



# Music and ... Social-Emotional Skills

Full Research Booklet

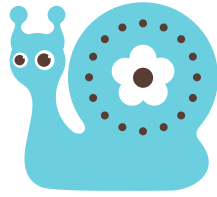
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Ages 18 months to 3 years old



## Introduction

### Social-Emotional Learning: What is it and why does it matter?



Given the competitive energy around parenting these days, it's a wonder some parents aren't signing their preschoolers up for intensive "accelerated school-readiness classes" and SAT vocabulary camps.

But no matter how brilliant – or over-scheduled – the child, there's a reason for the "pre-". A preschooler is, quite simply, a *pre*-schooler until he or she is ready for school. And no matter how data-driven parents may become, most would still agree that **beyond numbers, letters, colors, and such, there lies a harder-to-quantify but just-as-essential quality to school-readiness.**<sup>1</sup>

"School-ready" is, of course, a complicated and weighted term. Scientists describe a school-ready child as having "the ability to experience, regulate, and express emotions; form close and secure personal relationships; explore the environment; and learn—all in the context of family, community, and cultural expectations."<sup>2</sup>

It's interesting to note that this definition doesn't make mention of numbers, colors, or the alphabet. While it's important that a child entering school have some basic skills and knowledge, researchers seem to agree that

*what a preschooler knows is far less important than how he or she learns it.* **Only if a child is**

**emotionally and socially equipped to manage the demands of a school environment will he or she be able to benefit from the learning it has to offer.**



# Seven Social-Emotional Competencies

Because social-emotional learning can seem less quantifiable than, say, counting or identifying colors, some researchers have suggested breaking the concept into seven more specific areas.<sup>3</sup>



## 1. Confidence

### What is it?

Confidence: A sense of control and mastery of one's body, behavior and world; the child's sense that he is more likely than not to succeed at what he undertakes, and that adults will be helpful.<sup>4</sup>

### How it works in a Kindermusik class

The inviting, child-centered atmosphere of a Kindermusik class, where children and parents are welcomed with a "Hello song" and guided through a themed series of activities, is built to foster confidence in every child.

Lessons carefully balance **predictability** (which boosts confidence through repetition, familiarity, and mastery) with **novelty** (which boosts confidence through challenge and increasing competence), celebrating what children know and building upon it with new skills and experiences.

Every learning style is recognized, and every level of participation—from playing an egg shaker along to music, to boisterously moving around the classroom independently, to "opting out" of an instrument play altogether and sitting quietly, instead, with a parent—is valued as an appropriate way for a child to absorb the moment, prepare to try new things, and make his or her own discoveries.



## Developmental Milestones: *Confidence*<sup>7</sup>

By the age of three, most children:

- Seek an adult to show off an accomplishment.
- Will generate activity ideas independently.
- Have favorite colors, books, clothes, etc. that they enjoy telling others about.

*NOTE: Every child is unique, and different children may reach milestones at different times. If you're concerned about your child's development, talk to your pediatrician.*

In addition, research has specifically linked music and movement activities with the development of confidence in young children. While music alone can wield incredible power over state of mind, turning anxiety into calm, lethargy into energy, and distraction into focus,<sup>5</sup> the best way to describe the incredible connection between movement and confidence is to quote a researcher who writes, quite simply, **“The more they move, the more they learn.”<sup>5</sup>**

### What you can do at home

● **Break it down.** You know your child—where he or she excels, where he or she is more likely to struggle or resist. Set your child up for the right balance of challenge and success by breaking larger, potentially overwhelming challenges into smaller, more manageable sections or

steps. Offer an appropriate amount of independence for the steps that will come easily; offer an appropriate amount of support during the steps that you expect might be more difficult.

- **Muzzle Ms. Fix-It.** For a child to develop confidence, he or she must be allowed to problem-solve independently and successfully. This doesn't mean you can't guide, assist, or support (see “Break it down”) – but if the task is developmentally appropriate, allowing children to

“get stuck” can be a good thing. Only then can they experience the pride and confidence that comes when they persist and arrive at their own solutions.

- **Loosen up!** Sing, dance, rhyme, play, run, skip, twirl, crawl, wiggle, and bounce. (Yes, you.) Your child doesn't have to participate in everything. Simply by modeling the freedom to move your own body in a variety of ways, use your voice freely, and express your emotions creatively, you'll be demonstrating that you are safe and supportive and that expression is prized and welcome – two essentials for the development of confidence.

