

What to Expect at Musikgarten

Part 3: Toddlers and young children

- **I expect toddlers to fade in and out of activities.** Very few toddlers are completely engaged for the entire length of class. Because their attention spans are short, our half hour class typically features at least a dozen different activities. When one or two toddlers fade out, I usually let it go. I know that the magic of the music will eventually pull them back into the moment. If too many children get off track I will switch gears or alter the lesson plan to re-direct wanderers.
- **I do not expect your toddler to sing.** Your child's job is to hear and absorb the sounds and songs in the environment. Often imitating an animal sound will be a child's first attempt at vocalizing. You will notice that I sing tonal patterns and chant rhythm patterns in every class. At some point along the way your child will begin to imitate these simple patterns, which form the building blocks of music. If you talk to your child, he will learn to talk. If you sing to your child, she will learn to sing. Stick with it and keep singing!
- **Toddlers can learn to listen.** Most children are born with the ability to hear, but all children must be taught how to listen. Listening requires focused attention, and listening is the foundation of all learning. We do short "focused listening" exercises in every class to practice this vitally important skill. You'll be amazed at how still your child can be when we settle into our "special listening place."
- **Toddlers can learn to be gentle.** Toddlers need to be shown how to handle instruments gently and carefully, and we practice this in every class.
- **Toddlers can learn to wait.** Children need to be sitting down before I will hand them an instrument, and this will help them learn delayed gratification and impulse control.
- **"Learning to stop" is a skill that takes time.** I do not expect children to fully master the art of stopping on command until around the age of **four**. Stopping games and activities are included in the toddler class because children need practice to reach mastery. At this stage, the language center in the brain is not as well developed as the impulse to move. Therefore, once toddlers get moving it is very hard for them to stop on cue. Just as the brakes on your car take a certain amount of time to stop your moving vehicle, a toddler's "brakes" are not fully developed. That is why they need a lot of practice and understanding when they don't stop right away.
- **Toddlers can be shown how to calm down.** I frequently follow a lively activity or dance with a lullaby or rocking song. This sequence is intentionally designed to help toddlers learn to regulate their speed and practice self-calming techniques. Music is a powerful gift that can help all of us slow down and breathe—and that includes us grown-ups! Give it a try the next time you've had a long day.

