

The best ways to get and keep kids attention

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Have you ever felt like a cat thrown out of a window and miraculously you land on your feet?

This has happened to me a lot after performing music for kids for over 20 years. Many of the ideas I have to share, you already use in some form. There are unlimited variations of these basic ideas and I hope you will use these as a springboard to try new ways to make your interactions more enjoyable for you and the kids you work with. The more you use a technique the more it reinforces it. Remember the story of dogs who were conditioned to salivate just by ringing a bell? With practice it is easy to get a consistent response.

There may be quick tricks to hook attention but the basic rules of **healthy communication** like understanding as well as talking and listening, being sensitive to feelings and mutual respect, always apply.

Entrainment is a fancy word for something easily observable in the way kids relate to the world. If you have ever seen a large flock of birds quickly shift all together at the same time this is a form of entrainment. Scientifically it is strongly influenced by the magnetic field generated by each person's heart. Kids are not as individualized as adults. They are very sensitive to others and easily share a kind of group consciousness of thoughts and feelings. So it only takes a strong connection with a few kids to shift the attention of the whole group. Anyone who works with kids knows, things like a change in daylight saving time or a full moon can have a noticeable effect on kids. The choice and success of methods depends on the energy of the day.

Breathing is the quickest and easiest way to refocus a group. These techniques will not only help you manage groups better, it will also give kids a direct experience of how to manage their own personal energy.

1-2-3 Breath Game

Link to **video example** <http://tinyurl.com/yecamsv>

After wildly jamming on air guitars this is the best way I have found to bring kids back in balance quickly.

This is how I do it:

“Ok we are going to play a really quick game. I’m going to count to three and I want to see who can hold their breath really long.”

“Ready? 1-2-3-go” speak and count quickly, take an exaggerated big breath and hold your nose. After a little bit let it out and say *“take another breath if you need to.”* Hold a bit longer and smoothly and quietly let out your breath and say *“Good”*

Talk quietly to preserve the atmosphere. You will have a fertile opportunity to give directions at this point or continue to do various quiet chill out activities.

It is very important *not* to make this a contest to see who can hold their breath the longest. Don't worry if all the kids don't seem to be paying attention to the directions. As soon as they hold their breath, entrainment will automatically happen. A sense of urgency in giving the directions is helpful to make it clear if you don't pay attention you are going to miss a fun opportunity.

Four things the kids don't know and you're not going to tell them:

1. No one can hold their breath and talk at the same time.
2. Holding a deep breath helps integrate scattered energy.
3. You can feel your heart easier when you hold your breath and it helps to naturally bring your body back into its natural rhythm.
4. There is absolutely no need to understand this process. It works automatically.

Basic Arm Breath:

The basic breath is a quick refocus, like refreshing a web page on a computer. Warm ups, posture and breath are important in singing. Loosening up our bodies and taking a few breaths at the beginning of an activity helps gather the group energy together. First I have the kids take a couple deep breaths. Then it's good to have them slowly raise their hands on the in breath and slowly lower their hands on the out breath. This helps them learn how to pace their breath and more importantly you can visually see that everyone is breathing together. It is breathing together that harmonizes the group. I teach this right at the beginning so when the energy does go up the kids will already know how to do it. I use this through out the show whenever we need to refocus and settle down. When there is a lot of energy I sometimes have the kids hold their breath for a couple seconds at the top of the breath. Another variation to use with caution on rare occasions is to breath in while imagining to fill your hands with breath, while raising your arms straight out at shoulder height, holding your breath in your fists for a few seconds and then let it go up into the air. I only use the hand breath when there is more energy than can easily be integrated just by deep breaths. It can be like releasing steam to keep a boiler from exploding. It also helps kids take strong emotions outside of "themselves" and reduce potential harmful behavior.

Yes Clap **Video** of Yes Clap with Arm Breath <http://tinyurl.com/3zklcnh>

When breathing is used successfully to integrate energy there is the opportunity to generate more energy safely. The yes clap is something I use to quickly focus the energy of the group. I teach this at the beginning of a show to bring the group together and use it to complete activities. There is a yes clap at the end of the song Adalena Madalena on my All The Best CD.

