

11. First & Foremost: Some of the features about a song that are important in making it 'work' in school & SEN settings

Perhaps most importantly, **the songs are sung at a slow pace**. This allows learners to recognise, anticipate and join in the songs. It enables the leader to sing all the lyrics clearly and with engaging facial expression. It also allows time for accurate signing and for juggling symbol resources and multi-sensory props. However, the songs should have lyrics and melodies that are strong enough to ensure they do not become tedious.

The songs **can be sung unaccompanied**. When you are facilitating the use of *Sam buttons (electronic voice output devices), symbols and also doing the signs, it is not possible to play an instrument as well. You will want to pause and wait for responses, so it is not always helpful to have anyone else playing a piano or guitar. It might be good to have some simple accompaniment sometimes, when everyone has learnt the song really well, but the songs can be very effectively sung just using your voices.

The songs can be selected and adapted to give maximum **opportunity for 'Sam button singers'**. Some learners may not be able to sing vocally, but can use a voice output device to join in, or even lead the singing. This works well when there is a **regularly repeated line**, when learners can **choose which words** should be included, when the Sam button singer can lead one part of a song sung as a **round** and when the song has an echo pattern. There are examples of all these features on the CD 'Nice Warm Socks'.

It's helpful to find songs that have (or can be adapted to have) everyday vocabulary which is good for **signing** the key words and making **symbol resources** to remind learners (and staff) of the words and support understanding of the verbal concepts.

Try to include **multi-sensory** experiences with the songs. Many songs lend themselves to using props of various kinds – textures, smells, objects, lights, instruments and noisemakers.

Many songs can be '**flexible**' – that is the words can easily be changed to fit in with any particular setting or subject. It is good if a song has a repeating structure. For instance, you can stop in the middle of the song in order to ask learners to choose, by any means, what item they would like to sing about. You can also make the song personal by including the proper names of learners.

Another good feature is if the songs have a **chorus**, which enables the whole group to join in at certain points.

Other really useful songs are deliberately **short and simple**. These can be very effective when working with a learner who needs to practice multiple activations of a switch or device without getting bored. I record the first line of the song, using an age and gender appropriate voice when possible, onto the Sam button and put on a switch cap symbol and/or a larger symbol behind the device. The learner activates the button and 'sings' the first line of the song. You can then bring out a stimulating object related to the song and sing the rest of it. When the song ends, the object is hidden and you can wait for the learner to request the song again by activating the button.

The **songs can be sung by anyone – whether you think you can sing or not**.

One of the advantages of including traditional tunes is that these melodies have been sung by ordinary, untrained singers for generations, and seem come naturally to us. The melodies are not complicated, but are interesting and varied.

It is generally best to **avoid using the same tune** for more than one song e.g. I have heard songs to the tune of 'Looby Loo' sung with one group when they were both arriving and leaving.

It is fine to **change** both words and melodies as necessary.

They are best sung in a **natural voice** and in **whatever key** suits the singers.

Please remember that the quality of the interaction and commitment is as important as the quality of other performance aspects like tuning and precision in diction.

*Sam (song/speech/sound and music) button – this is what I call the voice output communication devices like Step by Step, BigMac, 4Talk4 etc.