

What's the best way for my child to learn music?



Music-making is life-changing

We at Youth Music believe that getting the chance to make music is vital for every child. The importance of music is universal throughout our lives, but it's when we're young that it can have the most profound impact.

Introducing your child to music at an early age does more than foster a life-long love of music as an art form. Encouraging them not just to listen to music, but to interact and become involved with the act of making music is a valuable step in your child's development.

By involving them in music you are helping to expand their problem-solving skills and develop their memory skills. And on a personal and social level, the benefits for the child are huge. By giving them a way of expressing themselves, you will be encouraging their creativity and improving their self-confidence and self-esteem.

The music we discover and love as teenagers is a crucial part of developing our identity: finding a favourite artist or band, forming allegiances with others who like the same music, deciding which music you definitely don't like! Even those young people who find it hardest to engage at school demonstrate a passion for music. It's just a question of finding the right way of getting them involved.

How does music-making affect language, literacy and intelligence? ¹

Music-making affects the brain. Many studies have shown how learning music uses similar processes to learning sounds and patterns, which in turn can aid in the development of language and reading. Crucially, further studies have shown that, if structured and long-term music-making is provided at an early stage (under the age of 5) then these benefits are even greater.

Some studies have also discovered a link between musical training and improvements in spatial-temporal reasoning (the ability to visualise patterns and manipulate them over time), which can lead to better general intelligence.²

These benefits are only observable for long-term structured music-making and depend on the development of musical skills. Simply listening to music does not have the same effect.



How does music-making affect academic improvement and motivation? ³

Better academic attainment is often achieved by those learning to play a musical instrument (though a key reason for this may be greater motivation more generally). Motivation is linked to self-perceptions of ability and self-efficacy (how able a person feels to carry out tasks) therefore, the higher a person's motivation, the bigger the gains in achievement.

Musical practice is well placed to increase and nurture motivation in children and young people, but again there is evidence that children must enjoy their music-making in order to sustain motivation. So it's essential that children find the method of making music which best suits them.

How does music-making affect personal and social development? ⁴

Self-image, self-awareness and positive attitudes are also related to motivation and success. Learning to play an instrument can positively affect each of these outcomes, especially for children from low-income

backgrounds.⁵ Better attitudes towards learning and the peer group can also create an increase in social cohesion and improved behaviour, and using music as part of this process can be especially useful for disengaged and disaffected children and young people.

Commitment, respect, responsibility and trust have been highlighted as key factors in the success of musical groups, and are recognised as essential skills to be developed through structured music-making.

Evidence shows that increased opportunities for music-making create significant improvements in young people's cultural and social capital. Cultural capital is the extent to which young people feel they have knowledge of and access to multiple cultural forms (different types of music, theatre, literature and so forth). Higher cultural capital has been linked to better general health, psychological wellbeing and educational attainment.

Social capital is the extent to which people feel part of a community and is measured by their involvement in different aspects of social life (through volunteering, being part of clubs and teams, meeting others in the community etc). Increased social capital in children and young people has been shown to improve physical and mental health, behavioural outcomes, and community cohesion.

High levels of social and cultural capital are key factors in experiencing a safe, healthy and rewarding life in childhood.

How does music-making affect emotional development? ⁶

By providing a way for children and young people to express themselves, music-making can also develop emotional intelligence and wellbeing. Research shows that the physical act of singing can improve mood, increase relaxation and reduce physical and emotional stress.

Importantly, many of the personal and social outcomes described above are also related to improvements in emotional intelligence and wellbeing. Increased social and cultural capital and increased feelings of self-efficacy and agency are strongly related to psychological wellbeing and reduced stress.

How can music-making lead into career opportunities as an adult?

The creative industries, especially music, are one of Britain's great strengths. They are worth more than £36 billion a year; they generate £70,000 every minute for the UK economy; and they employ 1.5 million people

in the UK. According to industry figures, the creative industries account for around £1 in every £10 of the UK's exports.⁷

In addition, research from NESTA shows that an additional 1.1 million creative jobs are outside the traditional creative industries. They define a creative job as one where:

- The role solves a problem or achieves a goal in new ways
- There is not a mechanical substitute to do the work
- An interplay of factors, skills, creative impulsive and learning occurs each time the occupation takes place
- The outcome of the occupation is new or creative despite the context in which it is produced
- The role involves a degree of creative judgement and interpretation. ⁸

Music-making helps young people to explore and develop this creativity. Teaching kids creative skills will help prepare them for the jobs market of the future.