I usually introduce it as *"I like to start with one of my favorite words, the word (pause for suspense)Yes!* Then have the kids say yes together a few times and a little louder until they start to say it together. Then I add a clap to the word yes. We clap yes a few times and then I say *"Ok now really quite"* and clap extremely slow and softly while still saying yes. You can keep it soft until all the kids are doing it quietly and then gradually speed up. The kids will naturally get louder as they speed up and at the peak I say *"and then we go"* opening my arms wide while saying *"Ohhhhhhhhhhh and then clap on yes"* Then I will do it a couple more times to make sure they have it. It is like having the reins of a horse, you can stay in control of how fast the clapping speeds up by holding your beat steady. There may be a slight delay but the kids will follow you.

This can generate a ton of energy. It may be a bit wobbly to begin with but by the middle of the show the kids are usually entrained and can do it exactly on the beat with each other. Once the kids know the yes clap you can skip the intro. Then it becomes a useful tool to focus and close high energy moments. It captures the excitement and makes a clear distinction that the activity is finished. It also works well as a way to draw attention. Just start with the Ohhhhhhhhh! And sustain it, until the kids join in and the clap infers that I now have your attention. It only takes a little praise when they get it all together right on the beat and they will have an expectation of how to do it in the future. A yes clap can also be used effectively as a reward for accomplishing something remarkable or a job well done.

The Micro Clap

This is a variation on the Yes Clap. I use the story that sometimes you are really happy and want to say Oh Yes! But you may be at the library or grocery store and it would be disruptive and look silly. So you can do the yes clap quietly, with no sound. You can even make the clap smaller. Still saying Oh yes! Silently outside and loud inside. Then there are variations like the micro clap which was created by a bunch of kids. The micro clap is a silent yes but “clapping” by bringing your index finger and thumb together. You can use both hands, get fancy behind your head, all while being extremely quiet. There are countless variations to this and kids love to invent their own personal quiet clap.

Echo Clap

Clapping a rhythm and having the kids echo the rhythm back is classic technique used by many people. It is popular because it works. There are countless variations to this method. Kids are speed learners and they enjoy games where they can easily develop and prove their skills.

The most important thing to keeping this effective is to change the rhythm, volume and tempo to keep the kids interest and attention. You can also add sounds and even directions into the echos.

Try having a kid lead the clapping. I also like to clap to a slow steady beat and then tell the kids I am watching them for unique claps that I will copy. That way there is a continual wave of different styles and the kids are thrill to have their clap recognized and expressed through the whole group.

The historical origin of clapping at concerts was partly a way to disperse energy and clear the pallet for the next song. Shamans and Feng Shui practitioners have used clapping to diffuse and clear energy for centuries.

It can be fun to have claps or unique sounds for specific activities like clean up, snack or gym time

Quiet Time

Kids have a natural instinct that recognize the need for a balance of activity and repose. Kids like to whisper and be quiet as much as being loud.

Silent yelling is an example of how an activity can be fun, enthusiastic and quiet.

Another basic law of nature is it takes more attention to listen to something quiet. Have you ever strained or stretched to hear something? Sound captures our attention in a more mysterious way than movement or sight. When we hear a sound we look for the source of that sound. When we see something we already accept that it is there.

One of the secrets of using quiet or whispering activities is to slow down so there is time to listen and breathe. Imagine someone talking without taking any breaths between their words. The spaces between the notes in music are equally important in creating harmonious sounds.

It may stretch your comfort zone but try pausing a tiny bit longer than you think you can, you may be surprised how well a little suspense works. Timing is important and easy to develop with practice.

Bells

A loud voice can work to get attention but it is usually not effective. The best sound to gain attention is a bell. This may seem cliché but there must be a reason why bells have been used for centuries to gain attention. Think of all the ways bells are used. Town hall bell towers, churches, factory and school bells, telephones, meditation gongs and of course music. One reason the ringing sound of a bell is so compelling is that it is a unique and rarely heard in nature. The resonance of the sound draws attention. It is a sweet sound that is different from a distracting sound like a thump of a dropped book.

A dinging bell works to get attention but a sustained ringing holds attention.

“Singing bowls” or bells that use a mallet to rotate along the rim to generate a sustained ringing sound work best. This is the same principle used to make a crystal wine glass sing by rotating a moistened finger around the rim. When I use a bell I start by gently striking it a few times to shift the kids attention. They are captivated when I begin to make the bell sing. Most kids have never seen a sound produced this way. Remember it takes more attention to listen to something quiet so I tell them to keep listening as long as they can still hear the sound until it finally fades out. You can also get a similar gong tone from something as simple as a mixing bowl from a thrift store. Pots and pans work great as an affordable and fun option.

