

FOR LEADERS OF

CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRY

Organizing a Choir for Young Children



Young children delight in music, and it is a wonderful way to teach Christian truths. Martin Luther is credited with saying that the way to teach music in worship is to teach the children, and they, in turn, will teach teens and adults.

Even if you do not have enough young children in your congregation to form a choir, offer an ecumenical or community choir. (We do this in our community, and parents from other churches, who appreciate musical training for their children, visit us occasionally so their children can sing in the choir.)

Teaching Songs to Young Children

1. Choosing songs

- a. Choose songs that relate to the child and his/her world—singing, jumping, getting dressed, animals, songs about travel with boats, trains or airplanes, songs about the weather and seasons.
- b. Young children love rhythmic songs and a catchy tune.
- c. The range of each song should not exceed more than six or seven notes between middle and high C.
- d. Short songs (two or three lines) can be learned quickly. Longer songs need a great deal more repetition.

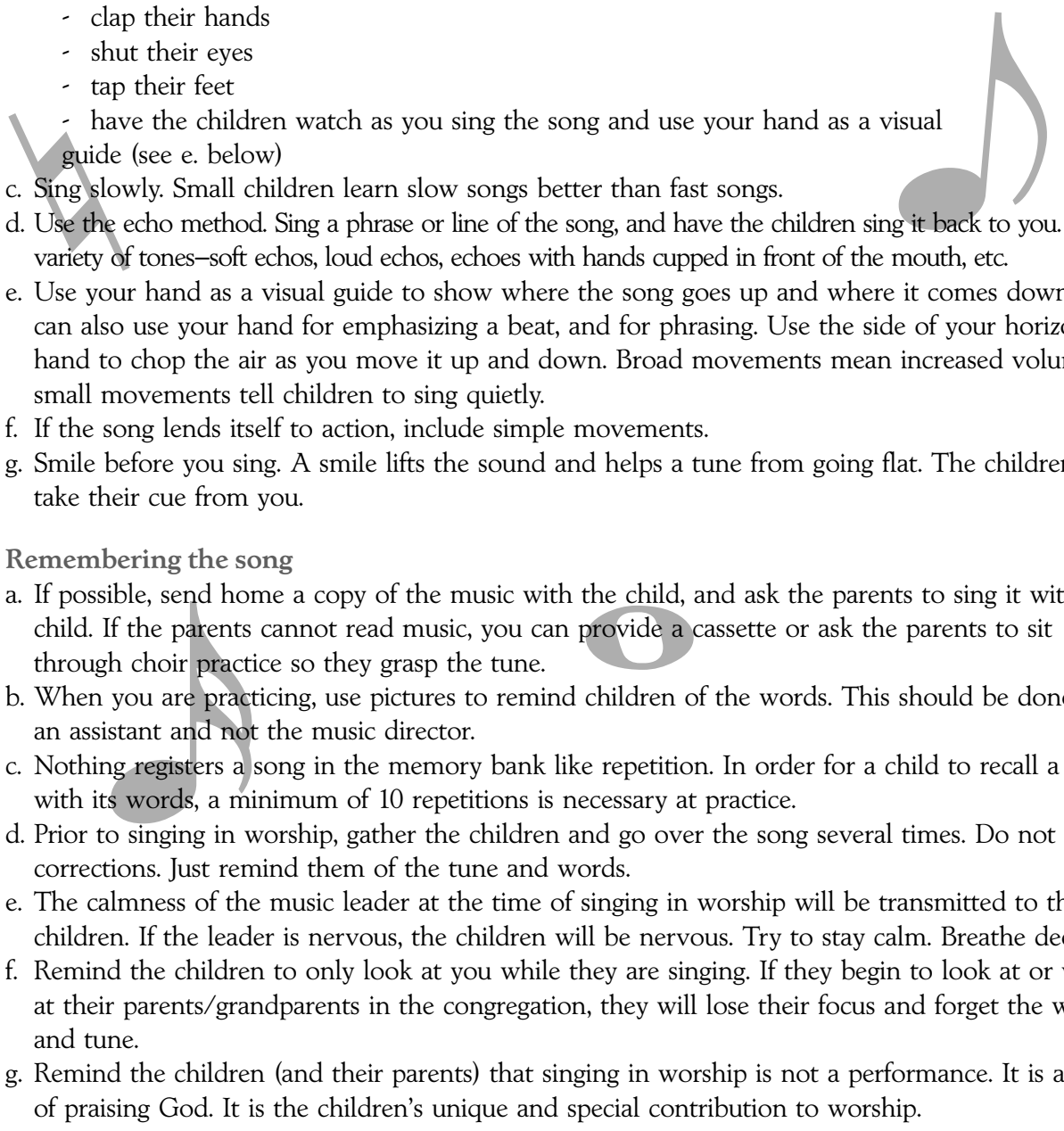
2. Learning a new song

- a. Start with either the words OR the music. This is a personal preference.

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- b. Sing or play the music several times. Each time it is repeated, ask the children to do a different thing
- clap their hands
 - shut their eyes
 - tap their feet
 - have the children watch as you sing the song and use your hand as a visual guide (see e. below)
- c. Sing slowly. Small children learn slow songs better than fast songs.
- d. Use the echo method. Sing a phrase or line of the song, and have the children sing it back to you. Use a variety of tones—soft echos, loud echos, echoes with hands cupped in front of the mouth, etc.
- e. Use your hand as a visual guide to show where the song goes up and where it comes down. You can also use your hand for emphasizing a beat, and for phrasing. Use the side of your horizontal hand to chop the air as you move it up and down. Broad movements mean increased volume, small movements tell children to sing quietly.
- f. If the song lends itself to action, include simple movements.
- g. Smile before you sing. A smile lifts the sound and helps a tune from going flat. The children will take their cue from you.

3. Remembering the song

- a. If possible, send home a copy of the music with the child, and ask the parents to sing it with the child. If the parents cannot read music, you can provide a cassette or ask the parents to sit through choir practice so they grasp the tune.
- b. When you are practicing, use pictures to remind children of the words. This should be done by an assistant and not the music director.
- c. Nothing registers a song in the memory bank like repetition. In order for a child to recall a tune with its words, a minimum of 10 repetitions is necessary at practice.
- d. Prior to singing in worship, gather the children and go over the song several times. Do not make corrections. Just remind them of the tune and words.
- e. The calmness of the music leader at the time of singing in worship will be transmitted to the children. If the leader is nervous, the children will be nervous. Try to stay calm. Breathe deeply.
- f. Remind the children to only look at you while they are singing. If they begin to look at or wave at their parents/grandparents in the congregation, they will lose their focus and forget the words and tune.
- g. Remind the children (and their parents) that singing in worship is not a performance. It is a way of praising God. It is the children's unique and special contribution to worship.

Should the congregation applaud?

After children sing in worship, it is common for the congregation to clap. It is a natural reaction because the children are usually just plain cute. However, it is important to ask ourselves, "What do we teach the children when people applaud? Do we inadvertently teach that worship is a performance?" Instead, we should be teaching that God acts and we respond, in worship, by offering our praise and thanks.

Instead of applauding, ask the music director to "teach" the congregation how to react.

Prior to singing, the music director can turn to the congregation and say, "The children and I have prepared a song which is sung to the glory of God. Since this is not a performance, but an offering to God, we ask you not to clap at the end. Instead, I will turn to you at the end of our song and say, 'Let all of God's people say...' and you will respond with a hearty 'Amen.' This lets the children know that you appreciated their song which was sung to the glory of God."