## 2. Curiosity.....

### What is it?

Curiosity: The sense that finding out about things is positive and leads to pleasure.<sup>8</sup>

### How it works in a Kindermusik class

When a child is offered an instrument and encouraged to explore it in whatever way he or she likes; when he or she is asked for ideas about how to make a scarf move in a “windy” or “bumpy” or “wiggly” way; when he or she listens carefully to find out how the sound of a baby elephant is different from the sound of an adult elephant, that child learns that curiosity is not only valued, but quite simply good, that questions have a payoff, and that **there are wonderful, unknown things in the world to see and experience and discover.**



Curiosity inevitably leads to learning. To learn something new, a child must not only encounter the kinds of items and experiences that cause him or her to ask what, why, how...but must also feel motivated to follow a thread to the answers, have the proper encouragement, freedom, and materials to do so, and then also find the answers exciting, fulfilling, and worthy of the investigation.<sup>9</sup>

Curiosity and payoff are in hearty supply in the never-ending variations on movement, vocal play, pretend play, instrument exploration, and creative storytelling and interpretation in a Kindermusik class. Curiosity/query, creativity/investigation, back and forth: *How might this sound? What if*

*we try it this way? Can you think of some other ways*

*we might do that? Now, what do you think*

*this would look like? What sound might*

*this make? What do you think will*

*happen next? Sounds are added to*

*stories; instruments are tapped on*

*toes and elbows and ears; scarves are*

*“flown” and “walked” and “dusted”.*

And so, **curiosity and music**

**are a natural pair.** Research

has shown that music instruments, for

example, almost universally engage

young children’s curiosity and

attention, prompting exploration,

experimentation, and multi-sensory

investigation of form and function.<sup>10</sup>



## What you can do at home

- **Mystery grab bag.** Collect some mysterious items from around the house—things whose function might not be automatically clear, like a honeydripper, garlic press, eye pillow, binder clip, or monkey wrench. Put them in a bag or on a tray and investigate them with your child, one at a time. Make up creative functions for them. Do they make good instruments?

- **Memory lane.** Dust off your shelf of old LPs, cassettes, or CDs and encourage your child to choose a couple. Look at the covers together, then play a song from one of them without letting your child see which it is. Challenge your child to guess which album the song comes from, based on the sound of the music and the look of the cover art.

- **Project find-out.** Keep a “find-out” list in the house somewhere. When a question arises (*Do penguins make sounds? Can you still hear music underwater? Where does chocolate come from?*), put it on the list. Then when you have some special activity time together, grab



### Developmental Milestones: *Curiosity*<sup>11</sup>

By the age of three, most children:

- Have begun to ask “why?”
- Enjoy realistic toys (i.e. dolls, telephones, tools) and imitating grown-up activities.
- Like to explore materials to find new ways to make things happen.

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a question and set about finding the answer. Some may be quick internet video searches, while others might involve a field trip, a phone call, or a science experiment. (Your child is sure to get even more creative in his or her curiosities once it's clear that the more esoteric the question, the more interesting the find-out!)

### 3. Intentionality



#### What is it?

Intentionality: The wish and capacity to have an impact, and to act upon that with persistence.<sup>12</sup>

#### How it works in a Kindermusik class

**Early signs of intentionality are in full view among children in the Our Time age range and are closely correlated with the burgeoning competence and autonomy of these young children.**<sup>13</sup> After all, toddlers never seem more joyful than when they have been, by their own choice and by their own efforts, *effective*.

There are a variety of ways a child can show intentionality. Making a selection (for instance, selecting one instrument from a group) or expressing a preference (such as suggesting a way to move or contributing a sound idea to a story or song) indicates a deliberate choice of one thing over others.

Attending to a song or activity “all the way through” also shows intentionality, as a child must opt to disregard or delay other stimuli and impulses (a new skill, and still in development) in order to focus on the activity at hand.<sup>14</sup>

## What you can do at home

Sometimes intentionality seems like the last thing on an active toddler's mind, as you follow his or her dotted path of 20-second fascinations, each rapidly investigated and discarded for the next. Other times, your child may "zoom in" on something so intensely that it's hard to get his or her attention.

Both are age-appropriate ways of interacting with the world and its stimuli, but as a child nears school age, he or she should become more able to engage with single activities for longer periods of time, persist through challenges, and demonstrate a longer view, longer attention span, and an ability to select, engage, and complete an activity.



### Developmental Milestones: *Intentionality*<sup>16</sup>

By the age of three, most children:

- Show a strong sense of self as an individual (e.g., sometimes say, "No!" to an adult's request).
- Can engage in a single activity, like a game or puzzle, all the way through.
- Will express specific requests, whether given particular options or not.

