

# Performance Play Spaces:

Create a setting for your young child to explore the performing arts.

The performing arts offer young children many opportunities to learn and grow. Dance promotes gross motor movement, theater encourages communication skills, music supports listening skills, and all the performing arts foster imagination, creativity, self-expression, and self-confidence. Even with space restrictions, there are simple ways to make room for performance play. Remember, the goal of performance play is not to train children to be dancers, actors or musicians. Instead, focus on creating an atmosphere for your child to explore the performing arts.

## Set the Stage

Pull the sofa away from the wall to make a puppet stage. A porch can be a stage, or simply create a stage using masking tape or a chalk line on a sidewalk. Decorate an old sheet and hang it on the wall as a backdrop, or hang a colorful shower curtain on the basement pipes to serve as a curtain. To create ambiance, have music available. Put a black light or colored bulbs in the fixtures, or use a flashlight as a spotlight. Safety reminder: make sure furniture corners, electric cords and other hazards are out of the way.

## Provide Props

Tambourines and shakers are great instruments for little hands. Find some toy instruments or make a small flat cardboard guitar for your child to decorate and “play”. Use a soup spoon as a microphone, and make a drum set out of pots and pans or Tupperware. Make puppets from socks or poster board shapes taped to a handle. Supply a costume box with fun dress up items like hats, scarves, and shoes. Create a small prop box with a few miscellaneous items such as a teddy bear, wooden utensils, fake flowers, a road

map, etc. If a camera or telephone breaks beyond repair, add it to your prop box! Rotate the objects in the box to find the ones your child uses most, and stock doubles of very popular items for siblings or play dates. Encourage substitution — a plastic bowl can be a hat; a skirt can be a cape. Remind kids also that they can imagine any prop they lack.

## On With the Show!

Once the space and props are ready, most kids will dive right in. If your child isn't sure where to start, provide a few suggestions based on her interests. For example, she could: make up a dance to music, put on a rock concert, act out a folk tale, family event, or a sports victory, tell jokes, or sing songs. Allow her time to play solo, or participate as a willing actor or member of the band. Encourage siblings and playmates to take turns as the director or the “star.”

## Audiences are Excellent, but Optional

Most young children are less self conscious than adults. A young child will rarely shy away from a piano if he doesn't know how to play it; instead he will explore the feel of the keys and revel in the sounds created. However, if your child is intimidated by onlookers, encourage private performances for an audience of toys, or no audience at all. If your child wishes to share his creation, make sure the audience is supportive. If the performance becomes a big family or neighborhood event, ask the performer(s) to create tickets or programs. Videotape or take pictures of the performance. Schedule an intermission with refreshments, or throw a cast party.

## Have Fun and Break a Leg! (Figuratively, of course!)