The music industry is changing rapidly. 2012 was the first year that music purchased via downloads and streaming services (like Spotify) generated more revenue for the record industry than sales of CDs.⁹ There's a balance to be negotiated making sure that musicians can make money from their art, while the exciting possibilities of consuming music free of charge are ever-expanding. Young people are at the forefront of this digital revolution. 'Learning music' today can be about so much more than just mastering an instrument, and many modern teaching methods reflect this.



Music-making comes in many forms

There are many enjoyable and valuable ways to get involved in music-making, and a wide variety of core skills to learn. These include:

- Singing
- Playing an instrument
- Rapping
- Beatboxing
- Reading music
- Writing lyrics
- Harmonising
- Organising music events
- Improvising
- Performing
- Recording
- Mixing
- Editing
- Producing
- DJing
- Composing

Music in the classroom

Music is a key part of the National Curriculum, and all children will be taught music in the classroom from ages 5 – 14 (Key Stages 1-3). They may then have the option to go on and study for GCSEs, AS Levels and A Levels in Music.

There will be future shake-ups in school music provision to come, as the Government reviews the curriculum and makes plans to change GCSEs and A Levels. Initial suggestions for the English Baccalaureate (E-Bacc) proved controversial, as arts organisations expressed concern that creative subjects – including music – were being sidelined. Read more at <http://www.baccforthefuture.com>

We know that schools have a musical offer which ensures all children get to learn and play music as part of the curriculum, but we also know that not all schools are equipped to meet the music learning needs of all children and young people – whether because of genre, instrument, or learning style.

Every child should get the chance to learn music: they just need to find the way which suits them best ¹⁰

Research suggests that we all have the capacity to be musical, and that it is extremely rare to meet a child who is ‘unmusical’ given an appropriate task and supportive environment.¹¹

“My own experience in music education over the years leads me to believe that every young person has the capacity to do something remarkable, they just need to be given the opportunity, support and inspiring environment every step of the way.”

Matt Griffiths, Youth Music Executive Director

“I lost interest in learning to read music when I was a kid going to piano lessons with the old lady down the road. I did the usual five-finger exercises. I thought, ‘Oh my God, this isn’t what I think music is.’ It seemed like homework to me, so I stopped. I tried again when I was 16 but by then I was writing songs. I’d written the melody to ‘When I’m 64’; it was all in my head. When I say ‘I can’t write music’, I can; I just can’t notate it.” ¹¹

Sir Paul McCartney, Musician

“Young people have an instinctive respect for each other’s musical tastes and aptitudes and are genuinely fascinated by the musical palette available to them. But they do not want to be told what is best, any more than they want to be told what to wear, what to laugh at, or what to eat. Good music teachers and community musicians realise that engaging with the musicians of tomorrow means a dialogue, not a lecture.” ¹²

Howard Goodall, Composer

Instrumental tuition (one-to-one)

What: One of the most traditional ways for young people to learn music, one-to-one instrumental (or singing) teaching involves an adult teacher - who is an expert in a particular instrument - passing on their skills to a child.

Lessons normally take place once a week, for around 30-60 minutes. Usually instrumental lessons follow a formal teaching method, with pupils working to a set syllabus of recognised skills and marking their achievements by passing exam grades.

In one-to-one lessons, young people may expect to learn:

- Instrumental skills
- Recognised technical skills (for example, the most effective way to hold your instrument or to create a vocal sound)
- How to read music
- Music theory (for example how music is constructed, how different chords and scales create different effects)

Music in one-to-one instrumental lessons tends to be taught in the classical genre for traditional orchestral instruments (like violin or flute) although more contemporary instruments like electric guitar and drumkit can be learned in pop and rock styles.

Some instrumental teachers may offer a variety of methods of learning, for example jazz teaching for brass and woodwind instruments would focus more on improvisation than classical orchestral performance.

Where: One-to-one instrumental tuition can take place in or outside school.

School music lessons are usually arranged via local music education hubs and may offer subsidised places.

Private instrumental lessons may take place at the teacher's house, at your own house, or at a venue hired by the teacher. There may be associated costs for purchasing or hiring an instrument.