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● **Picky, picky, picky.** Allowing your child to choose from a handful of selections—from what to eat, play, listen to, or wear—helps him or her develop the ability to see the long view (in other words, *If I choose this, I will have to live with it*), and feel more involved in the follow-through of that choice (be it macaroni, hide-and-seek, Old MacDonald, or overalls).

● **Puzzle me.** Puzzles can be a *perfect* exercise in intentionality. Each piece presents a challenge, and each challenge presents a choice: persist or give up. Giving up often comes with other attractive

activity options – but a child that knows the satisfaction of selecting, persisting, and completing an activity (like a puzzle) will likely push through the challenge to reap those emotional rewards.

- **Hocus focus.** You’ve almost surely heard some variation of the Kindermusik mantra: *hearing* is a *sense*, but *listening* is a *skill*, a deliberate act that requires intention and focus. Engaging in Focused Listening activities and exercises – both in and out of Kindermusik classes – is an intensive intentionality workout. Even for adults, it truly takes focus to shut out other, competing stimuli to focus *solely* on a sound or piece of music.<sup>15</sup>

## 4. Self-Control



### What is it?

Self-Control: The ability to modulate and control one’s own actions in age-appropriate ways; a sense of inner control.<sup>17</sup>

### How it works in a Kindermusik class

While there is very little heavy-handed direction (sit there, play this, line up, etc.) in a Kindermusik class, there are plenty of **experiences that provide learning opportunities in the areas of self-control**—namely sharing, taking turns, respecting classmates’ personal space, stopping and starting movements, putting things away when you’ve finished with them, etc.

You’re most likely to see physical and audio (rather than verbal) cues to let children (and parents) know what to expect and what’s expected of them. Rather than saying “Let’s all stand up”, for example, a Kindermusik educator may simply stand, gesturing that the class should join her. A “clean-up song”, rather than a verbal explanation, may be used to signal

clean-up time. Children will listen for audio cues in a song to know when to stretch up high, for example, and when to crouch down low.

Research demonstrates that these physical and audio cues are, in fact, almost miraculously effective, in contrast to verbal requests and/or explanations.<sup>18</sup>

## What you can do at home

- **Cue audio/visual.** Use familiar signals to let your child know that a transition from one activity to another is coming. Establish a special song to signal the approach of naptime, for example, or flicker the lights when it's time to clean up.<sup>19</sup>

- **Room for retreat.** Providing a place where your child can go to “get away from it all” (to stave off or recover from a tantrum, for instance) gives him or her the opportunity to recognize his or her own patterns and signals and, accordingly, to develop self-knowledge and self-control. (And no, it's not too soon!)

Music can be a powerful tool for relaxation and self-control, so consider equipping your child's retreat space with a CD or tape player with easy buttons that he or she can control independently.<sup>20</sup>



### Developmental Milestones: *Self-Control*<sup>22</sup>

By the age of three, most children:

- Can follow simple requests.
- Are increasingly aware of their possessions.
- Are often able to share and take turns.

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- **Share and share alike.** Give your child lots of opportunities to practice sharing – with you, with siblings, with stuffed animals, anyone. For fun, try this: choose one thing (an instrument, for example, or a toy) and allow your child to choose another. Set a timer for one minute, then switch toys. Repeat.<sup>21</sup>

## 5. Relatedness



### What is it?

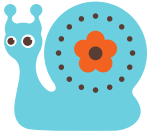
Relatedness: The ability to engage with others based on the sense of understanding and being understood by them.<sup>23</sup>

### How it works in a Kindermusik class

Studies show overwhelmingly that young children who participate in musical experiences and activities demonstrate increased levels of social participation<sup>24</sup>—and, interestingly, *longer* social interactions as well.<sup>25</sup>

In addition, **teachers who use musical cues to initiate transitions have been shown to experience decreased negative behaviors (such as teasing, taunting, and bullying) and increased positive behaviors** (instances of cooperation, kindness, and empathy) in their class groups.<sup>26</sup>

Music activities that engage a group of children with music and movement appear to have a great impact on children’s sense of “the other” and of “the group”, not to mention an increasing awareness of the emotions of others and an enhanced ability to cooperate.<sup>27</sup> Watch a group of young children holding hands in a circle or passing an instrument around the group, for example, and relatedness comes to center stage.



## Developmental Milestones: *Relatedness*<sup>31</sup>

By the age of three, most children:

- Enjoy exploring objects with adults as a basis for establishing relationships (e.g., playing a certain game over and over again with Grandfather).
- May make simple overtures to other children (e.g., look for and smile at children at the store).
- Show “contagious distress” when others are unhappy (e.g., starts to cry when he or she sees another child crying).

