



# Music Therapy & people with ASD

## What is Music Therapy?

Music therapy is a professional discipline that uses music to achieve therapeutic aims. Music therapy with people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is the functional use of interactive music-based activities to achieve therapeutic goals that are non-musical.

## Who is a registered music therapist (RMT)?

Registered music therapists (RMT) are skilled and qualified musicians and therapists who assess, design and implement programs to meet the needs of individuals with special needs, including ASD.

## What makes music therapy different?

The overall aims of music education and music therapy are, in fact, complementary. They both aim to facilitate the growth and development of the clients involved. The difference lies within the specific goals targeted by each discipline. Music educators specialize in the acquisition of musical knowledge, skills, and appreciation while music therapists use music primarily to achieve non-music goals (Davieson & Edwards, 1998).

## The Music Therapy Process

Specific music therapy goals are determined by the RMT through initial music therapy assessment and ongoing review of the client. A music therapy assessment involves conducting actual sessions with the client as well as reviewing any previous programs used by the client, and consulting with the client's family and other professionals involved in their care (e.g. occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech language pathologists, teachers etc). In the case of adults with ASD, music therapy goals can be an integral component of the overall care plan. When appropriate, the client is also asked to contribute to discussion regarding what they would like to achieve in music therapy. In the case of children with ASD, music therapy goals can also be an integral component of progress toward attainment of educational goals as identified by the clients' Individual Education Plan (IEP) team and parents. Overall, an improved quality of life through a well designed music therapy program is aimed for.

## Music Therapy Goals

As all music therapy programs are specifically designed for the individual, the exact goals cannot be determined until after the assessment. Some examples of music therapy goals for children and adults with ASD are:

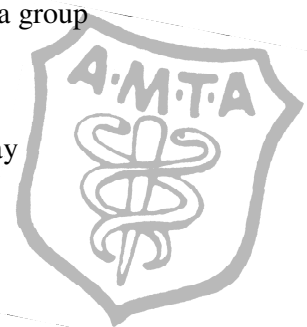
- ♪ To increase opportunities for cognitive, physical and sensory stimulation

- ♪ To develop motor skills (e.g., increase muscle tone, improve motor planning skills, balance & coordination etc)
- ♪ To promote social skills and improve interpersonal relationship skills
- ♪ To develop recognition of emotion in others and expression in self (verbal & non-verbal)
- ♪ To enhance self esteem and confidence
- ♪ To improve verbal & non-verbal communication skills
- ♪ To have opportunities for non-verbal self-expression through the use of music
- ♪ To develop play skills

## Music Therapy Techniques

After assessment, the RMT selects and applies a range of techniques in order to achieve the program goals. Some examples of techniques adopted by music therapists in addressing the client's needs include:

- ♪  Song writing to facilitate self-expression
- ♪  Movement to music
- ♪  Singing and chanting
- ♪  Educational/instructional songs
- ♪  Involvement in a group
- ♪  Improvisation
- ♪  Instrumental play
- ♪  Music listening



## Results

A range of empirical literature supports the effectiveness of music therapy in increasing the skills and abilities of people with ASD in the areas of (1) social and emotional behaviour, (2) motor skills, (3) communication skills, (4) language and vocal production, and (5) pre-academic and academic skills. The efficacy of these outcomes is enhanced by the power of music to arouse emotions that can be used to motivate and engage clients toward achievement of their therapeutic goals.

## Access to music therapy programs

Schools & other organisations (such as Disability Services Qld) may offer funded access to music therapy. However, most clients access an RMT privately. A free notice can be placed on the Qld Job Register for families seeking a music therapist. Please phone (07) 3321 4366 to access this service. A Register of RMTs and contact details can also be found on the AMTA website.

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## Further reading

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Music Therapy  
and people with  
Autistic Spectrum Disorder



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