

Why music should be part of parents' pandemic survival strategy

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Credit: Gustavo Fring from Pexels

With pandemic [school closures](#) in place in Ontario, [Québec](#), [Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island](#) until Jan. 17, and other provinces [on watch](#), music could be important for [maintaining the well-being of children and](#)

[families](#).

Many are concerned about the [effects of closures on student](#) and family well-being. While scientists and [government officials](#) are busy [developing strategies to defeat the Omicron variant](#), young children—whom UNICEF has cautioned could be a "[lost generation](#)"—yet again find themselves asked to attend a virtual classroom from inside their homes.

Early childhood researchers, children's rights advocates, [health experts](#) [and](#) parents continue to point out that the psychological well-being of children seems to be getting lost in policy-making and public debate.

Listening to music at home or participating in [musical activities](#) might be an important way for parents and children to [reduce stress, find ways to regulate their emotions](#) and experience joy together.

Music and self-regulation

How can participation in musical activities be therapeutic? Experts argue that music is at the very center of what [it means to be human](#). Stephen Malloch and Colwyn Trevarthen, who have respectively researched psychology, movement and music, and [child psychology](#), argue music comes from how human bodies, from birth, explore their environment using habitual patterns of action—a kind of "communicative musicality."

On a physiological level, the connections between different brain areas are still developing in [young children](#), yet these areas all become involved simultaneously when a child is performing a musical activity. This means that music might help [sustain and regulate emotional well-being](#) by engaging all these brain areas, and thus help to make sense of otherwise incomprehensible situations.

Express yourself

Even though we don't know now the extent to which children globally have been affected by isolation during the pandemic, many undoubtedly are processing stress and grief from missing daily routines.

Music allows children to safely express emotions that might otherwise manifest in [persistent nightmares](#), [violence](#) or trauma which may be correlated with mental health challenges, [PTSD](#) and [substance abuse later in life](#). Psychiatrists note that an important part of recovery from trauma is [being able to articulate one's feelings](#).

Given the opportunity to express themselves musically with instruments or simply in choosing songs, children may find venues to express emotions that are common responses to traumatic experiences, such as [disappointment, anger, passion and sadness](#). These can all be poured [into a song](#) that has no need for linear narrative.

Instead, music can simultaneously be a compassionate witness and a medium capable of encapsulating and expressing what a child might experience while missing friends and routines. Adults can listen to how children may hum a [favorite song](#) or [make up a new tune](#) to give their feelings a voice.

Singing about [pandemic and enforced safety measures](#) might help children make sense of a scary situation. Psychologists suggest that sharing songs and singing games together [as a family](#) can [strengthen relationship between children and their parents](#) and ultimately bring a smile whether through simple [fun or looking to music to put our current situation in a larger context](#) across generations. Listening to relaxing music can also [promote mental wellness](#).

Younger children

During lockdown, interaction with peers is constrained for most children, and [even more so for younger ones](#) who don't have access to social media and cannot reap [the psychological benefits of digitally mediated communication with their friends](#).

Some research suggests that some caregivers have been turning to music while being isolated in COVID-19 shutdowns. For example, a study of caregivers of children aged between three and six years old in Brazil found that about [60 percent of caregivers were listening to music to relax or feel excited](#) during social distancing.

But if this does not happen, how can caregivers benefit from music or facilitate children's engagement with music? They could start by simply sharing their favorite playlists with children or [choosing music they think could support a positive mood](#). They can strategically help evoke [positive emotions](#) that may help families keep an optimistic outlook through our pandemic winter.

There is a great variety of ways in which both parents and children can engage with recorded music: [dancing or tapping](#), singing along, making up another melodic line or even creating a funny parody.

Importance of connections

Finally, to restore the lost sense of belonging and community connection, which is [crucial to maintaining psychological health](#), parents can encourage children's participation in virtual music groups.

This type of collective music-making has been found [to promote self-expression, help manage emotions and bring a comforting sense of belonging](#). For children who have memories of attending school and activities before the pandemic, it can also help remind them of who they

were before the pandemic.

Music can help children adapt to difficult situations by binding families together.

Most importantly, [music](#) can help revive the belief that everything will eventually be well, despite this seemingly never-ending series of lockdowns [that many of us feel are damaging the spirits](#) of adults and [children](#) alike.

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