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## What you can do at home

### ● **Keep on keepin’ on.**

According to research, young children who demonstrate relatedness in preschool settings tend to be children who have trusting relationships and secure attachments with familiar adults<sup>28</sup>—so the things you’re already doing with your child at home (offering patience and comfort, teaching about feelings, empathy, and respect, etc.) are exactly what you should be doing to continue to foster this important skill.

### ● **Surprise, surprise.**

Research overwhelmingly reveals that music activities and movement help build trust and compassion between children, their playmates, and their adult caregivers.<sup>29</sup> Holding hands, dancing, partnering, swaying, clapping together, playing instruments together, singing together—almost any “together” musical experience is bound to be a relatedness slam-dunk.

- **The no-share, no-pressure band.** It’s clear that learning to share is a vital skill that preschoolers must learn in order to be successful – but sometimes, it’s okay not to share. For young children,

you can provide a relaxing, positive, and social music-making experience by providing each child with his or her own instrument and encouraging the group to enjoy playing music together without the emotional challenge of having to share or take turns.<sup>30</sup>

● **Be a joiner! Connecting with your child one-on-one in a compassionate way that emphasizes kindness and respect**

is essential, but engaging in activities with larger groups and other adults and children is just as important. Try to add experiences to your child's day that integrate big groups, small groups, people of ages and cultures other than your child's, as well as new sounds, sights, animals, spectacles, etc. The "bigger" your child's sphere of experience, the more universal his or her sense of relatedness will be able to become!

## 6. Capacity to Communicate



### What is it?

Capacity to Communicate: The wish and ability to verbally exchange ideas, feelings, and concepts with others.<sup>32</sup>

### How it works in a Kindermusik class

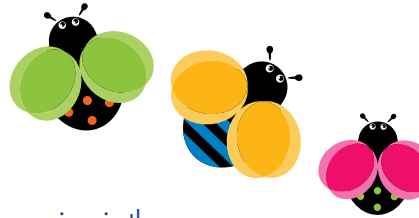
We are not born with a complete "kit" of communication tools. At first, as infants, we're primarily able to communicate only our most basic needs (such as, "*I'm hungry*"). As we become more adept at manipulating external forces (such as parents), we also become more adept at specifying particular wants (such as, "*Bring that toy here*") and emotions (such as, "*I like seeing your face*").<sup>33</sup>

That capacity to communicate grows by leaps and bounds, however, when we also begin to engage in it for its own sake—in other words, to communicate for pleasure, for connection, for fun.

**In a Kindermusik class, children are made, foremost, to feel secure, then encouraged to explore a variety of media for self expression.**

They learn—through songs, dances, instrument exploration, instrument play, and movement activities—that voices, bodies, and instruments are all tools they can use to communicate, and that there are subtleties in sound and movement that they can use to change the message they are trying to convey.<sup>34</sup>

## What you can do at home



- **Set the stage.** Creating an environment that's hospitable to communication and expression is the very best and most important thing you can do, and the recipe for this environment is simple. Offer your child a feeling of emotional security. Place a high value on expression. Model communication, expressiveness, and open lack of judgment yourself. Then give your child full access to the “tools” of expression—not only instruments, art supplies, books, and music, but also conversation, adventures, and access to a *you* that has the time and freedom to move, dance, tell stories, and be outlandish!
- **Teach emotion words.** As you're teaching your child the words for colors, numbers, animals, trucks, dinosaurs, parts of the body, and what have you, be sure to include the words for a large number of varied emotions as well. Young children experience the same large range of emotions that adults do, but don't often have access to vocabulary to describe and identify those feelings.



Developmental Milestones:  
*Capacity to Communicate*<sup>36</sup>

By the age of three, most children:

- Will often seek an adult to resolve conflict.
- Can identify (by picture and name) a set of basic emotions.
- May still rely on motions instead of words to express very strong emotions or in times of distress.

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● **Paint that tune.** Choose a couple songs from your CD collection or cue up a short MP3 playlist. Get out some crayons or paints and alongside your toddler, as you listen to the music, make some expressive art that represents how the music makes you feel. Use as many pieces of paper as you like, but at least one new one for each song.<sup>35</sup>

● **Get in touch with your inner orchestra.** Cue up a couple sound samples of a variety of instruments. (Search “instrument sound clips” on the Internet.) Engage your child, as he or she is able, in a discussion about which ones he or she likes best, which samples feel happy, sad, afraid, angry, sleepy, excited, etc. Then get up and move your bodies in a way that “matches” the instrument’s sound.

