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Music Therapy

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Summary: According to the Canadian Music Association, music therapy is a discipline in which Certified Music Therapists (MTAs) use music purposefully within therapeutic relationships to support development, health, and well-being. Music therapists use music safely and ethically to address human needs within cognitive, communicative, emotional, musical, physical, social, and spiritual domains.

Does Any of the Following Apply:

Does the person have any of the following:

- An interest in music?
- Difficulties with
    - Emotions and self-regulation?
    - Communication, social, cognitive, and physical skills?
    - Troubles with stress, anxiety and depression?

If so, then read on to learn more about music therapy.

Introduction

Music is an essential part of all societies.
Most people enjoy making and/or listening to music.
Research confirms that making or listening to music has many positive benefits for health.
Studies have shown that piano training for 1-hr a week for 11-weeks can show measurable improvements in depression, anxiety and stress, as well as improved audio-visual temporal processing (Che, 2022).
Music can calm our heartbeat, blood pressure, and breathing and even affect our body temperature.
Many people know this intuitively and already use music in their lives.
In addition, trained professionals known as music therapists have training in how to use music deliberately to help people.

What is Music Therapy?

According to the Canadian Association of Music Therapists, Sep 2020
Music therapy is a discipline in which Certified Music Therapists (MTAs) use music purposefully within therapeutic relationships to support development, health, and well-being.
Music therapists use music safely and ethically to address human needs within cognitive, communicative, emotional, musical, physical, social, and spiritual domains.

What Does It Help With?

Music therapy can help in many areas including:

- Physical
  - Reduce pain and distress. For example, listening to preferred music during medical procedures reduces distress and pain (Çelebi, 2020).
  - Aid in physical rehabilitation.
  - Promote physical activity.
- Social
  - Improve social connections.
  - Help with isolation and loneliness.
- Emotional
  - Help with expressing feelings and coping with difficult feelings.
  - Coping with stress
  - Decrease feelings of anxiety, anger, sadness, fear, or agitation.
- Cognitive
  - Help with overall cognitive functioning and thinking, including memory.
- Coping skills
  - Develop healthy coping skills through music-making or active listening.
  - Provide a sense of control.

Music therapy can also help people with specific issues conditions such as:

- Brain conditions and mental health conditions such as
  - Dementia
  - Developmental disabilities
  - Autism spectrum disorder
  - Acquired brain injury
  - Stress, anxiety, depression and trauma (Yuqing Che, 2022).
- Hearing impairments
- Physical disabilities
- Speech and language impairments

Why Music Therapy?

There are many reasons why music therapy can be helpful.
For one thing, music therapy activates nearly all parts of the brain. Because it affects the human person in so many ways, it can be harnessed to achieve goals in many different domains (Budson, 2020).
Many therapies, such as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), require talking about the person’s thoughts and feelings. Other types may require the ability to talk about one’s past. However, many people may be unable to talk about their thoughts and feelings, let alone the past. For people who are not able to benefit from talking therapy, music therapy is an example of a ‘non-talking’ therapy.

What Happens in Music Therapy?

Music therapy interventions will depend on the person’s needs and what level they can function at.
Passive interventions include:

- Listening to music, with music chosen by the therapist, based on the client’s preferences and needs.
- The therapist might ask the client to reflect upon the music.

More active interventions include

- Making music, such as singing or playing an instrument.
    - Studies show that playing drums with others can be particularly therapeutic for various conditions.
- Writing music
    - Writing music requires more ability and capacity of the client, and at the same time, helps develop skills such as creativity and flexibility.

What is NOT Music Therapy

Although music can be soothing and enjoyable, the following are NOT examples of music as they are used in a one-size-fits-all as opposed to a very specific and deliberate fashion.
Music therapy is:

- NOT simply listening to music.
- NOT a person with Alzheimer's listening to an iPod with headphones of his/her favourite songs;
- NOT simply people singing or playing instruments (e.g. guitar or piano) in a nursing home;
- NOT simply playing background music for patients in a hospital.

What is Music Therapy?

A music therapist will meet with the person and do an assessment, including the person's needs and strengths. Music therapy is when a trained music therapist develops a treatment or intervention plan and uses music deliberately, in a therapeutic way, based on the person's needs and preferences. They will consider various types of artistic activities based on that person.
The American Music Therapy Association (AMTA) gives the following examples of the work of music therapists:

- Work with older adults to lessen the effects of dementia.
- Work with children and adults to reduce asthma episodes.
- Work with hospitalized patients to reduce pain.
- Work with children who have autism to improve communication capabilities.
- Work with premature infants to improve sleep patterns and increase weight gain.
- Work with people who have Parkinson's disease to improve motor function.

For More Information

Canadian Association of Music Therapists
https://www.musictherapy.ca/
American Music Therapy Association (AMTA)
https://www.musictherapy.org/research/factsheets/

References

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Çelebi D et al.: The effect of music therapy during colonoscopy on pain, anxiety and patient comfort: A randomized controlled trial, Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice, February 2020. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ctcp.2019.101084
Yuqing Che et al, An RCT study showing few weeks of music lessons enhance audio-visual temporal processing, Scientific Reports (2022). DOI: 10.1038/s41598-022-23340-4

About this Document

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