Who: One-to-one instrumental lessons will suit children and young people who enjoy directed learning. They will be required to practice between each lesson,

repeating pieces and techniques until they have improved and perfected them. They will generally work towards exam grades, receiving certificates as proof of their musical achievement.

Music teachers will often be able to recommend local ensembles to their pupils, so that they get the chance to take part in group music-making.

Why: One-to-one instrumental tuition provides young people with valuable musical skills and understanding. It provides a core understanding of how music theory works, which can lead to skills such as improvising and composing, or moving into genres beyond the classical tradition. Children can study for many years, and there is a sense of achievement in progressing, passing grades and developing mastery of an instrument. It opens up doors to traditional progression routes: joining youth orchestras, taking GCSE and A-Level music, studying for music degrees at a university or conservatoire (specialist music college), and can be a pathway to careers including as a professional performer, composer, conductor or teacher.

How: As a starting point approach your child's school, as they will be able to tell you if they currently offer music lessons, and what instruments are available. If nothing is available for your school, then you may want to contact your local music education hub directly to find out what provision is available in your area. Contact details for the music education hubs can be found at <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/our-investment/funding-programmes/music-education-hubs>

For private tutors, <http://www.musicteachers.co.uk> has a database which you can search by region and county.

Music teachers employed by schools, music education hubs or community organisations are expected to have undergone a DBS check (formerly known as CRB check). You can find out more about the Disclosure and Barring Service at <http://www.gov.uk>

The DBS is designed for employers to run checks on behalf of their employees, so a self-employed music teacher will not necessarily be expected to have one. The Music Teachers website has useful advice on choosing a music teacher in safety and confidence at <http://www.musicteachers.co.uk/support/choosingguidelines>

Music-based mentoring (one-to-one)

What: Music-based mentoring¹³ uses music as the common ground to develop a relationship with a young person (mentee) in order to support significant developments in their knowledge, behaviour and thinking. Through this process, the music mentor supports the individual to achieve on a musical as well as social level. The mentor will generally teach the young person instrumental skills, but the musical skills could also involve singing or music production techniques.

Mentoring is goal-focused and music mentors use a personal learning plan in order to set and monitor musical and personal goals with their mentees.

Where: Music-based mentoring sessions tend to take place at a venue arranged by the mentor or an organisation, eg schools, community centres, youth centres.

Who: Although this style of learning could be beneficial for any child, it tends to be offered mainly to:

- Children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEN/D)
- Children with emotional or behavioural problems
- Those who are excluded from education
- Those who have committed (or are at risk of committing) a criminal offence
- Looked-after children (those who are fostered or in care of the state)
- Children who are at risk of being excluded from society for any reason, for example young parents, young carers, those in difficult economic circumstances, travellers, those who live in rural isolated areas.

However, many children will find that in one-to-one instrumental lessons (as described in the previous section) they may also experience some informal aspects of a mentoring relationship with their teacher.

Why: Music-based mentoring, perhaps more than any other style of learning, is about more than just the music. Music helps to form a connection between the mentor and the young person, and gives them something to discuss and focus on while working



through other issues.

This style of music-making is useful for young people who may have difficulties engaging in mainstream education. It is flexible, with children encouraged to set their own goals and progress at their own pace.

How: Often young people will be referred to music-based mentoring projects, by schools, colleges, social workers, health professionals etc. They tend to be run by music education hubs or charities, and are often provided at subsidised rates or free of charge.

Youth Music funds several music-based mentoring projects. You can search for them at <http://www.youthmusic.org.uk/what-we-do/our-projects.html>

Local music education hubs should be able to provide information about provision in your area, and you can find their contact details at <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/our-investment/funding-programmes/music-education-hubs>

Five settings explored

Ensembles (Groups)

What: Taking part in a music-making group is one of the most fun ways to learn. They come in all sizes, styles and genres. Ensembles involve a group of people playing together at the same time, possibly on a variety of instruments. There will usually be a person in charge to keep it all together (a band leader or a conductor).

Learning is directed: either the group leader will choose the music, or a decision will be made among the group members. Often ensembles practice and perfect a selection of pieces in order to perform them at a concert or gig.