Movement draws attention the same way unique sounds can. Stillness is the first defense for most animals. In nature animals often move more independently and unpredictably. They stand out from the general harmony of the surroundings. How often have you caught movement out of the corner of your eye? This instinctive reaction is tricky to use with kids because there is often a lot of movement to begin with. Something as simple as waving your hand in the air can work surprisingly well. Have you ever seen anyone wave their hand to get someone’s attention? Finding unusual creative movements like waving a ribbon streamer or twirling a rope over your head can be even more effective.

The main purpose of all attention getting techniques is to connect and create an atmosphere to effectively communicate.

Thank you for your commitment to working with kids. It can be a challenging and extremely enriching experience. I know it can be difficult to learn techniques like these in just a written form so feel free to contact me anytime if you have comments or questions. I would also enjoy hearing your ideas and experiences!



Kid Tested, Parent Approved, Teacher Recommended

Will Hale performs for 1000’s of kids every year. As a full-time kid’s musician since 1990, Will focuses on engaging kids in direct personal experience to gain useful life skills. Will Hale offers exciting concerts for kids and families, festivals, community events, daycares, elementary schools, parks and recreation, concert series, churches, libraries, private parties and pretty much everywhere there are kids!

Contact Will Hale 651-307-3849 will@willhale.com to schedule your own show!



10 things kids don't know and you're not going to tell them.

We don't need to tell the kids, learning is camouflaged in all the fun!

1. Through **health and fitness** exercises camouflaged as dance moves, kids will get a healthy aerobic work out, simple breathing techniques and direct experience of ways to balance their own personal energy.
2. Kids who can keep a steady beat are **better readers**.
3. Don't tell the kids that a lesson in **vowel phonics patterns** is seamlessly blended with voice warm ups.
4. **Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in the Arts for K-3**
Strand III: Perform/Present - Standard 1: Sing and play a varied repertoire that includes simple rhythms and melodies. Revise performance based on the feedback of others. Strand IV: Respond/Critique - Standard 1: Describe the characteristics of a variety of musical works and performances.
5. For added peace of mind Will Hale has **\$3,000,000 in liability insurance**.
6. Will Hale has mastered countless techniques to capture and keep kids full attention.
7. After performing for thousands and thousands of kids *Will Hale* has proven, he can take the natural high energy of kids and skillfully contain and focus it, to **keep kids fully engaged and safe** for the dynamic wild ride of energy and emotion at a live rock concert.
8. To create the highest possible music experience for kids and families. Will Hale quietly invests his time and money to **record at the best studios** with professional producers like Tom Garnau who has over ten gold record credits.
9. Whether live or in the studio the **Tadpole Parade Band** is a gathering of extremely talented musicians not only appreciated by kids and adults but also highly respected by other musicians. Feel free to listen for yourself. www.willhale.com
10. We will never know the lasting effects in a child's life, gained by helping them build self confidence and develop an appreciation and passion for life. A Will Hale concert is a step toward kids taking part in a larger cultural community with a growing recognition of respect & gratitude for all things.

Rock Concerts for Kids
www.willhale.com 651-307-3849

WILL HALE & THE TADPOLE PARADE

Rock Concerts for Kids

www.willhale.com web site 651-307-3849 cell

Will Hale and the Tadpole Parade: Kids are the rock stars! When they clap, dance and sing with Will Hale, the king of rocking air guitar. Will's kid tested, teacher approved concerts create a fun atmosphere filled with plenty of audience participation, excitement and energy. Kids will enjoy Will's captivating music performances which include a friendly mix of festive drums, guitar, mandolin, and harmonica, but by far the most fun is when the kids pick up their inflatable air guitars and jam!

