

Music for Healthy ADHD Brains: 8 Songs for Focus



From the ADHD Experts at

ADDITUDE

Strategies and Support for ADHD & LD

ADDITUDE

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A trusted source of advice and information for families touched by attention-deficit disorder—
and a voice of inspiration to help people with ADHD find success at home, at school, and on the job.

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Music for Healthy ADHD Brains: 8 Songs for Focus

Music can work wonders on the ADHD brain, improving everything from language development to impulse control—and even sleep.

BY THE EDITORS OF ADDITUDE

Shakespeare once rhetorically wondered whether “music be the food of love.” Now, some scientists contend that it might actually be the food of healthy brains, pointing to mounting research showing the influence of music on our bodies’ neurologic functioning.

After studying and documenting music’s healing effects in his book *Musicophilia*, Oliver Sacks, M.D., the late professor of neurology at Columbia University, concluded, “Nothing activates the brain so extensively as music.” While Sacks’ case studies covered disorders like Parkinson’s, Tourette syndrome, and autism, others have found similar results on ADHD brains.

Specifically, music’s distinct structure can help an ADHD brain stay on a linear path. Kirsten Hutchison, a music therapist at Music Works Northwest, says, “Music exists in time, with a clear beginning, middle, and end. That structure helps an ADHD child plan, anticipate, and react.”

Other research has shown that pleasurable music may increase the brain’s dopamine levels. This neurotransmitter—responsible for regulating attention, working memory, and motivation—is in low supply in ADHD brains.

“Music shares neural networks with other cognitive processes,” says Patti Catalano, also a music therapist at Music Works Northwest. “Through brain

11 ways to build music into your child’s daily routine:
<http://additu.de/12v>

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Strategies and Support for ADHD & LD

imaging, we can see how music lights up the left and right lobes. The goal of music therapy is to build up those activated brain muscles over time to help overall function.” This suggests that children with ADHD can train their brains to achieve higher levels of focus and self-control by listening to and interacting with music.

Psychiatrist and best-selling author Edward Hallowell, M.D., writes all his books while listening to the same songs he’s used for focus and concentration since high school. “The music couldn’t have words, had to have a certain tempo, had to last a while, and couldn’t stop and start,” he said. He praises composers like Bach, Vivaldi, Mozart, and Handel for helping him focus in his times of need.

Based on these experts’ input, *ADDitude* has compiled the following list of recommended songs for finding focus and achieving productivity:

1. “Emperor Concerto for Piano, No.5”

Ludwig van Beethoven

Listening to this complex and beautiful Beethoven concerto, you’ll understand why classical music is often compared to intricate Gothic architecture. The patterns, details, and mathematical structure of pieces like Beethoven’s build all portions of your child’s brain simultaneously; advancing speech and language skills, motor tracking, and more.

2. “Symphony No. 40 in G Minor”

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Mozart’s music is often used in the “Tomatis Method” of music therapy. It uses filtered versions of Mozart pieces—like this classical symphony—to stimulate the inner ear. By retraining the muscles in the ear, it strengthens auditory and motor functions, which can be helpful for children with learning issues, auditory problems, or even autism.

3. “Brandenburg Concertos”

Johann Sebastian Bach

Listening to these famous concertos by Bach has been shown to change the electromagnetic frequencies of the brain to 7.5 cycles per second, referred to as the “Alpha Mode,” or the Schumann Resonance. When your child’s brain is in “Alpha Mode,” he’ll focus, concentrate, and learn better.

Looking for more ways to boost your brain naturally? Read about the benefits of exercise at <http://additu.de/101>

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4. “Water Music”

George Frideric Handel

Handel’s music is also great for getting brains into Alpha Mode, and this collection is a fun place to start. Since it takes about 20 minutes for the brain to change to this mode, this hour-long collection should be started *before* your child starts her homework—you won’t have to change the music once she settles in!

5. “Concerto for Violin, D Major”

Johannes Brahms

Anyone who has heard this jaunty number by Brahms knows that it’s anything but calm—in fact, it’s quite lively! When your child’s brain goes into Alpha Mode, his body may appear relaxed, but his mind is still alert and picking up every note. This allows him to focus his energy effectively and get some of his best ideas, without getting distracted by his fidgeting body.

**Behold the amazing
focusing power of white
noise at
<http://additu.de/noise>**

6. “The Four Seasons”

Antonio Vivaldi

This famous set of violin concertos was used extensively by Donald Shetler, Ph.D., who was the first person to look at how listening to music in utero affected a baby’s speech and language development. He found that children who listened to classical music in the womb—for just 20 minutes a day—had stronger memories, more developed speech patterns, and greater clarity.

7. “Concerto for Piano No. 1”

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Tchaikovsky’s 1879 piece is one of the best known of all piano concertos. Playing the piano—or any instrument, really—is a vital part of music therapy for children. Learning an instrument improves concentration, memory, and spatial reasoning skills, particularly for child with ADHD or LD. In these kids, it’s also been shown to improve impulse control, reading comprehension, and working memory.

8. “Canon in D”

Johann Pachelbel

If your child struggles to get to sleep every night, classical music can help with that, too. Check out this classic Pachelbel tune; it’s very meditative, and can help soothe overactive minds after a long day. If your

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child still has trouble, try adding in some ocean sounds—the repetitive sound of the waves, combined with the music, can work wonders.

These songs have helped countless people focus, but it's important to remember that there's never a one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to our children. Your child may insist that Metallica helps him study. You may prefer Bach, but that doesn't mean he's wrong.

