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Secrets to raising smart kids: Play music



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Budding Beethovens

Hearing a child play "Für Elise" would make any parent beam, but the benefits of learning music go far beyond parental pride. Multiple studies show that kids who have learned how to play an instrument perform better in tests associated with literacy, verbal memory, math, and IQ than those without music lessons.

"The areas of the brain called upon when your child learns music may enhance the regions of the brain that involve reading, math, problem solving, and spatial reasoning," says Joseph Piro, an associate professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Long Island University.

A study, published in the journal *Psychology of Music*, compared a group of second graders who took piano lessons for three consecutive years to a group who didn't learn music. At the end of the third year, the budding Beethovens did significantly better than their non-music-learning counterparts in a battery of vocabulary and verbal sequencing tests.

"Learning music isn't going to take your child from average to a genius, but it can help her be a better learner," says Laurel Trainor, a professor of psychology, neuroscience, and behavior at McMaster University and director of the McMaster Institute for Music and the Mind in Ontario, Canada. Learning how to play music actually has an effect on how the brain gets wired when it comes to memory and attention, says Trainor.

Trainor points out that learning to play an instrument can be complicated for a young child. If you're learning the violin, for instance, you have to have to figure out how to hold two different things properly, pay attention to the teacher, and try to reproduce the sounds the teacher makes. Your brain is getting a real workout that will help it become stronger and primed to learn other things.

Trainor adds that the benefit of music for your child goes far beyond test scores. She points to the social and emotional perks. "Music brings people together and just makes you feel good," she says.

What you can do

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