



Musical storytelling

Developing emotional expression and family bonds through shared storytelling:

Stories often use metaphors which allow children (and adults) to explore difficult emotions in a safe way. By adding musical sound effects to stories, children can express these emotions in a fun and nurturing way. This can lead to alleviated frustration and improved feelings of wellbeing. It's also something which can help secure positive family bonds which is fun for the whole family and adaptable to children's varying needs and levels of engagement.

Familiar stories

Choose a favourite story book. Find some musical instruments or percussion replacements around the home (pots, pans, bottles filled with lentils etc!) and some props (soft toys, silk scarfs, collected natural materials such as crunchy leaves/tissue or newspaper to scrunch etc). Children and parents can also use their own musical instrument if they are learning/can play one too and their voices!

You can choose a 'narrator' in your family. Sit in a circle, with all your props in the middle of the circle. The narrator should pause after every few lines of the story, so that the rest of the family can 'illustrate' the story with sound-effects and props/acting out! If that sounds too chaotic, you could take it in turns to do a 'sound effect' going around the circle... it's up to you how free you think would work best for your children! You can experiment by making up sounds/starting and ending 'music' to set the mood with your props as well.

Suggestions – tried and tested!

Some stories work better than others - some use language which lends itself to sound effects and music. Below are some which have been popular with families and music therapists: They allow for expression of more 'difficult' emotions and sensations (such as chaos and fear) to be played out in a safe way, whilst remaining in the metaphor of the story.



Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak (the “wild rumpus” allows children to vent frustration in a fun way!)

The Three Little Pigs - (classic stories and fairy tales often work really well as the metaphors often involve a range of different emotions)

Making up your own story

Once you're familiar with the format, try each person saying a line of the story around the circle — see where it goes and after each line, all add sound effects. Or, for a more structured version, each person can alternate making up a line/creating a sound effect to go with the previous line of the story.

Option: all play together for 'ending music'. Encourage starting with 'silence'!

Additional ideas

See if your children can explore any emotions in the story? Can they create a sound effect or piece of music to illustrate the predominant emotions? Can you help them and create an emotion/mood piece as a duet/trio etc? Can they say how making up a story or creating a musical story together made them feel? Can they see how it made others in the family feel? Can they do a drawing to illustrate the story/emotions within it? Character portraits etc.

Try to create 'shared moments' within the stories which are adapted to the needs of the children e.g. waving a sheet together for 'wild rumpas' or for the wolf 'huffing and puffing' is something everyone can enjoy and be a part of even if they are unable to move the sheet themselves.