

Music Therapy in the Early Years

About music therapy

Music therapy is a unique method of creative communication that takes place within a relationship developed over a series of regular sessions. It can help people of all ages and abilities but is often used when verbal skills are limited due to physical or learning disability, or they are unable to make use of a verbal therapy due to emotional distress. Music therapy can be 1:1, in a group or with a parent/carer and child together.

How can music therapy help young children?

Music therapy with young children promotes the development of both verbal and non-verbal communication skills through a mixture of structured musical activities and free improvisation.

Children with any level of ability can benefit from the opportunity to express themselves within an enjoyable and creative environment. Early intervention in groups or individually can support a child's social and emotional development and facilitate physical and cognitive development.

Parents or carers can be involved, supporting the child in their music-making.

The child's natural musicality motivates them to listen and participate, and often enables them to concentrate for longer than usual. Essential aspects of non-verbal communication are encouraged such as:

- Turn taking
- Eye contact
- Anticipation
- Listening and concentration
- Awareness of self and others



The music therapist adapts their musical and therapeutic skills to bring about the most appropriate responses from each child.

Through interacting musically with others children can develop an increased awareness of themselves and others, which can boost self-esteem and build resilience. Shared music making has also been shown to stimulate language skills and to strengthen family and peer relationships.

A positive relationship with the music therapist is key to the child's level of engagement in music therapy.

What happens in a session?

Music therapy sessions are structured around the needs of the individual or group.

A large selection of percussion instruments are available, chosen for their suitability and ease of use so there is no need for prior musical experience.

The therapist uses sensitively judged musical responses to give the child a sense of being heard and responded to in a special way, allowing them to develop their own musical language.

With young children well-known songs may be used in a flexible way, changing the words to suit the situation. Group sessions provide a bespoke combination of structure and flexibility to allow the relationships and skills to develop.

What are the typical reasons for referral?

If a child is having difficulty reaching milestones, engaging or playing with others or has emotions they can't express verbally, music therapy can help. Specific reasons for referral include:

- Communication difficulties
- Emotional distress
- Relationship difficulties
- Developmental delay
- Autism

Music Therapists work with young children in various settings including:

- Early years nurseries
- Child Development Centres
- Children's Centres
- Music therapy centres
- The child's own home.

Finding a music therapist

To find a music therapist in your area you can contact our office or search on our website at www.bamt.org

Music therapists are trained at postgraduate MA level and are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council.

The British Association for Music Therapy (BAMT) was established in April 2011. It provides information and promotes high standards of practice, training and research to further the advance of music therapy.