

A tuneful upbringing does wonders for the wee ones

They learn to self-express and hone listening skills

(NAPSI) – There is a growing body of evidence that early exposure to music can foster a child's development. Whether that means having youngsters listen to the classics or classic rock, or letting little ones make music of their own, it's clear that a tuneful upbringing is hitting the right notes with both parents and educators.

Exposing children to music not only helps them engage in early self-expression (moving to the beat) but also aids listening skills (as they distinguish rhythm and beat). When learning is set to music, it really engages children and becomes more memorable. Remember how you learned your ABCs?

There is also a variety of toys on the market that can help set your baby Beethoven on a melodic path by introducing musical concepts such as tempo, pitch and styles. For example the Laugh & Learn Baby Grand Piano from Fisher-Price teaches those elements, along with early learning skills such as numbers, colors and opposites.

Babies are encouraged to play and learn and are rewarded with

light-up and sing-along songs. This realistic experience fosters growth and progress both musically and intellectually.

As a child gets older and more familiar with musical concepts, learning how to play an instrument, such as a piano, and reading music are the next steps. An innovative new piano system lets youngsters plug a three-octave piano keyboard into any television to create a plug-and-play piano system.

I Can Play Piano from Fisher-Price uses color-coded keys and new technology called **Piano Wizard** in its song-and-game cartridges, turning standard sheet music into a colorful game with fun, moving images that tell kids what note to play and when to play it.

The Laugh & Learn Baby Grand Piano is designed for children ages 9 months to 3 years, while the I Can Play Piano is recommended for children ages 4 to 8.

Of course, toys are not the only way to inspire children's musical creativity and enhance learning. Parents can incorporate play tips such as these into regular routines at home or on

the go:

Try a tape recorder

Press "record" and tape your child's singing or baby's babbling. Then play it back and enjoy the look of amazement on your child's face: "That's me!"

Strike up the band

Collect a number of noise-making items from the kitchen and place them on the floor. Show your child how to make a variety of sounds – pounding, tapping, beating, shaking, rattling and rolling.

Ball beat

Use your little one's ability to pound and make noise to promote listening skills, rhythm and understanding of cause and effect. Place a large, soft ball (no smaller than a baseball if a baby) in your child's hands. Sing a favorite song and tap the beat on the ball with your hands as you sing.

Introducing music into a child's life – through basic activities, toys, musical instruments or spontaneous sing-alongs – helps set the stage for a lifetime of learning and enrichment.

