



American Music Therapy Association

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Music Therapy and Developmental Disabilities - Evidence Based Practice Support

Description: Music Therapy (MT) is 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. This established allied health profession uses music to address physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social needs of children and adults with developmental disabilities. Research supports connections between speech and singing, rhythm and motor behavior, memory for song and memory for academic material, and overall ability of preferred music to enhance mood, attention, and behavior to optimize an individual's ability to learn and interact. One of the purposes of music therapy is to provide an initial assist using melodic and rhythmic strategies, followed by fading of musical cues to aid in generalization and transfer to other environments.

Standardization: MT sessions are documented in a treatment plan and delivered in accordance with standards of practice. Music selections and certain active music making activities are modified for client preferences and individualized needs (i.e., song selection and music may vary). Toolkits are available via AMTA and publications.

Replication: Yes; has been used with different providers and populations also.

Outcomes:

Increased attention	Improved behavior
Decreased self-stimulation	Enhanced auditory processing
Improved cognitive functioning	Decreased agitation
Increased socialization	Improved verbal skills
Successful and safe self-expression	Enhanced sensory-motor skills

Research:

General

- All music intervention, regardless of purpose or implementation, has been effective for children and adolescents with autism.

Whipple, J. (2004). Music in intervention for children and adolescents with autism: a meta-analysis. Journal of Music Therapy, 41(2), 90-106.

- Data analysis over two-year period demonstrated clients reached initial objectives in goal areas of language/communication, behavioral/psychosocial, cognitive, musical, and perceptual/motor within one year or less.

Kaplan, R.S. & Steele, A.L. (2005). An analysis of music therapy program goals and outcomes for clients with diagnoses on the autism spectrum. Journal of Music Therapy, 42(1), 2-19.

- Music therapy addresses multiple types of goals and treatment outcome is generally perceived to be favorable.

Jackson, N.A. (2003). A survey of music therapy methods and their role in the treatment of early elementary school children with ADHD. Journal of Music Therapy, 40(4), 302-323.

Music Therapy in Pre-Reading/Writing Skill Development

- Music activities increase pre-reading/writing skills, vocabulary development and motor skills in early intervention programs.

Colwell, C. (1994). Therapeutic application of music in the whole language kindergarten. Journal of Music Therapy, 31(4), 238-247.

Register, D. (2001). The effects of an early intervention music curriculum on prereading/writing. Journal of Music Therapy, 38(3), 239-248.

Standley, J.M. and Hughes, J.E. (1997). Evaluation of an early intervention music curriculum for prereading/writing skills. Music Therapy Perspectives, 15(2), 79-86.

Standley, J.M. and Hughes, J.E. (1996). Documenting developmentally appropriate objectives and benefits of a music therapy program for early intervention: A behavioral analysis. Music Therapy Perspectives, 14(2), 87-94.

Music Therapy in Cognitive Development

- Music facilitates memory and recall skills of preschoolers.

Wolfe, D. & Horn, C. (1993). Use of melodies as structural prompts for learning and retention of sequential verbal information by preschool students. Journal of Music Therapy, 30(2), 100-118.

Wolfe, D. & Jellison, J. (1995). Interviews with preschool children about music videos. Journal of Music Therapy, 25(2), 265-285.

- Research supports the use of music to structure and organize information in order to increase learning and retention of number concepts.

Claussen, D., & Thaut, M. (1997). Music as a mnemonic device for children with learning disabilities. Canadian Journal of Music Therapy, 5, 55-66.

Music Therapy and Language and Social Skills

- Selected verbal language and speech skills are enhanced through music activities in special education populations.
- Music is effective as a prompt and reinforcer to increase verbal response in preschool-age children with limited verbal communication.
- Musical activities increase appropriate verbal communication responses in preschool-age children with developmental disabilities who show preference for musical presentation.
- Music has a positive effect on the number of manual signs autistic children are able to imitate.

Braithwaite, M. & J. Sigafoos (1998). Effects of social versus musical antecedents on communication responsiveness in five children with developmental disabilities. Journal of Music Therapy, 35(2), 88-104.

Buday, E.M. (1995). The effects of signed and spoken words taught with music on sign and speech imitation by children with autism. Journal of Music Therapy, 32(3), 189-202.

- Music-facilitated interactions and structured instrument playing are effective to improve social skills in school-age populations.

Bryan, T., Sullivan-Burstein, K., & Mathur, S. (1998). The influence of affect on social-information processing. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 31(5), 418-426.