

Introduction to Steady

Beat

Excerpted from “Baby Artsplay” workshop by Wolf Trap Master Teaching Artist Valerie Bayne Carroll

Steady Beat

Ability to keep a steady beat is not only a fundamental music skill, but has been linked to better ability to read and organize patterns of thought. Steady beat is cited in many early childhood education curricula as a primary music objective. Fostering a sense of steady beat can be accomplished by bouncing children on the knee, rocking them during a lullaby, walking to the beat (or being carried by an adult who is marching to a steady beat), and doing movements or gestures with a song. Steady beat is better experienced when children can feel the beat in or on their bodies. For example, since babies will not be keeping a beat for themselves, it is better for an adult to tap them on the feet or shoulders so they can feel the beat than to have them watch someone else keeping a beat. Remember, beat is different from rhythm (clapping every syllable of a word), and it is important to foster beat first.

For Babies and Toddlers

During some songs the teacher bounces the child on her knees or rocks the child from side to side to help the child experience beat. Included in this are songs to play peek-a-boo and songs in which the teacher taps the child’s knees or the bottoms of her feet. Eventually, the baby will be able to pat her own knees or tap her feet by herself. When the baby is able to sit up alone, she can hold shaker eggs or jingle bells to experience different ways of creating sound. The child experiences ringing the triangle as the teacher sings and keeps a steady beat. Walking babies enjoy circle songs like “Ring around the Rosie” while younger babies can simply be carried and feel the beat of the song through the movement of the teacher.

For Eighteen to Thirty-Six Months

At this age the beat can be experienced through locomotive gross motor movements like running, jumping, and marching. The beat can also be experienced through smaller percussive body movements such as patting, clapping, and tapping on the body and through the use of additional rhythm instruments such as rhythm sticks and sand blocks. Children can explore walking using different qualities of movement—moving like frogs, bunnies, mice or bears. Children can play the drum, gradually learning to keep the beat and make loud and quiet sounds through their hand movements. Taking turns with the teacher, children can begin to keep a steady beat on the triangle.

With infants, vary the type of locomotion (bounce, sway, jog, etc.) used in this song so that they feel differences in tempo (fast/slow).

Walk and Stop

Well we walk and we walk and we walk and we stop.
And we walk and we walk and we walk and we stop.
And we walk and we walk and we walk and we stop.
Then we turn around and go the other way.