



Music Therapy & Young Children

What is Music Therapy?

Music therapy is a professional discipline that uses music to achieve therapeutic aims. Music therapy with young children is the functional use of musical interactions to enhance and develop socialisation, communication, self-expression, and sensory-motor skills.

Who is a registered music therapist (RMT)?

Registered Music Therapists (RMTs) are skilled and qualified musicians and therapists who assess, design and implement programs to meet the needs of young children. RMTs work with young children in hospitals, early intervention facilities and private practice.

Why music therapy?

Music is a universal language that crosses boundaries of age and culture; it is a motivating and calming medium that stimulates all of the senses and facilitates age appropriate cognitive functioning, language skills and other developmental skills.

When applied therapeutically by a RMT, music becomes a pleasurable therapeutic medium that facilitates advancement toward articulated and often multi-purpose goals and objectives. Music therapy can address several needs simultaneously and is highly transferable to the home environment.

Furthermore, as young children with delay in development are not necessarily delayed in their music skills, music therapy allows them to experience a sense of success and fun while pursuing other non-musical goals.

The Music Therapy Process

Specific music therapy goals are determined by the RMT through initial music therapy assessment and ongoing review of the child. During the assessment, the RMT will interact with the child through activities such as singing familiar songs, improvising, creating new songs and listening to music in order to develop a trusting rapport with the child and observe the child's responses to music, before formulating specific goals and objectives.

Music Therapy Goals

As all music therapy programs are specifically designed for the individual child, the exact goals cannot be determined until after the assessment. Some examples of music therapy goals for young children 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 (i.e. spatial awareness, confidence to move, gait, direction, and gross & fine motor skills)

- ♪ To promote social skills
- ♪ To increase vocal skills
- ♪ To develop speech and language skills, including complexity and completeness of sentences
- ♪ To promote emotional expression and self-confidence

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 child's needs include:

- ♪ 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 young children 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

Organisations such as Disability Services Qld and Playgroup QLD may offer funded access to music therapy. However, most clients access an RMT privately. A free notice can be placed on the AMTA 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.

Brochure prepared by:

Maggie Leung

B Mus GradDipMusThy, RMT

Anne Flood

B Mus Thy, RMT

Designed and edited by:

Tina Liu

B Mus (Hons) B Ed, RMT

Further reading

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For further information please contact:

Australian Music Therapy Association –

Queensland Branch

Tel: (07) 3321 4366

Email: amta_qld@yahoo.com.au

www.austmta.org.au



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