

British Association for Music Therapy

The British Association for Music Therapy (BAMT) is the professional body representing music therapy and music therapists in the UK. It is a source of information, support and involvement for the general public, and acts as a voice for those who could benefit from music therapy and those who provide music therapy.

What is music therapy?

As human beings, music plays a fundamental role in our identity, culture, heritage and spiritual beliefs. It is a powerful medium that can affect us all deeply. In music therapy, music therapists draw upon the innate qualities of music to support people of all ages and abilities and at all stages of life; from helping new born babies develop healthy bonds with their parents, to offering vital, sensitive and compassionate palliative care at the end of life.

BAMT BRITISH ASSOCIATION
FOR MUSIC THERAPY

To find out more about music therapy services in your area, or to support or learn more about music therapy, please visit www.bamt.org and contact info@bamt.org or call 020 7837 6100

Everyone has the ability to respond to music, and music therapy uses this connection to facilitate positive changes in emotional wellbeing and communication through the engagement in live musical interaction between client and therapist. It can help develop and facilitate communication skills, improve self-confidence and independence, enhance self-awareness and awareness of others, improve concentration and attention skills.

Central to how music therapy works is the therapeutic relationship that is established and developed, through engagement in live musical interaction and play between a therapist and client. A wide range of musical styles and instruments can be used, including the voice, and the music is often improvised. Using music in this way enables clients to create their own unique musical language in which to explore and connect with the world and express themselves.

Music therapy is an established clinical intervention, which is delivered by HCPC registered music therapists to help people whose lives have been affected by injury, illness or disability through supporting their psychological, emotional, cognitive, physical, communicative and social needs.



Music therapy and adoption – supporting attachment and healthy relationships

Adoption is currently preferred as a new family form for removed children to grow up in, where they can find stability, certainty, security and love.

Statistics show that 70% of children adopted in the UK have experienced neglect and abuse. Early trauma can result in high stress levels in infancy which impacts on the brain, nervous system, and physiological development, undermining a child's capacity to form attachments.



Photo by: Roz Shearn

Because of this, adoptees may be diagnosed with attachment disorders and adoptive parents may struggle with secondary traumatisation, impacted upon by parenting adopted children.

Evidence shows that music therapy is a therapeutic model that helps children to heal and re-attach. Adopters also need their own therapeutic support in order to be able to parent therapeutically.

Sam was 14 when he was referred to therapy because of his behavioural difficulties after his distraught adoptive parents had requested that he go back into care.

Sam worked on his own with his therapist at first, who identified the unconscious motivations, which caused him to jeopardize new relationships.

In spontaneous song, Sam found a safe place to re-live abuse and trauma experiences he had endured in his birth family, which previously were expressed in hyper-arousal and flashbacks.

Sam eventually asked if his adoptive mother could attend sessions too. Within the safety of the musical relationship, Sam could regress and on one occasion played the xylophone like a toddler. His mum was able to cuddle him and acknowledge the loss of relationship in his earliest years. She also gained insight into why Sam may act in negative ways, which destroyed all the good and love they wanted to offer him. These music therapy sessions contributed to Sam remaining with his adoptive family.



Scientific research of the brain shows that engaging in therapy can help the brain develop new neural pathways. This is known as 'neuroplasticity'. Music therapy possesses specific qualities, which are often called 'communicative musicality'. The elements of rhythm and repetition within music are similar to the ebb and flow of the rhythms in early life relationships. Adopted children miss out on these. Working in moments of free, improvisatory therapeutic relationships, music therapists can open up attachment processes and enable an understanding of children's attachment styles.

These music therapy sessions contributed to Sam remaining with his adoptive family.

Music therapy can meet and reflect awful experiences and mirror painful emotions safely. It can enable processing and assimilation of the emotional impact of traumatic experience. By musically relating with a therapist, a child might engage in a new 'dance' of attunement, where early intuitive emotional communication can be made evident. In this experience of being held in the minds and hearts of new carers, reparation may begin.

Currently provision of music therapy for adopted children and adopters is uneven across the UK and families in need of therapeutic support are not always able to access the support they need. Many more could benefit from music therapy if services were expanded.



Photo by: Key Changes Music Therapy © Alick Cotterill