For all the details call Will Hale 651-307-3849 cell or visit www.willhale.com

"Anyone who has brought kids to a Will Hale show knows they won't stay in their seats. The local musician is known for interactive performances where children, parents and grandparents dance, sing and play a little air guitar." Saint Paul Pioneer Press

"Will Hale is a top notch performer. His music is pleasantly refreshing compared with traditional sugar coated children's music. Kids and parents love to dance and rock along with their air guitars. Good fun for everyone!" Christy Novak - MN Children's Museum

"It's fun to watch kids engaged in a positive environment with Will and The Tadpole Parade. His enthusiasm for music and children is contagious!" Brian Siverson-Hall - Executive Director
MN Association for the Education of Young Children (MNAEYC) MN School Age Care Alliance (MNSACA)

"Will Hale is a true kids rock star. We often times refer to him as the king of the air guitar. I always call him first for all of our kids events." Kelly Cochrane – President, SilhouettEvents

"Will Hale and his Tadpole Parade is always a hit at Mall of America. His air guitars really get kids excited and encourages them to participate." Mall of America - Events Coordinator

"Will Hale's concerts are amazing. We had a blast! A professional production, filled with exceptional talent." Kirstin Wiegmann - Ordway Center for the Performing Arts

"Will Hale's rock concerts are totally unique. I can't compare them to any event we have ever done. We enjoyed the whole experience!" Kim St. Marie - Zumbrota-Mazeppa Elementary

"Will Hale is always lively and full of energy, He makes a lasting impression, the kid's love it!"
Lisa Pillar--New Horizon Academy

"Will Hale's concerts at our summer music series are always an unforgettable favorite."
Minneapolis Parks & Recreation

"Will Hale is the only one to unseat High School Musical out of our family CD player!" Bill Roach - Parent

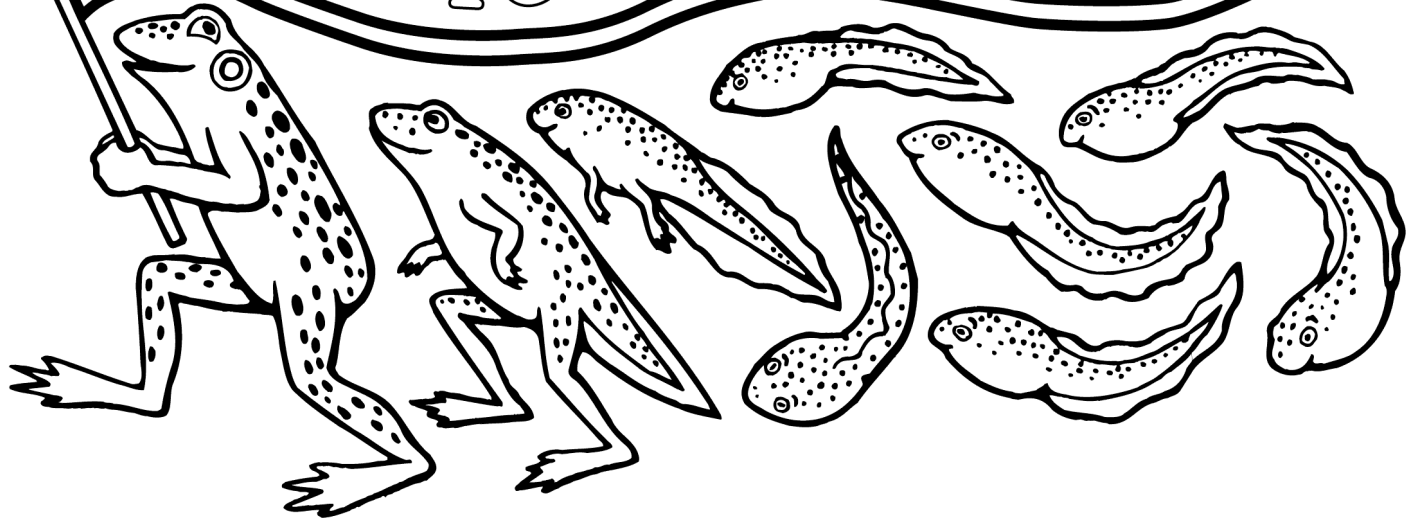
"The kids absolutely loved it! They never stopped singing all the way home." Kris Drury – Parent

"Engaging, absolutely fabulous!" Brenna Collins – Sunny Hill Preschool

"Will Hale is the greatest singer ever!" Ryan age 4

"Better than awesome!" Danny age 7

Tadpole Parade



Music You'll Never Outgrow



You rock! Thanks for jamming along.

Join The Tadpole Parade Fun Club email list at www.willhale.com to receive all kinds of free music downloads, special contests, exclusive event invitations, performance discounts, urgent updates and surprise bonus rewards. It's free & easy!

kid tested, parent approved and teacher recommended

www.willhale.com

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