

# SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

You want to become a Hip Hop expert? Learn the info below and you're on your way, yo!

## IS HIP HOP MUSIC APPROPRIATE FOR KIDS?

Hip Hop music can be quite controversial at times. However, it has become loved worldwide by people of all ages. This has raised great debate over whether Hip Hop music is appropriate for kids. In today's lesson, we will look at the topic from multiple angles and present ideas that will help you decide where you stand on the issue.

Since the very beginning, Hip Hop was seen as dangerous and inappropriate by some people outside the culture. Those inside the culture knew personally that it was easy to judge as negative something that wasn't well known or understood. The creators of the culture themselves were judged as lower class, unimportant, non-contributing members of society by people who did not really know or understand them. As you know from these lessons, the artistic components that would eventually become Hip Hop culture were started by kids in the inner cities and ghettos of New York. It is not uncommon for people to dismiss those who live in these areas as lazy, dangerous or unproductive. And, while that may be true of some living in these areas, it is shortsighted to assume that everyone there is that way. In the same way, it is shortsighted to assume that because some Hip Hop music is objectionable, all of it is that way.

Early Hip Hop music was made primarily to entertain partygoers. It was made by teenagers and young adults and reflected their world, which resulted in music that was lighthearted, fun, humorous and a little irreverent. Those creators knew their audience well and the music they created was appropriate for that crowd. As one would expect of an artform which has remained relevant for so long, Hip Hop music has grown and changed considerably since that time. You can still find party music that is fun, silly and has wide appeal but you can also find music that speaks directly to the ugliest problems of our society. Not surprisingly, then, this wide range of music can only be considered appropriate in the context of who is listening. However, Hip Hop music is now available on a massive level, far greater than anything created in the early days of the genre. As such, where teens in the 1970s could make music knowing only those at their party would hear it, today's music is made for specific audiences as well, but is distributed in such a way that almost anyone can have access to it. Therefore, a problem is encountered as music created for a certain audience, especially a certain age of audience, gets to those for whom it was never intended in the first place.

To be clear, there are definitely massive amounts of Hip Hop music not appropriate for kids of any age. It can be argued that there is some music that is not appropriate for people of any age. In fact, many have debated, FUNKMODE included, whether some of the music being put out under the Hip Hop umbrella has any artistic merit at all or even belongs being classified as Hip Hop. The latter two arguments aside, what's important for this discussion is the recognition that not everything labeled Hip Hop is being created for everyone in the culture. Just as the teens going to the Hip Hop parties would leave their too-young brothers and sisters at home, it's up to the older crowd to help the younger ones know which music is appropriate for them and which is not. To that end, what follows are ideas and guidelines to help younger ones find their way to the brand of Hip Hop that is suited to their age category.

You might not think toddlers and kindergartners would have Hip Hop music written for them. However, again consider that Hip Hop has evolved quite a bit and it is in the hands of many different kinds of people today. Secret Agent 23 Skidoo is a Hip Hop artist that realized that need for such a genre of Hip Hop once he had a kid. The music he makes he calls "Kid-Hop". He has a rhyming style that we would describe as a stylistically evolved version of old school rap. Not only is he solid in his rhyming skills, but the content is appropriate for the youngest of kids while being educational and inspiring. Besides Skidoo, with a little searching, you will find that there are other groups\* that make music appropriate for kids that follow exactly in this vein.

For kids in the age 6-10 category, the net starts getting bigger. The first thing we would recommend is going back to the earliest days of Hip Hop and playing party tracks from Kurtis Blow, The Furious Five, Lovebug Starski, DJ Hollywood, Grandmaster Caz, Whodini, Run DMC, Afrika Bambaataa and the Soulsonic Force and LL Cool J. If chosen well, this will not only give them clean and skillfully-crafted Hip Hop music to listen to, it will also give them a sense of Hip Hop history at a perfect time for them to be learning about the origin of the culture. Another direction for this age group is to go back even further to funk music. While not specifically Hip Hop, it is the foundation for Hip Hop instrumentals and allows kids the chance to hear the music that the early Hip Hop creators were listening to themselves. As this music directly inspired almost everything in Hip Hop culture, it is a perfect source of music for kids of this age. Finally, as this age group is becoming proficient at reading and writing, we would encourage them to start putting together their own rhymes. If provided with funk, old school or currently popular Hip Hop instrumentals, kids are amazingly good at creating lyrics that are a reflection of their world. With practice and direction, they can become quickly proficient at writing thoughtful rhymes that also show technical skill in delivery and composition.

