



Music Therapy in Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

“Behavioral health includes not only ways of promoting well-being by preventing or intervening in mental illness such as depression or anxiety, but also has as an aim preventing or intervening in substance abuse or other addictions” (Sandler, 2009).

Mental health is important to the health and well-being of people at any age, but this is especially true for children and adolescents who are still developing neurologically, emotionally, mentally, and physically. Approximately 1 in 5 children and adolescents in the United States experience mental or behavioral health challenges. There is a great need for effective, evidence-based treatment approaches to address the behavioral health needs of young people (NAMI, 2018).

FACTS ABOUT MUSIC THERAPY IN CHILD AND ADOLESCENCE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

According to the American Music Therapy Association’s (AMTA) recent Member Survey & Workforce Analysis documents (2014-2017), approximately 22% of music therapists reported working with children and/or adolescents in behavioral health settings. Of those specifically working with young people, board-certified music therapists (MT-BCs) may work in the following settings:

- ◆ Community health centers
- ◆ Inpatient and outpatient treatment centers
- ◆ Juvenile detention facilities
- ◆ Early intervention programs
- ◆ Schools (K-12)
- ◆ Private practice

Music Therapy in Child/Adolescence Behavioral Health is...

- ◆ An evidence-based way to meet the needs of children and adolescents of various ages and developmental levels.
- ◆ A multi-modal means of expression, both verbal and non-verbal.
- ◆ Inclusive of trauma-informed/wellness-based models of care.
- ◆ A source of intrinsic motivation for children and adolescents to engage in therapy.

Functions of Music Therapy

- ◆ Allow for self-reflection through the use of a variety of music-based activities.
- ◆ Foster social and communication skills by making music with others.
- ◆ Inclusive of trauma-informed and wellness-based models of care.
- ◆ Help young people identify how their thoughts and feelings influence their behaviors, choices, and identity development
- ◆ Teach young people how to self-regulate and to help them develop healthy coping skills

Childhood behavioral health conditions music therapists work with include, but are not limited to:

- Behavior disorders
- Mood and anxiety disorders
 - Attention deficit / Hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Autism spectrum disorders (ASD)
 - Trauma
- Substance use disorders



Considerations and potential contraindications for music therapy in this setting

Rather than contraindications, there are considerations that need to be taken into account regarding the use of music therapy in this setting. These considerations relate to individual trauma history, trauma triggers, lyrical content, associations that the young person has to the music, and recognizing when a young person may be using music in an unhealthy way, such as by ruminating on negative or unhealthy thoughts and feelings. Ultimately, it's important to understand why a young person connects to a particular song or type of music. This includes understanding the greater social and cultural context within which a young person may find themselves living and functioning.

MUSIC THERAPY CLINICAL PROCESS

Assessment

Assessment is a necessary part of the music therapy clinical process. Music therapists may use a variety of assessment tools along with information shared by other healthcare providers or teachers who work with the child. Music therapists also gather information from parents or caregivers, when appropriate.

When assessing the child or teen directly, music therapists also look at:

- ◆ Musical preferences
- ◆ Musical background
- ◆ Musical skills
- ◆ Individual trauma history
- ◆ Individual trauma triggers

Two music therapy-specific assessment tools in child and adolescent behavioral health includes the Healthy-Unhealthy Music Scale (HUMS) and The Beech Brook Group Therapy Assessment tool.

Treatment Planning

Music therapists may work alone or as a member of a multidisciplinary team. Factors taken into account when developing individualized goals and objectives include:

- ◆ Therapeutic need(s)
- ◆ Client's age and developmental level
- ◆ Physical and cognitive abilities, including sensory processing issues or needs
- ◆ Individual trauma triggers

A therapist's theoretical orientation also plays a role in treatment planning as music therapists may work from a humanistic, psychodynamic, behavioral, or neurological orientation.

Evaluation

Music therapists regularly assess client progress and make adjustments or modify the treatment plan as necessary. The continuation or termination of music therapy services are based on a variety of factors, including length of stay or treatment (if applicable), client preference, client progress, and funding (including third-party sources).

IMPLEMENTATION

Music therapy is offered in both individual and group formats in child and adolescent behavioral health. Interventions addressing goals around self-regulation, coping skills, emotional expression, enhanced mood, social interactions, attention and focus can include:

- Music-listening
- Lyric analysis
- Musical re-creation
- Improvisation
- Songwriting



RESEARCH AREAS

Does it work?

While there is a need for more music therapy research in child and adolescent behavioral health, the studies that have been done suggest that music therapy does have a beneficial effect on the mental and behavioral health of young people. Music therapy studies in this area have looked at the use of music therapy in individual and group formats with young people from different ethnic, family, and social backgrounds within a variety of settings, including schools, residential treatment centers, and hospitals.

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What is AMTA?

The American Music Therapy Association (AMTA) represents 10,000 music therapists, corporate members, and related associations worldwide. AMTA is committed to the advancement of education, training, professional standards, and research in support of the music therapy profession. AMTA establishes criteria for the education and clinical training of music therapists. Professional members of AMTA adhere to a Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice in the delivery of music therapy services. AMTA's mission is to advance public knowledge of music therapy benefits and increase access to quality music therapy services. Learn more at www.musictherapy.org.

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