

PFA Tips

Music Therapy

Music Therapy is an expressive arts therapy that uses music to address a person's physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs and can offer several benefits to individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Within Music Therapy there are several practice models that may be followed depending on clinician preference, training, and experience. Some of these models include medical, behavioral, humanistic, or a combination of these models. What's important to note is that Music Therapy is not the same as music instruction.

What is Music Therapy?

The American Music Therapy Association defines Music Therapy as "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. Music therapy interventions can be designed to:

- Promote wellness
- Manage stress
- Alleviate pain
- Express feelings
- Enhance memory
- Improve communication
- Promote physical rehabilitation

Research in music therapy supports its effectiveness in a wide variety of healthcare and educational settings." (www.musictherapy.org)

Who is a Music Therapist?

A music therapist should be board certified by the nationally recognized Certification Board for Music Therapists and would be credentialed as an MT-BC (Music Therapist - Board Certified). Some states have specific licensure for music therapists, but at this time

Maryland does not. Music therapists must undergo continuing education and trainings to uphold their certificate much like other professionals' requirements. When searching for a music therapist, it is important to ensure that they are board certified (this can be verified at www.cbmt.org), and to schedule a "meet and greet" to make sure the therapists' ideals and approach to therapy are appropriate for you and/or your family.

Process for Music Therapy

- **Referral** - Depending on the setting, a referral may come from a parent or loved one, case manager, teacher or other school staff, physician, psychologist or counselor, or other related service professionals. If the service is IEP based, then protocol would be followed within the school as it would for any other related service and the IEP team would need to make the request for an assessment. Privately, anyone can call and inquire about Music Therapy and thus begin the process of obtaining the service.
- **Intake interview** - During this step, the MT-BC will gain pertinent information about the client, such as strengths, needs, other therapies they



are involved in, music preferences, and what a typical day may look like for the individual.

- **Assessment** - There are several published assessments that the MT-BC may use depending on the population they are serving. Overall, every assessment will look at the entire individual including their social, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, physical, and quality of life needs. Most assessments will look at an individual's responses in both non-musical and music therapy settings to determine eligibility.
- **Treatment plan** - The MT-BC will formulate a treatment plan based on the data recorded during the assessment. This will include frequency and duration of sessions, as well as a list of appropriate goals and objectives that

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will be tracked throughout the course of treatment.

- **Treatment and evaluation** -

Individualized sessions will then be conducted according to the treatment plan with constant evaluation of the individual's progress in therapy.

- **Termination** - like many other therapies, there is a time of discharge or termination. MT-BCs plan for this as well so that the client can successfully transition out of therapy and generalize the skills they rehearsed in Music Therapy into their daily lives.

What does a Music Therapy session look like?

Sessions are usually very structured and follow a predictable order to create a comfortable environment for the client. A music therapy session may include instrument playing, singing, song writing, lyric analysis, movement to music, art with music, and therapeutic music listening. Some

songs in sessions are familiar, but many songs are written by the MT-BC to address the specific needs of the client. Often Music Therapy with individuals on the Autism Spectrum includes social skills, de-escalation strategies and coping skills, cognitive goals, and communication skills. The repetitive nature and predictable structure of music lend well to being a therapeutic tool with this specific population. Music therapy also provides avenues for communication for individuals that have difficulty with verbal expression or articulating with words. Music is also fun and very motivating!

Sessions could be individual or groups. Many MT-BCs also teach adapted music lessons since their unique training lends well to teaching individuals who may not learn through traditional methods. Music is universal in that it is everywhere in our world, and it can be individualized to meet the needs of anyone according to

their goals, objectives, and personal preferences.

What are the benefits of Music Therapy?

A recent study cited, "Reported benefits included, but were not limited to increased appropriate social behavior; increased attention to task; increased vocalization, verbalization, gesture, and vocabulary comprehension; increased communication and social skills; enhanced body awareness and coordination; improved self-care skills; and reduced anxiety."

How can I Find an MT-BC?

We are fortunate to have a very active state association, the Maryland Association for Music Therapy. You can search for local MT-BCs at: www.marylandmusictherapy.org. You can also search our national association (American Music Therapy Association) membership at <https://www.musictherapy.org/about/find/>.

Additional Resources

Pathfinders for Autism Online Provider Database
<http://pathfindersforautism.org/providers-services/>
Choose category > Therapies > Music Therapist

The Benefits Of Music Therapy For Autistic Children
<https://nursejournal.org/community/the-benefits-of-music-therapy-for-autistic-children/>

Music as a Therapeutic Intervention with Autism: A Systematic Review of the Literature
<http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/108987616/music-as-therapeutic-intervention-autism-systematic-review-literature>

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