“Why are we attracted to one song or one symphony over another? It's a complex and personal brain function that is immeasurable,” says Catalano. What helps your child may be specific to him, so remind yourself that what's playing through his headphones doesn't matter as much as its impact. If Eminem helps him focus, let it be.

Whatever the songs, incorporate them into your child's life. For example, instead of writing down, “Wash face. Brush teeth. Get dressed. Eat breakfast,” string together songs that will keep her moving and remind her to stay on task. When Raffi's “Brush Your Teeth” hits its final note, she'll know it's time for a wardrobe change. And when Justin Bieber kicks in, it's time to pull up those socks and find her sneakers.

Specific songs may help your child enter the right mindset at the right time. Hearing songs of varying rhythms can slow down or speed up your child's mental and physical processes, so you can trigger an intuitive, neurological reaction with the right playlist. Does Lady Gaga get your daughter moving? Play it after school to burn off excess energy. Does Moby slow her pace? Play it before bed to begin the daily wind-down. “Rhythm, melody, and tempo are tools used to target non-musical behaviors, and to catapult change throughout the body,” says Rebecca West of the Music Institute of Chicago.

One parent even shared a game she plays with her child called “Draw What You Hear”—she puts on music and her son draws or doodles whatever comes to mind. These exercises engage motor skills, organize the brain, and stimulate artistic juices. Many ADHD children are creative and in search of outlets for their imagination, so don't be afraid to experiment and see what works for your child!

How to build a healthy routine for your child:
<http://additu.de/2s>

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ADDitude Special Reports Available Now

www.adhdreports.com

A Parent's Guide to ADHD, Diet, and Nutrition

The foods, vitamins, minerals, supplements, and herbs that can help your child manage symptoms.

What is a good ADHD diet? Is sugar the enemy? What about gluten? Dairy? In this comprehensive special report, we detail the connection between the food your child eats and the severity of his hyperactivity, inattention, and impulsivity, covering topics from artificial dyes and flavors to the right amount of protein.

>> Learn more about this special report: <http://additu.de/nutrition>

A Parent's Guide to Effective ADHD Discipline

A better-behavior plan for the most oppositional, defiant children.

Nothing works. You take away electronics, or special activities, and he couldn't care less. You try rewards, points, praise, consequences—nothing turns around his behavior. He shows no remorse, and you feel like a failed parent. Sound familiar? This 25-page special report, filled with expert tips and solutions is a game-changer.

>> Learn more about this special report: <http://additu.de/191>

Mindfulness and Other Natural Treatments

The best non-medical treatments for ADHD, including exercise, green time, and mindful meditation.

Learn how mindfulness works on ADHD brains, and how to begin practicing it today. Plus, research the benefits of other alternative treatments like yoga and deep breathing exercises—including some designed especially for kids—as well as the science behind each natural therapy.

>> Learn more about this special report: <http://additu.de/mindfulness>

To purchase these or other ADDitude Special Reports, go to
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FREE ADDitude Downloadable Booklets

Routines for Morning and Night

Reliable schedules make a world of difference. Here are guidelines and suggested examples for your family.

Brain-Building Video and Computer Games Kids Love

Got a gamer with ADHD? Here are brain-building downloads and purchases that we recommend.

Great Sports and Activities for Kids with ADHD

Not all sports are created equal! Use this as your guide to choosing the right one for your child.

13 Parenting Strategies for ADHD Kids

What does it take to be a great parent to your ADHD child? Here's what works, and why.

Sleep Solutions for Kids with ADHD

Help your child fall asleep faster, get a good night's rest, and wake up on time.

Find these and many more free ADHD resources online at:
<http://additu.de/freedownloads>

FREE ADHD Webinar Replays from ADDitude:

Screen-Smart Parenting

>> <http://additu.de/screen-smart>

Do your kids always have a controller or tablet glued to their hands? Instead of fighting it, why not learn to make technology work for your child with ADHD? Jodi Gold, M.D., a nationally recognized expert in adolescent and child psychiatry, shares helpful tips to understand the risks of technology, as well as strategies to teach your child the rules of being a citizen of the digital world.

Neurofeedback and Cognitive Training for ADHD Kids

>> <http://additu.de/neuro>

Is brain training—including neurofeedback and cognitive training (CT)—really all it's cracked up to be? Is it safe for kids? Is it worth the money? Naomi Steiner, M.D., shares the research behind some computer-based alternative therapies so you can make an informed decision before treating your child.

Positive Parenting

>> <http://additu.de/positive>

Mary Rooney, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist at the ADHD and Disruptive Behavior Disorders Clinic at the Child Mind Institute, shares techniques for improving behavior in elementary-aged children through consistency, external motivators, and selective negative consequences.

A Parent's Guide to Executive Function Skills

>> <http://additu.de/efs>

Executive function skills (and deficits) are so intertwined with ADHD that many consider them interchangeable. That's not exactly true, but the distinctions are irrelevant to your middle- or high-school student who habitually forgets homework assignments, procrastinates until the last minute, and really struggles to plan and execute long-term projects. What matters is that there are solutions for building stronger executive functions. That's where experts Sarah Ward, M.S., and Kristen Jacobsen, M.S., come in.

FREE ADHD Newsletters from ADDitude

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<http://additu.de/email>

Adult ADHD and LD (weekly)

Expert advice on managing your household, time, money, career, and relationships

Parenting ADHD and LD Children (weekly)

Strategies and support for parents on behavior and discipline, time management, disorganization, and making friends.

ADHD and LD at School (bimonthly; weekly from August through October)

How to get classroom accommodations, finish homework, work with teachers, find the right schools, and much more.

Treating ADHD (weekly)

Treatment options for attention deficit including medications, food, supplements, brain training, mindfulness and other alternative therapies.