## 7. Cooperativeness

### What is it?

Cooperativeness: The ability to balance one’s own needs with those of others in a group activity.<sup>37</sup>





## How it works in a Kindermusik class

“Children who are cooperative may imitate others and then join in, participate in small-group activities, begin to follow simple classroom rules, help put away toys or wipe a table, and offer help to another child.”<sup>38</sup>

Read the above, then witness a Kindermusik class, and you’ll agree that the Kindermusik classroom is fairly bursting with cooperative activity.

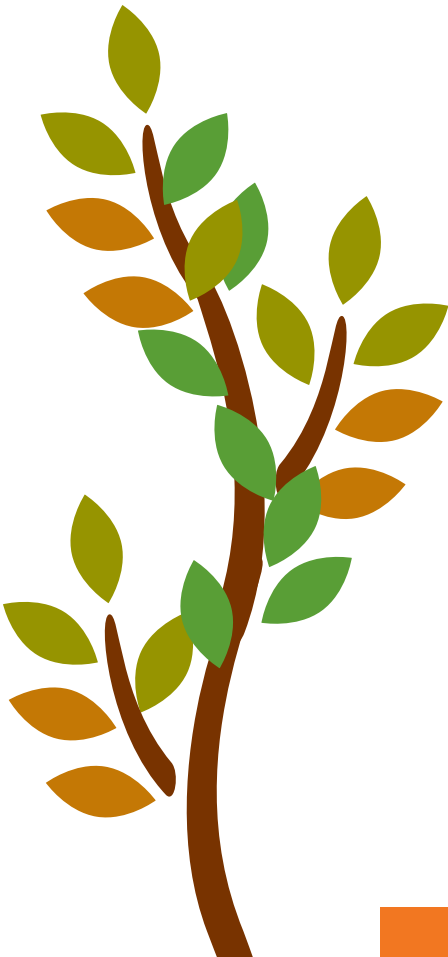
**Cooperativeness makes for an interesting intersection of the other six social-emotional competence categories discussed.** A cooperative child, for instance, can demonstrate self-control (take turns, for example), express relatedness (play a group game), and communicate (contribute ideas to an activity) in order to allow for an experience that is enjoyable for the entire class, and not just him or her.

Though surely not every Kindermusik activity and lesson are orchestrated with 100% cooperation, research does reveal clearly that experiences with music make children better able to work and play successfully and in cooperation with others.<sup>39</sup>

## What you can do at home

- **Practice makes per-cussion.** Give each child one shaker, drum, maraca, or other instrument. Begin playing a simple, steady, 3-beat rhythm (as in, shake-shake-shake (pause) shake-shake-shake (pause)). Ask the children to follow your lead, shaking or tapping their instruments in the same rhythm. Try a handful of other simple rhythms (for example, shake, (pause), shake, (pause)), always asking the children to follow your lead to try to play together.

- **Conditioned response.** Using musical cues for certain behaviors—cleaning up, preparing for bed, etc.—has been revealed to be a startlingly effective way to generate cooperativeness among young children.<sup>40</sup> While verbal requests for the same behaviors sometimes invite dawdling, negotiation, or refusal, musical cues generally do not. Try rolling a naptime riff, clean-up tune, or bedtime ditty into your routine.
- **The joy of ensemble.** Nothing says cooperativeness like a musical marching band! Allow children to make or select their own instruments, then set up a route, and create a rotating order so each child gets a turn to be the leader. Then strike up the band and get moving!<sup>41</sup>



Developmental Milestones:  
*Cooperativeness*<sup>42</sup>

By the age of three, most children:

- Enjoy playing comfortably alongside other children, though they may not interact significantly.
- Use toys (i.e. balls, blocks) with other people.
- Begin to learn about taking turns.

*NOTE: Every child is unique, and different children may reach milestones at different times. If you're concerned about your child's development, talk to your pediatrician.*

## Conclusion

Pressed to define the look and feel of social-emotional development, you might find it difficult to quantify or even to describe – but you know it when you see it, and you certainly see it in a Kindermusik class. A child offering a toy to a peer who is crying; holding hands with a partner; moving, singing, or speaking expressively; or asking an adult for help. Children taking turns playing a drum; moving with scarves in whatever way makes them feel most like wind; dancing with parents, teachers, and classmates; hugging their teacher at the end of class.

The amazing fact is that to researchers' awe, **music and movement experiences seem to tap positively into every domain for social and emotional development in toddlers.** On the whole, young children who spend time singing, playing, and moving with other children find themselves better prepared to be confident and self-aware, build positive relationships with peers, and get the best out of the learning environments and opportunities that life will bring them.



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