



# Music Therapy & people with special needs

## What is Music Therapy?

Music therapy is a professional discipline that uses music to achieve therapeutic aims. Music therapy in special education is the functional use of music to achieve and enhance special education goals, while offering an alternative to traditional teaching methods.

## 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 individual students/adults with special needs.

## 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 student. The difference lies within the specific goals targeted by each discipline. Music educators specialize in students' acquisition of musical knowledge, skills, and appreciation while music therapists use music primarily to achieve non-music goals (Daveson & 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. In the case of special education, music therapy goals can be an integral component of progress toward attainment of educational goals as identified by the clients' Individual Education Plan (IEP) team and parents. In the case of adults with special needs, music therapy goals can support long term goals suggested by other members of the therapy team, such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists, as well as by the client. Music therapy can therefore contribute to the quality of life of people with special needs and their families.

## 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 goals of music therapy for children and adults with special needs are:

- ♪ To increase opportunities for cognitive, physical and sensory stimulation
- ♪ To develop motor skills (strengthening of muscles, increasing range of motion, training of movement coordination, etc.)
- ♪ To develop orientation and mobility (ie. spatial awareness, confidence to move, gait, direction, and gross & fine motor skills)
- ♪ To promote social skills and interpersonal communication

- ♪ To develop appropriate emotional expression
- ♪ To enhance self-confidence
- ♪ To increase awareness of one's immediate environment and of others
- ♪ To develop complexity and completeness of sentences, and appropriate use of vocabulary

## 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 playing
- ♪  Music listening



## Results

A range of empirical literature supports the effectiveness of music therapy in increasing the skills and abilities of people with special needs 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

The cost of music therapy services is covered generally by the following school/institutional bodies:

- ♪ School funds
- ♪ Parents & Citizens (P&C) committees
- ♪ Non-profit organisations/associations
- ♪ Parents and/or clients

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## Further reading

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