



**CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT  
In Toddler and Cycles Classes  
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**General Pointers in Class**

1. Feel free to shorten any song. One or two verses are often enough the first time the song is introduced.
2. If the children are not responding at all to one activity, change the verse or even use another song to recapture their attention. For example, if the children are not participating in "nodding," switch to "jumping," which is a favorite activity.
3. Observation of the children and their caregivers is crucial to creating a flow in the class. A good teacher continually needs to observe, assess, and adjust. Choices of action words in a song can transform the class energy from high to calm; for example, one verse might be jumping or trotting, the next might be sneaking, tiptoeing, or even sleeping.
4. Children's emotions are usually obvious, but many adults are much more complicated to read. Sometimes, a parent who looks angry or bored may actually be intimidated about making music, insecure in her ability to sing or move, or worried about how to engage her very active or very quiet child. Make a point to talk to such parents casually about the class before or after class time, offering support or ideas.
5. When a parent is forcing, say "the child needs to do this now, but you could help by lightly tapping on the top of his/her back."
6. Remember simplicity when working with the very young. Common mistakes include talking too much during transitions, or complicating the activity rather than keeping it simple. The best transition from one activity to another may be simply to begin singing and doing the actions of the next song, without any explanation.
7. Be sure to encourage child/parent interaction. Facilitating musical play in class will more likely carry over into music making at home. Some ideas:
  - After echoing patterns in the group or with individual children, ask the parent/child pairs to take turns imitating one another's patterns. This reinforces the habit of improvising and echoing patterns at home, and also gives a little non-teacher-directed time for the families during class.
  - During focused listening, have the children imitate the sound of an animal, and then invite the "grown-up animals" across the room to respond back to the "animal children." To conclude the activity, have the children move like the animal (or choose from the group of animals, if more than one was heard) back to their caregiver, and then make its sound. The grown-up can say the name of the animal the child is imitating, or have fun answering, for instance, in "cat language."
8. Display a sense of humor and optimism. After a particularly chaotic toddler class in early fall I may comment, "You're going to be amazed at how much this class will grow over the course of the year. By spring, the children will be focusing and participating so much! Remember, the important thing is to sing, dance and listen at home, and your children will naturally participate more in class."

## Management Ideas

1. One of the highest goals in our classes is to create a community that involves joy in live music-making and support for each child's development. Our biggest challenge in meeting this goal is to support parents who are struggling with their child while trying to enlist and extend the support of the parents whose children are already participating. A circle formation during the lesson may facilitate a sense of unity, connection and community bonding, but it could also instigate comparisons, pressure, and stress to "perform" up to others' expectations.  
The teacher needs to determine which situation is happening at any moment. Change from the circle to a free movement activity (free dance, traveling movement not done in a circle, such as rolling, crawling, turning with the parent, etc.) to break the focus on one or two lively, struggling or dominant children. Instruments are another diversion, especially when presented with time for free exploration.  
Be aware of adults who may need your help. Sometimes the teacher may move toward the child and parent to help the child refocus. If the parent is reacting inappropriately, the teacher may need to quietly suggest another course of action.
2. Setting class guidelines for the parent as well as for the child can be challenging. Again, try to keep things simple.
  - If child is only mildly challenging his/her parent, often the class may continue without much impact.
  - If the child is distracting the entire class, the teacher could change activities to attempt to change the dynamic and to re-engage the child.
  - If a child continues to dominate, as with yelling, screaming, continuously and noisily running away from the parent, etc., calmly encourage the parent to remove the child for a short time. If possible, I prefer to do this after the class focus has been diffused by another activity. I then approach the parent/child couple and say, "It's okay to take a break outside the room for a little while. Johnny will probably be ready to return in a few minutes." Sometimes, if the child is completely fighting the parent's good attempts, I may walk up and say, "Maggie, if you want to scream, you need to go out for a while. We sing, but don't scream, during music class."
  - The challenge is to help adults to realize when their child needs a break and to make a good decision in a timely manner.
  - If the scenario repeats from week to week, call the parent to discuss the problem and possible solutions.
3. Prepare and educate the parents. In the parent meeting and from time to time in class, prepare the adults for the possibility that a child may need to step out of class sometime during the session. "Everyone has an 'out-of-sorts' day at some point. Don't worry if you need to take your child out of class once in a while. It happens to most everyone." Remind the parents that children have not learned to hide their feelings as we adults have, so their emotions of anger, sadness, fear, jealousy, etc., are displayed for all to see.
4. Continue to remind the parents that their own joyful music making, both at home and in class, often motivates their child to participate more and more as the session progresses.
5. Point out that the children are "learning to move and moving to learn" at this age. Encourage all to be supportive each family, bringing children with unique personalities, changing developmental stages and individual timetables. Notice the times when the children acquire a new skill in impulse control. "Logan stopped moving exactly when our singing stopped!"

**Karen Haughey**