

How to Encourage and Nurture Your Child's Passion for Music (and have a blast together doing it)

a guide by a lifelong guitar teacher
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A passion for music is more than just “what bands you like”. Musical taste forms such an important part of one's identity and self image, and can be a reflection of who they are as a person too (or where they feel at home at that point of their life). Sharing music together also creates an amazing feeling of unity and understanding!

Emotions, fashion, mood, hobbies, time periods, cultural background, even class and economic standing can all be associated with different music. Remember how each group of kids at school was often associated with music? The goths, the metal heads, the rap fans (what do you call those?), and on and on.

I'm speaking as someone who finished high school at the end of the 90s. These days kids have so much information overload, video games, low attention spans, etc... that it can be hard (but incredibly rewarding) to just chill and listen to some music. I think it will always be true that a passion for music is truly important and can build feelings of confidence, enthusiasm, inspiration, motivation, and so on.

I've had a lot of fun compiling these ideas. I'd love to hear about your experiences trying them, and please give me any other ideas that could help other families. Maybe I'll add them in here too!

ENJOY!

So step one, ask your child (of any age):

“what type of music do you like?”

“what are your favourite bands?”

Many kids under the age of 13 or so will just spit out names of some of your favourite music. They often tend to follow their parents' identities and preferences until they are able to find some of their own, which often happens as an early teenager. That's completely fine and normal, but with a little bit of parental effort, you can all have a blast discovering and exploring music together (new music and things you already like). This can really help your child feel like they are discovering and building their self identity too.

Of course, the bigger their love of music, the more fun they will have playing it on an instrument too! That's where a creative and enthusiastic music teacher/coach can help.

Then there are the emotion-filled, puberty-driven teenage years, where kids really build their personal identities; maybe more than any other time in life.

Think about your own musical taste, do you still love the music you discovered around the age of 13-16? Is it still “your music”? Did it have a big impact on you as a person, your style, the pop-culture you identified with, even your groups of friends? For some people this identity stays with them their whole life and they are proud of it (which is great!). Did new music you discovered later in life have as much of an impact on you as your early teenage music?

As a very cool parent (if you are reading this you must be!) It's your job to help your kids find themselves through music. You can build their self-image and confidence in the process, and hopefully grow closer together as a family as you do it. Music truly is amazing! At least you can try!

What can you do as a family to nurture this?

Here are a few simple places to start (see the included activity ideas sheet for these and more)

- 1) Play your favourite music around the house or in the car as much as possible and “get into it!”. Seeing your passion for music will make your kids want to love it as much as you do. Dance, sing, drum, play instruments if you play. So just have fun with music in front of, or involving, your kids.
- 2) Make them a cool looking “favourite songs list” and encourage them to write down any songs they think are really cool (the bonus here is getting to know your kids better, and encouraging their creativity)
- 3) Take the kids to live music events of all shapes and sizes so they can have fun and experience the energy and happiness that music brings to groups of people.
- 4) Make a playlist just for them (youtube, spotify, etc...) and make sure they know how to add songs to it. This is 100% theirs so don't fill it with what YOU want to be in there (that should be a different playlist you can make for them, which is amazing and important too and they may treasure many years from now)
- 5) Questions (bonus: ask yourself these same questions, it's not always easy to answer them)
 - ask them if there are any trendy/viral songs they keep running into?
 - are there any songs that they can't get out of their heads?
 - ask them WHAT they think about certain songs?
 - ask them HOW the song makes them feel?
 - ask them WHAT emotions they feel, or IF a song seems happy or sad (if it's clearly an “upper” or “downer” song especially)
 - ask WHAT they think the words are? (this can be hilarious because we all misinterpret lyrics, but the stuff kids come up with can be priceless...)
 - ask WHAT kind of mood they are in? and try to find some music together that fits that mood (if it's "excited and goofy" you can even just search for "excited, goofy music" and see what you find. Be creative with this...

Ideas lists...

Questions (bonus: ask yourself these same questions, it's not always easy to answer them)

- ask them WHAT they think about certain songs?
- ask them HOW the song makes them feel?
- ask them WHAT they like or dislike about the song?
- ask them WHAT emotions they feel, or IF a song seems happy or sad (if it's clearly an "upper or "downer" song especially)
- ask WHAT they think the words are? (this can be hilarious because we all misinterpret lyrics, but the stuff kids come up with can be priceless...)
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Fun Music-related Activities (even more fun if you join in too!)

Theme nights (or even better, theme weeks... depending on the depth of the topic).

Pick some topics (you can even compound these with related foods, fashion, geography, art, etc...)

- STYLE of music
- COUNTRY of origin
- MOOD
- SUBJECT MATTER (songs about: fantasy, movies, history, romance, kids songs, unicorns, sci-fi...anything)
- TIME PERIOD (40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, etc...)
- ONE HIT WONDERS (explore those bands and make discoveries...we have the technology!)
- NUMBER ONE SONGS from different years/decades/countries
- MASHUP songs, there are some really amazing ones out there, then you can explore the originals too. Look for the music videos to have even more fun things to talk about and critique!
- PARODIES... Wierd-Al night anyone??? Look up the funny lyrics then check out the original songs too!

As always ask your kids:

What they think and feel about the music?

What they like or dislike about it?

Can they make up a story or a drawing inspired by the music or a specific song?

Share your thoughts with your kids too, get to know each other better than ever!

***Make sure you guys add any new songs you like to your playlists, you are going to end up with such an amazing and diverse list! Be proud of this fun discovery time together, maybe in 50 years your kids will still love going back to the playlists you create together.

***Make family videos of these amazing times, or have what I love to call "BOOGIE TIME" where you all just dance like crazy to some songs you love and make a video just for you guys! (by the way, as I write this guide, I keep thinking how amazing it would have been if my family did some of these things I'm coming up with, and the fond memories I would have)

Make homemade instruments and jam together! (also go to the music store percussion section, there are so many great cheap percussion instruments you can collect... adults love them too!)

- fill glasses with water to make a xylophone (yes you can actually tune them by adding or subtracting water if you want to play real music)
- stretch plastic wrap over pots and pans to make drums (the tighter, the higher the pitch)

- make a drum-kit out of anything you want (chopsticks or pencils make great non-destructive drumsticks)
- stretch and pluck a strong elastic band (notice how the pitch gets higher the more you stretch it)

BONUS: find real songs, drum beats, or even full "backing tracks" to jam along with. I do this with my students all the time (and we play guitar along with them)

Learn about different instruments from around the world.

Make or find a list of different instruments (start with common popular ones, then orchestral ones, then you can start exploring the planet using the magic of the internet and youtube).

Find pictures of them (get the kids to draw them if they are into that or draw a fun character, animal, or creature playing them).

Find a video of someone playing them and talk about it.

If the kids love the music you find, encourage them to dance to the music and pretend to play (like playing "air guitar").

Eventually this will increase their desire to actually play one of these instruments too!

Karaoke (it's still a classic)

There are endless ways (like youtube) to find karaoke songs, with lyric videos that you guys can sing along to.

Make it an event... practice for an end of the month performance ("gig", "concert"), make a set-list, dress up, make "flyers" advertising it (just fun easy stuff for your family, or even join together with other friends families and really make an event of it). Take "ROCK STAR" videos and photos!

Create a family band (or at least brainstorm about it!)

Do this together and/or have every family member create their own...

All family members have to be in the band (include pets too, why not!).

Who plays which instrument?

Band name?

Style of music?

What subjects are your songs about?

How would you dress?

Make a drawing or story based on this brainstorming, or get dressed up and take a family "band photo".