

# Songs and Upfront Ministry with Children

Snack Music – contact us for more at [www.snackmusic.com.au](http://www.snackmusic.com.au)

## Using Music with Kids

### Why?

- It's contemporary and relevant, and fun
- Kids relate to and hear music around them all the time
- Music can set the mood and energy level of the room
- It can be inclusive of everyone, different levels/abilities, it's across different cultures
- It brings a point of focus and can draw the group together
- It gives a chance for everyone to open their mouths, which encourages participation later
- It can bring together auditory, visual and kinesthetic learners, with something for each of them

### Growing Faith through Music

God is repetitive – God keeps saying things over and over. Repetition is a common part of music. Singing phrases over and over helps us to learn them, so singing about God and about our response to God will help us to remember more deeply (and eventually internalise) the truths that we are singing.

Some of the deepest and most significant (faith) memories that we hold on to are songs from our childhood.

Singing can free our brains from the cognitive *thinking* that a lot of other faith-oriented group activities involve (e.g. Bible study, listening to a sermon) so we can be *with* God rather than merely *thinking about* God.

Music can be used as a form of prayer by either listening or singing/playing along.  
God can speak to us – and we can speak to God – through music.

Music is an activity that we can engage in with people of diverse age, background and ability.  
Our faith is improved and strengthened by diverse voices, and music is an easy place to bring them all together.

Music (especially when it's catchy) goes with children from our ministries, into their families, homes, schools.  
Music is an effective tool for increasing the impact of our ministry beyond those who physically attend.

### What Makes a Great Kids Song?

- Fun and catchy words and tune
- Actions and ways to all get involved
- Ways to be interactive (e.g. call & response)
- Variety in the music
- Singable by everyone. Generally the range from B (just below middle C) to A is safe to use with kids

### Engaging the Kids

How can you ensure the experience is interactive and engaging for everyone?

Actions are good. Play along with air instruments (e.g. air guitar). Integrate a competition into the song, or turn it into a game. Give ownership to disengaged kids (operating the technology, holding up words, leading the actions)

## Using Music with Kids Who Don't Know God Yet

Singing in a group can be quite unfamiliar and uncomfortable – not everyone is used to it. We need to meet them where they're at, not expecting them to necessarily conform with our model and values.

Encourage everyone to get involved, make it an inclusive activity, but don't be pushy. The boys up the back, those that aren't interested, those that refuse to participate... they might be taking in more than we think they are. It's ok to let them sit back and watch what is going on before they have a go.

When introducing songs, give enough instruction to encourage participation and have everyone feel comfortable, but avoid too many words and lengthy explanations.

### Song Selection

What is appropriate for singing with children who don't know God yet? What can we *ask* them to sing? We need to be very careful, and not water down the significance of the words that we say & sing.

### The TUF test

This three-part acronym T-U-F is a filter you can use to assess how appropriate a song is *for a given context*. Some songs will be great in one situation, but not appropriate in another.

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#### True (for them)

Are the statements in the song true? On what basis (biblical, theological, experienced)?

Are the statements in the song true *for those we are asking to sing them*? We can't make assumptions of where kids are coming from. Avoid statements of faith, putting words in their mouth. It's better to make statements about God and Jesus' character, than to make 'I' statements professing something that might not be true for everyone. For example, when working in an outreach context, "we can choose" is better than "I believe" or "I want to."

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#### Understandable

Use language that the kids can understand, avoiding jargon and confusing multiple names for the Deity (e.g. God, Jesus, Father, Son, Redeemer, Saviour, One... which are sometimes confusingly used interchangeably).

Avoid unclear metaphors, unless you can provide adequate explanation so they aren't misunderstood.

Using today's contextual language as much as possible. Sometimes things don't translate understandably across the UK / US / Australian cultures.

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#### Fun

Are the words fun, catchy, engaging, memorable? Will they get stuck in your head?

How do you think these three phrases go with the TUF test?

*"I'm sanctified by the blood of the Lamb" "Jesus did this very absolutely cool stuff" "Jesus is my best friend"*

### Silly Songs

Songs without any 'God content' are ok to use – they have their place amongst other songs. Be strategic about why you are using them, and therefore where they fit in and how they are used to enhance your program.

## Presentation Upfront

We can all sing a song to ourselves or read a story to a few other people, but what are the things we need to consider when presenting to a larger group?

