

A child's interests are

# Windows of Opportunity

to fun and enjoyable learning

**Dancing** is a powerful learning activity for many young children



## Places to learn and activities to enjoy **AT HOME**

### Inside the house

- Tune in to different kinds of music on the radio or play different recordings on a home sound system, giving your child opportunities to hear and respond with movement to many kinds of musical rhythms. Move along with your child in time to the music.
- An infant might enjoy being held in your arms as you spin and sway about the room. For a toddler, hold hands and dance. You can follow his steps and movements or each of you can move freely. Praise him for creative dancing.
- Let the music you dance to together be a mixture—with some fast, exciting tunes and some smooth, flowing melodies. Notice which music and movement styles your young child seems to enjoy the most. Which kinds of music make him smile, squeal happily, clap his hands, and pick



**Mommy is my favorite dance partner!**

up his feet? Which kinds of music does he ask for again and again? Once you've discovered this, dance to these types of tunes most often.

- Sometimes it can be fun to play simple musical instruments as you dance. You can give a very young child a rattle or maraca to shake as you dance about with her in your arms. All kinds of rhythm instruments are fun for young children to combine with dancing. For example, try a tambourine or a hand drum, a few jingle bells sewn securely to a strip of cloth, or a pair of wooden rhythm sticks or spoons to beat together while dancing.
- An older toddler might have fun inventing costumes to wear when dancing or having some colorful props like flowing scarves or a few long ribbons to hold and wave through the air as he dances.
- Give your child the opportunity to watch herself dance. Point out her dancing reflection in a full-length mirror, if one is available. Other reflective surfaces around the house might include a dark oven door or a glass door or picture window when the lights are on inside and it's dark outside. It's also fun for young children to watch their shadows as they dance. Clear space for dancing between a bright lamp and a light-colored wall. Try out all sorts of dance moves as you watch and talk about the dancing shadows you make on the wall.

# Places to learn and activities to enjoy **AWAY FROM HOME**

## Around your community

- Take advantage of all sorts of fun and free dancing opportunities in your community. Take your dance-loving toddler along to neighborhood block parties, arts festivals, cultural celebrations of different ethnic communities, square or contra dances, and outdoor concerts, where you know there will be lively music and people moving to the beat. In these informal settings most participants are delighted to see even the youngest children join in the dancing.
- Gather information about attending free and low-cost dance performances that will enchant your young child. Some possibilities? Arts festivals, dance-studio recitals, student dance troupes at area high schools and colleges, and dress rehearsals of professional ballet companies are just some of the dance performances your little one might enjoy watching—and copying!
- Take part together in creative movement and music classes designed especially for toddlers and young preschoolers. Programs such as Kindermusik, which offers an introduction to music and movement for young children, are available in many communities. Watch community events and arts/entertainment calendars published in local newspapers and magazines and on television or check in your local telephone Yellow Pages to find out about such opportunities in your area.
- Don't let music limit your small dancer's creativity. Let him dance to all sorts of sounds you experience every day. For example, dance to the sounds of a splashing fountain or gurgling stream you pass when you're out for a walk together. Listen to anything from birds' songs to traffic sounds and respond with movement.



Families gather for a community concert and soon the lively tunes have young children on their feet!

## Visiting friends and family

- Many ethnic groups include dancing in all sorts of family celebrations such as weddings and anniversaries, birthdays, and holidays of every kind. Arrange for your young dancer to observe and join in the traditional dancing at such events. Talk to your child about the people you see dancing, why they are dancing, etc. Let her have the experience of dancing and interacting with many different people
- Family and friends can make a great "audience" for a young child who loves to dance—clapping and expressing their appreciation, adding music to her performance, and more. Such spontaneous performances are convenient times for your child to learn and practice saying "Thank you!"

## Public library

- Share some wonderful children's books about dancing with your child. A librarian can help you find just the right ones to take home and enjoy reading together. Among the many titles that might charm your dance-loving child are: ***Barnyard Dance*** by Sandra Boynton, ***Song and Dance Man*** by Karen Ackerman and Stephen Gammel, ***Baby Dance*** by Ann Taylor and Marjorie Van Heerden, ***How Can You Dance?*** by Rich Walton and Ana Lopez-Escriva, ***Color Dance*** by Ann Jonas, ***Dance!*** by Bill T. Jones and Susan Kuklin, and ***Watch Me Dance*** by Andrea and Brian Pinkney.
- Public libraries can be a great resource for recorded music. Check out recordings of music in styles that might not be part of your home collection. Your child's dance experimenting will be twice as much fun when she can spin and twirl to a range of sounds from classical ballet to old-time jazz. Have fun!