The traditional route to joining an ensemble is through those organised by schools or local music education hubs. These may include youth orchestras, string groups, brass bands, choirs and jazz ensembles. Generally, young people will be required to have achieved a certain grade (or reached that particular standard) before they can join, so groups are often the next step after one-to-one instrumental lessons. As the young person improves, they can progress through ensembles to a higher and higher level. The opportunity also exists to represent the UK in ensemble music making through the National Youth Music Organisations.

However, there are many ensembles where you don't need to be able to play an instrument before you start, or to read music. These can be found in a whole variety of genres, and may be structured in a less formal way (see the Workshops section).

Where: Ensembles usually need a large, sound-proofed space in which to practice: schools, community centres, religious buildings etc.

Who: Ensemble playing is fantastic for all children who wish to develop their musical skills, and may be particularly beneficial for those who are shy about performing on their own.

Why: Being part of a group increases confidence and is a great opportunity for forming friendships.

Making music in a group gives young people the chance to develop their musical skills (particularly listening, playing in time and in harmony), as well as offering leadership opportunities. It encourages



teamwork: group members can learn from their peers, support those who are having difficulties, and will work together to perfect their performance.

How: If your child has one-to-one instrumental lessons, their teacher should be able to recommend local ensembles at a suitable level, or you can get advice from your local music education hub. Contact details for the music education hubs can be found on the Arts Council website: <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk>

The website <http://www.makingmusic.org.uk> has a database of music-making groups which you can search by area and keyword (this covers groups for all ages but you can search specifically for 'youth' or 'junior').

Workshops (Groups)

What: As an alternative to more formal music-making ensembles (many of which may require a young person to have reached a certain standard on an instrument), workshops allow children to try out new skills and discover what suits them best.

This type of music-making is sometimes referred to as 'community music', as it tends to take place outside a school setting. Community music covers a variety of genres, ages and skills. It may be a group for parents and babies to learn simple songs and rhythms, or a studio session where teenagers can learn production, recording, mixing and editing techniques.

Where: Like ensemble groups, workshops usually need a large, sound-proofed space in which to practice: schools, community centres, religious buildings etc. Often workshops might make use of specialist equipment in locations like recording studios.

Who: There will be a workshop to suit everyone. Community workshops are likely to operate on principles of access, participation and inclusion, so that everyone who wants to can get involved, regardless of their prior experience or ability to pay.

Workshops may be particularly suitable for children who have an interest in music genres which aren't generally

taught in schools (for example hip-hop or metal).

Children who don't like the pressure of exams may also find that this kind of music-making works best for them. Informal workshops allow young people to work at their own pace and to discover where their skills lie. This isn't to say that without the passing of grades they won't be able to mark their progress: accreditation schemes such as Arts Award (<http://www.artsaward.org.uk>) are implemented by many music projects, which recognise achievement in a flexible way.

Why: Workshops which take a non-formal approach to music-making tend to share a number of principles.¹⁴ These are that music-making should be:

- **Collective:** that they involve people working together. The sessions may be more collaborative than in a classroom setting
- **Active:** there will be a focus on learning by doing, rather than by listening or being shown
- **Adaptive:** sessions will be flexible, for example the young people may have a say in how the session is structured, or may choose to take part in a number of different activities during the session.



Most of the music-making projects funded by Youth Music include this kind of flexible workshop. However, we love all kinds of music-making, and believe that the more chances that children get to take part the better. Our research report, Communities of Music Education, explores how formal and community music teachers have much in common and much to learn from each other <http://www.youthmusic.org.uk/what-we-do/our-research/communities-of-music-education.html>

How: All the projects currently funded by Youth Music are at <http://www.youthmusic.org.uk/what-we-do/our-projects.html> You can search by region, see the name of the organisation running the project, and a description of what they do. We recommend that you contact the organisations directly to find out their start dates and availability.

Arts organisations - for example arts centres, professional ensembles, concert halls – often run community outreach projects, so it's worth getting in touch with ones in your local area to see what they have to offer.

Local music education hubs may have an overview of workshops in your area, and you can find their contact details at <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/our-investment/funding-programmes/music-education-hubs>

Workshops tend to be community-led, so it's good to keep an eye out for them in your local community! Take a look at library and newsagent noticeboards, local newspapers and online forums, as well as youth centres and after-school clubs.



Five settings explored

Do it yourself (informal)

What: Music-making is such an important part of many young people's lives that they often don't need to take lessons or join a group: they'll simply start to do it themselves!