Upfront time can include: songs, speech (one or more people speaking), games, drama, puppets, interaction.

### Keep it Simple

What's the one big idea you are exploring and communicating? Have everything else point to this. Can you get it down to one short, clear sentence? Anything more is too complex and can't be communicated well.

Choose songs that fit with the big idea whenever possible, so that they are supporting the presentation.

Don't rely on complex technology. The latest and greatest can be good, but be ready for it to fail without detriment to what you have planned.

### Learning Styles

Try to cater for the different ages and stages of the group, and the different learning styles.

Repetition is good, as well as optional extras for older kids to attempt (e.g. with song actions).

- Visual learners will appreciate seeing words & pictures to support what is being spoken
- Auditory learners will appreciate spoken words, music, while watching
- Kinesthetic learners enjoy having something to do, instead of – or as well as – watching and listening
- The Interpersonal intelligence is served well with groups and interaction with others
- The Intrapersonal intelligence enjoys a moment to reflect quietly

Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences can help us to engage the diverse group of humans we are serving. Variety and incorporating many different 'modes' are the best way to engage everyone.

### Size and Space

#### The Bubble

You are always projecting a 'bubble' around you of a certain size. Those *within* the bubble are engaged with what you're doing and saying, those *beyond* are aware that it's not for them, they can't hear you, they will not engage. We intuitively project a different sized bubble when having a deep conversation with one friend, to when we are telling a story to everyone at a large dinner table.

Enlarge your bubble beyond the front row of kids, beyond the back row, beyond the adults standing around. Especially when outdoors, enlarge your bubble into the public spaces that you want to draw people in from.

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#### Volume

- Your voice
- Tone of voice
- Use a microphone
- Turn up the music

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#### Size of...

- Body language and your movement
- Props
- Facial expressions

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#### Use of Space

- Move everywhereRefer to people on the other side of the group, don't just look down at the front row

Imagine how a street performer engages those wandering past, drawing people in with their huge 'bubble'.

## SVENK

### Size

Make everything massive. Props, arm movements, use of the stage. BIG!

### Volume

Use your biggest voice – exaggerate, amplify, and keep people engaged!

### Energy

Keep the kids awake by being super awake yourself. Drink 100 cups of coffee!

### No Inhibitions

Allow yourself to live as your character (even if it's "you"). Go nuts. Have fun.

### Keep it Moving

Even if something is super funny, keep moving the script along, value everyone's time.

## The Fourth Wall

We have great fun with silly songs and games, then sometimes put on our 'performance hat' for something more serious, and we start pretending that the kids aren't there. Break down this fourth wall, keep interacting and be personable. Enjoy yourself and enjoy being with the group. Expand your personal space to include them.

## The Participant's Point of View

Know your audience. What are they in to? What appeals to them, gets them excited?

Imagine your program, beginning to end, from the point of view of a participant. From the entrance (signage, how the room is set up, welcome, remembering names) to the welcome (how many welcomes were given, are the right things said, do I know where the toilets are) to the content and discussions and activities. How did it feel?

Avoid in-jokes from upfront. Saying things like "the usual process" is problematic for visitors.

What things could be moved away from upfront? Could the Bible story be read in small groups instead? Could videos be watched at various stations around the room? Could a game be played in small groups, where relationships can form? Could the 'message' be a discussion rather than a monologue?

## Leading Songs Well

- Prepare well and practise heaps (see below). Know the song, relax and have fun
- Keep introductions brief before getting into it – just enough to give everyone confidence and a fair chance to participate
- Be enthusiastic, lead with 110%
- Be flexible, be fun. Unless you need to correct something that may be interpreted wrongly, don't worry about mistakes and don't draw attention to them – just keep going
- Be aware of your facial expressions, stage presence, body language. Ask for others' honest feedback to help you develop in these areas

## Practical Tools

### Screens

- Laptops and iPads are capable of outputting words, images, videos and audio to projectors and TVs
  - iDevices can sometimes do this wirelessly with Apple TV
- Interactive whiteboards are found in many school classrooms these days

### Presentations

- [www.prezi.com](http://www.prezi.com)
- [www.powtoon.com](http://www.powtoon.com)
- Keep information per-slide to a minimum, never ever read sentences from the screen
- Use visual information to *support* what you are presenting in person, not to replace it
- Use a video of the words for a song, so that it is timed to advance slides in time with the backing track
  - Snack has videos for their songs with the words for this purpose. It is just the words, so that it doesn't distract from you, a real person, leading the song/actions/etc

### Apps

There are apps for everything!

