

Music Therapy and Neuro-disability

About Music Therapy

A psychological intervention, music therapy uses the expressive elements of music as the primary means of interaction between therapist and client. Attentive listening on the part of the therapist is combined with shared musical improvisation using voices and instruments so that people can communicate in their own musical language, whatever their level of ability.

Music therapists work with individuals and groups and the methods vary according to the setting and the theoretical approach of the music therapist.

How can music therapy help someone living with a neuro-disability?

Music is processed in many parts of the brain, which makes it an excellent tool for people living with an acquired brain injury or a neuro-degenerative condition. Individual and group programmes can be devised for assessment, neurorehabilitation, and quality of life which can be addressed by adopting the following three approaches:

Compensatory – using music to compensate for losses in conjunction with tools such as memory / communication aids

Psycho-socio-emotional – using music to enable emotional expression, engagement in social interaction and adjustment to disability

Restorative – using music to regain skill and function e.g. through Neurologic Music Therapy (NMT)

NMT is a neuro-scientific model of practice which consists of 20 standardised research-based



music therapy techniques designed to improve the lives of people with neurological disabilities. The techniques cover three overarching rehabilitation domains including:

- Sensorimotor training
- Speech & language training
- Cognitive training

Typical reasons for referral

A person with a neuro-disability may require music therapy for maintenance and improvement of skills including:

- Physical skills
- Cognition and thinking skills
- Emotional expression
- Communication skills
- Relating to others

Benefits of music therapy

Benefits for someone living with a neuro-disability include:

- Improved engagement and motivation to participate
- Decreased anxiety
- Improved upper and lower limb function
- Improved communication and mood

Case vignette

Mr. J, a man in his 50s, sustained an acquired brain injury through an infection. He was referred to music therapy to help with managing his anxiety, which was preventing him from engaging in rehabilitation.

Following four assessment sessions, it was found that Mr. J experienced a reduction in anxiety in response to listening to live guitar and vocal improvisation, paired with guided imagery. This was shown through an increase in ratings of relaxation on a scale from one to ten at the end of each session.

It was also evident that his breathing rate decreased during sessions. In addition, it was found that Mr. J was highly motivated to play instruments, which improved when a clear rhythmic cue was provided.

Through using an NMT technique, Mr. J was able to regain some strength, co-ordination and function in his weaker left hand during joint occupational therapy sessions.

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.