For the tween group, we would recommend all that has come before but also some other areas of Hip Hop. At this age,

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abstract ideas are more easily understood and it's possible that some of the more conscious or politically relevant Hip Hop becomes appropriate. Artists like Chamillionaire specifically don't use profanity but still talk about more complex topics. There is a large amount of Christian Hip Hop music that is becoming popular and contains no profanity, sexually explicit lyrics or traditionally objectionable material. However, this music also does not avoid political, social or religious topics that may be controversial and therefore becomes better suited for minds ready to handle these concepts. As this age group will often start attending school dances, they will be exposed to mainstream Hip Hop music which is usually edited or cleaner party music. It's important, then, to get them connected to artists that are known for their actual talent and not one-hit wonders or artistically lacking. Mos Def, Common, Nas, Missy Elliott, Outkast, The Roots, MC Lyte, Queen Latifah, Wale, Gym Class Heroes, Blackalicious, Jay-Z, Pitbull, Tribe Called Quest, Busta Rhymes, Will Smith, Timbaland, N.E.R.D., Macklemore, Sean Paul, Flo Rida and the Black Eyed Peas are but a few of the artists who have tracks that can be appropriate for this age group and provide good examples of well done Hip Hop music. There is also the younger generation of rappers that have music appropriate for this age such as Diggy Simmons, Bow Wow and Romeo.

For those that fall into the young adult category of "kids", it may be appropriate to open the floodgates of Hip Hop music but with direct supervision and conversation. There is a time and place for everything, and the more controversial aspects of Hip Hop music are, with the right guidance, advisable to introduce at this stage. Those about to enter adulthood need to know what the world holds for them. However, this exposure should also come with training wheels. Any Hip Hop listened to at this age should be discussed with older ones who have the experience to contextualize and explain what is being heard. Young people at this age are either already deeply committed to Hip Hop culture or are very curious. The time is right to make sure they understand what they are hearing and have the guidance to make decisions as to how it fits their values and worldview. As these older ones are often in need of expressive outlets for the onslaught of new ideas and feelings coming at them, they should be encouraged to write about their views on Hip Hop, their world and their imaginations. Many Hip Hop artists start their careers at this age, as clearly their minds are ready to tackle the subjects that provide artistic value for us all.

Regardless of age, Hip Hop music has grown to the point where there is something out there for everyone. Those who love the culture have the responsibility of making sure the artistry of Hip Hop finds its way to and is consumed by those who comprise the next generation of Hip Hop lovers. It may take effort, but passing on culture and art to youth pays off, not only in closer relationships and increased knowledge, but by giving them deepened appreciation for themselves and their world.

\*including FUNKMODE :)

## HIP HOP WORDS OF THE WEEK

Izzo/Izzle talk: Made popular by the song "Double Dutch Bus" (Frankie Smith, 1981) and later experiencing a resurgence when used by Snoop Doggy Dogg, this is a practice of adding the letters izzo or izzle to the beginning, middle or end of words.

EX: "Willze illzare plizzayin' dizzouble dizzutch!" (We are playin' double dutch) - from the song "Double Dutch Bus"

Fo' rizzle: An abbreviated and Izzo'd version of the phrase "for real".

EX: "As soon as I get out of this hot room, I'm goin' to get me a big ol' milkshake, fo' rizzle!"

Off the hook: So excellent that it contains the type of energy to break and jump off of a hook as a fish might.

EX: "That new album is the best I've heard in a long time." "Yeah, it's off the hook, fo' rizzle."

Off da hizzle: An abbreviated and Izzo'd version of the slang phrase "off the hook".

EX: "The party this weekend is gonna be so off da hizzle, I feel like I'm gonna explode."

**BONUS:** Create a sentence using all words of the week

## EXTRA LEARNING

- 1) What kind of topics would you write about if you were creating Hip Hop music?
- 2) Why is it important to listen to music that is age appropriate?
- 3) Name three people with whom you can discuss the music you choose.