

Music Therapy in the UK

The work of music therapists has a decisive impact on the lives of hundreds of people every day. The unique properties of music therapy mean it has the potential to play a vital role in sustaining the health and wellbeing of our society into the future.

Priority areas of public health, care and social wellbeing, such as maximising opportunities for vulnerable children, improving adult mental wellbeing and caring for the growing number of people affected by dementia, are all areas where music therapy has shown it has an important contribution to make.

Music therapists work across a range of health, social care and educational settings, including:

Hospitals (NHS and private)
Mainstream schools, special schools and pupil referral units
Child Development Centres
Children's Centres
Day centres
Hospices
Residential settings including care homes
Prisons and forensic settings
Acute and post acute rehabilitation centres
Specialist music therapy centres
Community spaces
In people's homes

“Music therapy can help in many clinical situations, particularly where communication is difficult due to illness, injury or disability.



Photo by: Royal Hospital for Neuro-Disability

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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

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Music therapy - using the power of music

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, which can affect us all deeply.

Playing a musical instrument, being part of a choir or in a band, listening to music - these are all ways in which we can engage in music. They help us to connect with ourselves and others. Music can be exciting or calming, joyful or poignant. It can stir memories and powerfully resonate with our feelings, helping us to express them and communicate with others.



Photo by: Lucy Delafons

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.

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 psychological 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.

Who can benefit?

Because musical participation and response does not depend on the ability to speak, music therapy is a particularly effective clinical intervention for people who have difficulty communicating verbally. For people affected by disability, illness or injury, working with music therapists can be life-changing. Children with autism can develop emotional, social and communication skills. Someone with an acquired brain injury as the result of an accident can be helped to regain their speech. An older person frightened by the isolation and confusion brought on by dementia can, through the powerfully evocative nature of music, connect with these memories again and share these with others.



Photo by: Roz Shearn

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What is a music therapist?

Music therapists are highly trained health professionals, providing treatment that can help to transform people's lives. Music therapists hold a Masters degree in music therapy and have a high level of musicianship and skill. Many, though not all, will have studied music at a university or a conservatoire. Like other arts therapists (such as art and drama therapists), qualified music therapists must be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council. This national regulator holds a Register of health and care professionals who meet their Standards of Proficiency and who are bound by their Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics.

Music therapists work in hospitals, schools, pupil referral units, day centres, hospices, care homes, therapy centres, prisons and in private practice across the UK. They often work within a multidisciplinary team alongside other professionals such as speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, doctors, paediatricians, teachers, social workers, consultants, psychologists and psychiatrists.

There are almost 800 music therapists currently registered in the UK. The title 'music therapist' is a protected title by law and only those registered with the HCPC can use it.

Registered music therapists also undertake Continuing Professional Development to ensure that they are aware of new clinical developments and research that can support and enhance their practice.

What do music therapists do?

Music therapists use music to help their clients achieve therapeutic goals through the development of the musical and therapeutic relationship. The role of the music therapist is not to teach clients how to play an instrument, and there is no pre-requisite to 'be musical' in order to engage in music therapy. Music therapists work with the natural musicality styles and genres including free improvisation to offer appropriate, sensitive and meaningful musical interaction with their clients.

Music can be a social process engaged in with others and it can also provide the sanctuary of a more private experience. Depending on the individual needs of the clients, music therapists offer individual or group music therapy sessions. For a child with autism, this could be helping them to find a way to communicate with others. For a learning disabled adult, this could be helping them to find a way in which to express their emotions in a safe and supported environment. For an older person with dementia, this could be helping them to feel valued and heard.

The work of a music therapist takes place not only in sessions but also around the sessions. In thinking about a client and their needs, music therapists will liaise with other professionals working with the client to provide a holistic, joined-up approach to their care. This can include offering assessments, attending meetings, weekly telephone calls with the client's family or carers, providing joint sessions with other professionals such as speech and language therapists, writing reports, and making recommendations for further treatment.