A great way to get your child interested in music is to sing with them at home from an early age. The key is to be confident: many adults are embarrassed about their voices but there's no need to be. Singing loudly and clearly makes it easier for a young child to follow your example.

Older children may be inspired to teach themselves an instrument at home. The internet has opened up opportunities to be able to see and hear how something should be played, as well as just reading about it. Instruments such as the ukulele and guitar are relatively inexpensive to get hold of, and there is a wealth of resources to support self-teaching.

Where: Bedrooms, garages, school practice rooms, youth centres: any space where young people can relax and hang out.

Who: Most young people would find it easy to start making music, but it takes motivation to keep going. If there's no exam to work for, weekly session to prepare for, or teacher to please, children may lose interest. So it would be helpful for them to set themselves challenges (for example learning a particular song, or preparing for a gig) and your encouragement may keep them on track.

Young people who are particularly keen listeners to music may be the most enthusiastic about setting themselves a creative project.

Why: DIY music-making is extremely flexible and creative. Young people will be able to explore their interests in their own time. A bedroom or other private space gives a child the privacy to compose songs, write lyrics, practice instruments and make mistakes, without the pressure of anyone watching.

Forming a band with a group of friends is a popular activity with young people. Now online resources, apps and software programmes give young people the ability to not only compose and perform their own music, but also to produce, record and distribute it.



How: This blog gives many useful tips about resources to help you make music with under-5s and activities to get you started <http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/resources/blogs/sophie-scott/early-years-music-making-resources>

Another blog on the Youth Music Network contains links to free and affordable music technology resources recommended by professionals who run music projects with young people <http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/groups/music-technology/discussions/free-music-software>

Online video sites YouTube and Vimeo are great sources for tutorials covering all aspects of music-making.

The Arts Council's Take it away scheme offers loans to make it easier to buy instruments for young people <http://www.takeitaway.org.uk>

<http://bsharpresources.org> contains guidance for young people about all aspects of progressing in the music industry, including planning and marketing their own music events.

Join us

We at Youth Music know that music-making transforms young lives, but too many young people still don't have access to these invaluable experiences. With our national view, we seek out and support excellent music projects in the places which need them most.

But we're not reaching everyone. The demand for our work hugely outstrips what we can currently provide. Recession and cuts mean that those with least opportunity are slipping through the net.

We aim to double the number of life-changing music projects available to disadvantaged children and young people. Join us in making this happen: donate today at <http://www.youthmusic.org.uk/donate>

Keep in touch

Do sign up for the Youth Music newsletter at <http://www.youthmusic.org.uk/learnmusic>

We'll keep you up-to-date with future guides and resources, as well as developments including our latest research and reports from the music projects we fund.



Music is Power



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Additional Information

End Notes and Weblinks

1. <http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/resources/research/power-music-youth-music-briefing-paper>
2. Hetland, L. (2000). Learning to make music enhances spatial reasoning. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 179-238.
3. <http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/resources/research/power-music-youth-music-briefing-paper>
4. <http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/resources/research/power-music-youth-music-briefing-paper>
5. <http://pom.sagepub.com/content/32/2/139.abstract>
6. <http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/resources/research/power-music-youth-music-briefing-paper>
7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/making-it-easier-for-the-media-and-creative-industries-to-grow-while-protecting-the-interests-of-citizens#issue>
8. <http://anewdirection.org.uk/blog/a-dynamic-mapping-of-the-uks-creative-industries>
9. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/news/9302223/Digital-music-sales-beat-CDs-for-the-first-time.html>
10. <http://www.youthmusic.org.uk/assets/files/Research/Communities%20of%20Music%20Education.pdf>
11. <http://www.classicfm.com/composers/mccartney/guides/cover-story-behold-my-heart/>
12. <http://www.youthmusic.org.uk/what-we-do/our-research/communities-of-music-education.html>
13. <http://www.youthmusic.org.uk/assets/files/YouthMusicMentorspaper.pdf>
14. <http://www.youthmusic.org.uk/assets/files/Research/Communities%20of%20Music%20Education.pdf>

Music education hubs are a collection of organisations working in a local area, to create joined up music education provision for children and young people, both in and out of school.

Contact details for the music education hubs can be found at <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/our-investment/funding-programmes/music-education-hubs>