs are very sensitive to sudden noises. Choose gentle sounds.

## Something to Cool You Down...

### Adding a gentle breeze

Almost all children (and many adults!) find gentle breezes intriguing and soothing. Some wafts of cool air will be an unusual but very welcome addition to your rhymes:

- Use a folding fan if you can and make a little breeze for everyone to feel. This could be added in to lots of rhymes and songs. For example 'There was a little breeze blowing as we rowed down the river' ('Row, Row, Row Your Boat) or 'A little breeze was blowing, the rain began to fall and out of the pond hopped a frog...' ('The Little Green Frog').
- Many Bookbug Sessions already include bouncy Lycra activities. These can be very inclusive as the Lycra is large and easily seen. It's tactile and also creates a refreshing breeze for everyone to enjoy.

### Whoosh! Using scarves and fabric

Silk scarves (or other large pieces of light fabric) are lovely to look at and touch and a great way of including peek-a-boo games.

- Scarves can be used as mist, snow, water or rain!
- Many children enjoy having a scarf draped right over them. For example you could pause Incy Wincy Spider in the middle and play at covering children in the 'rain'. A big piece of blue silk or other light fabric can be used for the 'rain'.
- Silk has the advantage that it is see-through so not too overwhelming for a game of peek-a-boo. But some children may still prefer to watch other children (or grown-ups!) get covered up.

## Wooden spoons and clothes pegs... Adding interest with everyday objects

Simple everyday objects can add lots of interest to rhymes and songs.

- Think of the sensory qualities of the objects when you are choosing them. Is the object you have chosen nice to touch? Can it make any interesting noises? Does it have a smell? Think about how the child will experience the object.
- Small replicas of larger objects are not always very interesting or meaningful for children with additional needs, particularly those with complex needs. For example, if you want something to represent a bird, it is best to choose something like a bird noise-maker or a bunch of feathers rather than a small bird toy or ornament.
- Movement attracts the eye, so throw a bean bag carefully in the air, or let some confetti gently float to the ground. Use movement to attract the attention of children and to engage them visually.

There are lots of interesting, everyday objects that you can use to add sensory elements to engage children and parents. Here are some that you might want to use:

Scrubbing brushes, dish mops, yellow dusters, feather dusters, clothes peg in a bag, coffee beans, pine cones, sea shells, sea weed, autumn leaves, flowers, catkins, wash boards, wooden spoons and mixing bowls, cups and teaspoons, old-fashioned toys (yo-yos, Jacob's ladder toys, topsy turvy dolls), fruit and vegetables, bubbles, balls, bean bags, biscuit tins (to bang), bubble wrap, wellies, flip flops, emergency foil blankets, maps (fun to unfold and fold), confetti...

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