

TelAbility Videoconference: Understanding Music Therapy

Presented by Sarah Klein, MM, MT-BC
sarahklein.mtbc@gmail.com

The American Music Therapy Association (www.musictherapy.org) defines Music Therapy as "...the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program."

Let's break this down...

Q: What is meant by "clinical and evidence-based?"

A: Music therapists base their practice on research that explores the benefits of music as therapy. A substantial body of literature exists to support the effectiveness of music therapy. Two of the primary sources for research publications in the field are the *Journal of Music Therapy* and *Music Therapy Perspectives*.

Q: What is meant by "credentialed professional?"

A: Music therapists are eligible to practice after completing an approved college music therapy curricula (including an internship) and successfully passing the national examination offered by the Certification Board for Music Therapists. These steps result in the credential of Board Certified Music Therapist, or MT-BC. Additionally, the National Music Therapy Registry (NMTR) serves qualified music therapy professionals with the following designations: RMT, CMT, ACMT.

Q: Who can benefit from music therapy?

A: Infants, children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly. (In other words, anyone!) Music therapists work with individuals who have mental health needs, developmental and learning disabilities, dementia and other aging related conditions, substance abuse problems, brain injuries, physical disabilities, and acute and chronic pain. Typically functioning individuals may benefit from music therapy geared towards wellness and stress reduction.

Q: What individualized goals are addressed through music therapy?

A: Music therapy can be used to address a variety of social, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and physical goals. More specifically, music therapy can be used with the following populations to...

Autism

- develop communication, social, emotional, and behavioral skills
- facilitate appropriate interaction among peers
- improve academic skills
- develop leisure skills through music instruction and/or participation in a community vocal or instrumental group
- teach daily routines with songs composed for the individual

- eliminate stereotypic behaviors with contingent music or by having individuals engage in music activities (e.g. instrument play) that are incompatible with the behaviors
- reward targeted behaviors (contingent music)
- cue targeted behaviors (social songs)
 - Example: *“It’s a Nice Thing to Do”*

Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing

- develop residual hearing through activities that require careful listening
- develop language skills by introducing vocabulary and word usage in songs
- practice language skills through songwriting and song signing
- develop understanding of the organization of language through parallels in music
- improve speech production, including vocal intonation, vocal quality, speech fluency, and speech intelligibility through vocal exercises and singing activities
- target specific sounds or words that the individual has difficulty articulating

Early Intervention

- foster cognitive, expressive, social, and emotional development
- foster language development
- teach simple sign language with songs to facilitate communication and increase vocabulary
 - Example: *“The More We Get Together”*
- develop gross and fine motor skills and improve coordination
- facilitate bonding between children and their parents and caregivers
- develop pre-literacy skills through song books

Piggy-Back Song Exercise

Definition: A piggy-back song is a song that uses a familiar melody with different words to address any concept or directive.

Exercise: Use the melody of any traditional children’s song such as “London Bridge,” “Frère Jacques,” “Row Your Boat,” “Clementine,” etc. and compose lyrics for each of the following situations:

1. You want the child to find the red shaker.
2. You want the child to clap along with the music.
3. You want the child to point to his/her head.
4. You want the child to play a drum 4 times.
5. You want the child to count to 10.
6. You want the child to dance with the green scarf.
7. You want to congratulate the child for doing well.

Now think of a specific objective you have for one of your clients. What simple song could you write to cue this skill, task, or concept?

Emotional Handicaps or Severe Emotional Disturbances

- reward appropriate behaviors (contingent music)
- teach new musical skills to improve self-concept
- provide opportunities for positive social interaction with peers
- structure appropriate behaviors such as sitting still, taking turns, and raising hands
- induce mood change and relaxation using preferred music and the Iso-Principle
- facilitate counseling; songwriting and lyric analysis provide opportunities for self-expression, communication, and discussing important issues

Homebound or Hospitalized

- elevate mood, thereby increasing mental and physical well-being
- reduce pain, facilitate invasive procedures, and reduce anxiety
- decrease respiratory distress with background music for passive listening
- increase coping skills through songwriting and lyric analysis
- facilitate expressions of discomfort or distress
- reduce developmental regressions through cognitive stimulation
- facilitate socialization with peers, families, and staff
- motivate and structure physical rehabilitation

Intellectual Disabilities and Specific Learning Disabilities

- develop communication skills, social skills, and behavioral skills
- reinforce academic concepts and themes
 - *Example: “Add ‘Em Up”*
- help students remember and organize information by using songs and chants as mnemonics
- develop interpersonal skills through group music-making activities
- develop skills for productive leisure activities
- develop ability to follow directions, progressing from simple to complex

Multiple Disabilities

- develop acceptance of sensory input
- develop awareness of and response to sensory stimuli
- develop communication skills and choice making
- provide opportunities for increased independence
- motivate and structure activities to develop fine and gross motor skills

Physical Impairments

- accompany physical therapy to increase motivation and provide structure
- facilitate gait-training exercises with rhythmic cues
- increase fine and gross motor coordination, control, and endurance
- increase range of motion, hand grasp strength, dexterity, and flexibility through movement activities and instrument play
- provide an audio-analgesic (i.e. a distraction from the pain experienced during strenuous physical exercise)

Speech and Language Impairments

- develop auditory awareness and auditory discrimination
- develop understanding of the organization of language through parallels in music
- develop expressive language skills and vocabulary
- improve speech production, including vocal intonation, vocal quality, speech fluency, and speech intelligibility through vocal exercises and singing activities
- target specific sounds or words that the individual has difficulty articulating
- develop receptive language skills by giving musical directives

Visual Impairments

- practice sound localization, sustained attention to sound, and other auditory training exercises to develop listening skills as a way of gathering information
- improve spatial awareness, coordination, and gross motor skills
- teach individuals how to get to their next destination through programmed music
- increase motivation to explore surroundings
- teach appropriate nonverbal behaviors (e.g. simulating eye contact, smiling, nodding, leaning in, and using gestures)
- eliminate stereotypic behaviors with contingent music or by having individuals engage in music activities (e.g. instrument play) that are incompatible with the behaviors

Collective Goals

- improve communication, social, behavioral, academic, physical, and/or leisure skills
- increase quality of life and improve self-concept
- cue, structure, and/or reward targeted behaviors and skills
- establish a non-threatening and engaging environment for therapy to occur in

For more information:

Adamek, M. S. & Darrow, A. A. (2010). *Music in special education* (2nd edition). Silver Spring, MD: The American Music Therapy Association, Inc.

American Music Therapy Association, <http://www.musictherapy.org>

Standley, J. M. (1996). A meta-analysis of the effects of music as reinforcement for education/therapy objectives. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 44(2), 105-133.

To inquire about music therapy services locally:

Abilitations Children's Therapy & Wellness Center, <http://www.actwc.com>