Find one for a dice roll or coin flip (and ensure you are projecting it on the screen for everyone to be able to see), or to select a random name from the list of participants.

Use countdown timers and countdown videos to signal the end of a game, or the time when everyone needs to be sitting down ready to listen.

## What Can Go Wrong?

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### Technology

- CD doesn't play on a foreign CD player (test it in advance)
- Batteries run out (have spares on hand)
- Power blacks out (be ready to continue your program without relying on electrical devices)
- File format not compatible (test it in advance, on the machine it will be played on)

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### Memory

- Forget to have notes/object/something with you
- Forget the words to the song or the script
- Someone forgets to be ready for their part upfront

Obviously there are a lot more things that can go wrong!

Preparation (see below) is the key to preventing things from going wrong, and when they do, flexibility and confidence will help you navigate it and continue with your important job of ministering with children.

## Preparation

The bigger the group, the more prepared you need to be – the less it's ok to sort things out on the fly.

Have everything ready, know the script, think about everything that's happening – don't just aim to scrape through, remember your words and survive the experience.

## Putting Together Your Program

- Consider the attention span of those you'll be with. Use variety to help break up the time
- Shape the mood of the program – don't jump back and forth between high and low energy activities without time for energy levels to transition between them.
- Consider the time that will be spent physically moving from space to space (the big group into small groups, from snack time to washed hands ready for a game, etc).
- Be realistic with time, and learn from past experience in this context
- Repeat things – the second and third times you sing a song, your more comfortable. We can't assume that everyone has heard/sung it before, so use songs day after day or week after week for familiarity.

## Integrating Music

How can you move beyond simply singing a song at the start of every program? Are there other places to integrate music into your program?

- Background music – during an activity or as people enter the room
- Opening song
- Calming everyone down
- Rousing everyone up
- A song to indicate that it's nearly time to be sitting back together
- Reinforce (not replace) a bible story

## Team of Leaders

Utilise your team in everything you do.

Teach them the songs before your program – then they can proactively get amongst the kids and 'lead' the singing and actions and participation from there.

Have clear roles to allow smooth transitions between different elements of the program. Gaps allow for distraction and a loss of everyone's attention to the program you have planned.

## Preparing to Use a Song

Have the music and song words (for the visual learners) ready. Make some decisions about how you'll do the song:

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### Live Band

- Can be more creative
- Brings energy and a great visual
- Involves more people
- Allows flexibility (e.g. extra chorus or skip a verse)

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### Backing Track (e.g. CD)

- High quality sound
- Low (people) resources necessary
- Can use a full version to provide a strong lead vocal, or a backing track to allow you to change a word or a name
- Not flexible with the form of the song – so know it well and keep up with the recording

## Practise Practise Practise

- Know the lyrics
- Know the melody
- Know the form (e.g. verse chorus verse chorus chorus clapping chorus end)
- Know the actions – and know how to lead them as a mirror image
- Practise with the band / CD / equipment
- Practise how you'll introduce the song
- Practise in front of a mirror, with microphone, with other leaders, on the platform, etc

Learn things so well that you are free of needing to read the words or music, so you can move around and concentrate on why you're there – for the kids! The more planned and prepared you are, the more comfortable everyone will be. Your confidence and enthusiasm will lead to confident and enthusiastic kids.

## Creativity

Look at each element of your program and ask yourself "is there another creative way to do this?"

## Resources

### Where to Find Songs for Kids

- Snack Music
- Koorong
- Max7
- Sean W Smith
- Doug Horley
- Colin Buchanan
- Johnny Burns
- Great Big God
- Hillsong Kids
- Dan Warlow

### Resources to Support Songs

Snack have a range of free resources available to help you use their songs with children:

- Lyric sheets (PDF)
- Chord sheets (PDF)
- Vocal & piano sheet music (PDF)
- Song words for projection (PPT and MP4)

These are all available from [www.snackmusic.com.au](http://www.snackmusic.com.au)

### More Tips and Tricks

Visit [www.snackmusic.com.au](http://www.snackmusic.com.au) for videos with ideas for working with music and children.