

A Music Therapy Perspective

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What about the children?

- Each child is unique (*which we sometimes overlook*).
- Each deserves attention to the details of how they are unique and how they can best be reached and taught.
- The goal is always to help each one reach **their full potential** and have a life that is **satisfying to them**.

What's the big deal about music?

- Music is highly motivating on many levels.
- Two major motivating factors for children are: "it's fun!" or "it feels good!"
- Music activates many areas of the brain and central nervous system, including motor, cognitive, & emotive.
- Music is also very effective in producing changes.
- Music facilitates numerous functions necessary for development, including an anticipatory response pattern, which is an evidence of learning, i.e., expanding their "experience - knowledge bank."

So what is Music therapy?

- Music Therapy is the skilled use of music as a tool in order to meet developmental and/or rehabilitation goals.
- Music Therapy is not just adapted music education, nor is it entertainment.
- It is primarily engagement in music experiences designed and continuously adjusted to meet non-musical needs.

Connecting:

- Music can entice and thereby bridge the gap between isolative activity and meaningful interaction (especially when avoidance/defensive patterns are prevalent).
- Keep in mind the input they seek, avoid, or merely tolerate and what is most calming for them.
- Become the provider of the type of pleasure they seek out on their own.
- Anticipate need for calming/organizing input and give choices to elicit communication before escalation.

Music Basics: how to look at music as a tool

- Use music / songs that provide interaction with "trusted" persons (providers of pleasure).
- Use cause-effect musical instruments/tools to provide immediate gratification.
- Look at ways to use music to provide success at varying levels of ability.
- Use music to increase awareness of emotions or provide an outlet for emotional expressions.
- Use music to provide appropriate leisure skills.
- Music provides an opportunity for equally appropriate choices.

Movement and Facilitation of Motor Skills:

- Music can guide and encourage movement that is rhythmic and coordinated, especially locomotion.
- Rhythmic movement is very organizing and helpful in maintaining regulation of attention or alertness.
- Pauses in the music and prolonged phrases can assist the child that has difficulty processing too much information at one time or is prone to going into "overload."
- Use instruments that promote bilateral hand use, crossing the midline of the body, and postural stability.
- The child who has difficulty using objects in purposeful ways, toward meaningful ends (especially the original intended purpose), may need maximum physical assistance initially.
- Remember the goal is always to move toward independent action – as much as the child is capable of, and as soon as they are able.

Music to Promote Processing of Sensory Input

- Music facilitates positive response to sensory input, especially vestibular
- Music used as accompaniment to sensory input can identify and give a way to "request" favored input
- Music provides time frame for input – encouraging increased tolerance & sense of completion (phrases).
- Music can provide a framework for various sensory inputs: auditory, visual, tactile, vestibular, and proprioceptive.
- Also some music instruments provide for vibro-tactile, visuo-vestibular, visual input, weight bearing/heavy work patterns (lift, carry, support).
- Songs promote sub-cortical assimilation of vestibular and proprioceptive input to improve body awareness and praxis (motor planning)
- Pulsing or pressing the beat provides constant pressure to decrease high alerting effect of some tactile input.
- Playful interaction to music paired with deep pressure touch can increase the effectiveness and enjoyment of the activity.
- Likewise, music paired with some light touch provides cues for anticipation, which allows for preparation and dampens the over-excitatory effects.

Music to Assist in Cognitive Development

- Music enhances auditory discrimination and awareness;
- increases potential for recall of information taught;
- provides non-verbal means of communication, especially choices (i.e. varying modes/prompts) and multiple opportunities to initiate continuance/change;
- gives easily recognized parameters for completion;
- increases awareness of sequencing and flow;
- provides more concrete way of learning concepts e.g., high/low, loud/quiet, fast/slow, up/down, right/left;

- increase duration of attention to tasks;
- encourages completion of tasks (end of song).
- Song activities can involve various cognitive skills:
 - identification of body parts, colors, shapes, etc.
 - visual and/or auditory tracking
 - pre-reading skills (tracking “symbols” for notes)
 - pre-math skills (1:1 correspondence)
 - labeling, matching, categorizing, factual retention
 - humor awareness
 - combining what goes together
 - learning to use objects for intended purpose(s)
 - identification of actions through song lyrics
 - tracking and visual spatial skill development
- Nonsense words often “catch” a child’s attention.
- Open-ended songs create suspense & entice to communicate.
- Songs with repetitious phrases facilitate language development.

Music to Stimulate Social Interaction:

- Music can provide a feeling of comfort in a distressing environment (e.g. closeness of others).
- Music also provides a natural opportunity for taking turns and sharing – space, objects, and attention.
- Music is an easy way to time involvement for the child who has a very short attention span
- It also provides a tool for expanding frustration tolerance and appropriate interaction with others.
- Music promotes: increased awareness of others, e.g. visual/passing; tolerance of interaction with others; acceptance of delayed gratification; spontaneity and initiation of interaction; and cooperation in “group product” with instrument “ensembles”

Music to Facilitate Emotional expression:

- Music provides a safe way to express a wide range of emotions, even those that may be distressing.
- Music can be used to direct focus or divert attention from distressing input. More than just a distraction, it engages the child, providing release by activating a different part of the brain.

Problems of over-arousal (or under arousal):

- Children with poor modulation of input are unable to “filter” out the inconsequential or unimportant input, and so are often unable to modulate their responses. It may appear to be a lack of attention as they are unable to maintain their focus on the “important” input. If not “defensive” or over-aroused, they may only need a **schedule of regulated input** to keep them organized (i.e. in a calm-alert state) so they can remain focused.
- Some children have a greater need for stability and security. To help them feel secure, they need routines and a way to understand them.

Music to Help in Managing/Shaping Behavior

- Music can facilitate transitions – between tasks, locations, persons, etc.
- Music can provide a routine sound cue that becomes a paired stimulus to make transitions flow more smoothly; especially needed when stressed children are unable to “decode” verbal instructions.
- Music can change mood through types of music used; tempo, pitch, and volume changes (including verbal/hum/sing).
- Use to assist you to alter your attitude; i.e. increase calm/patience by control of pitch, volume, and harshness (e.g. perceived as “yelling” when increase in intensity, volume, or pitch).
- Music that facilitates acceptance of limits and structure, e.g. learning safety & interaction “rules”

Summary:

- Use music wisely: not for prolonged periods (20 minutes at a time maximum).
- Use music with a steady tempo when at all possible – more organizing.
- Choose music that fits what you want to accomplish, not just something that you happen to turn on.
- Don’t overuse any given song – have a variety, but remember that some repetition is needed for learning and security.
- Make your music environment fun, but not nerve wracking (avoid noise making).