

A Career in Music Therapy

AN ALLIED HEALTH
PROFESSION



WHAT IS IT? HOW DO I BECOME A MUSIC
THERAPIST? WILL I LIKE IT WHEN I DO?



AMERICAN
MUSIC
THERAPY
ASSOCIATION®

What is Music Therapy?

“Music therapy, to me, is music performance without the ego. It’s not about entertainment as much as its about empathizing. If you can use music to slip past the pain and gather insight into the workings of someone else’s mind, you can begin to fix a problem.”

- Jodi Picoult, *Sing You Home*

Definition and Brief History from the American Music Therapy Association

Music Therapy is the clinical & evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program. Music therapy interventions can address a variety of healthcare & educational goals:

- Promote Wellness
- Manage Stress
- Alleviate Pain
- Express Feelings
- Enhance Memory
- Improve Communication
- Promote Physical Rehabilitation and more

The idea of music as a healing influence which could affect health and behavior is as least as old as the writings of Aristotle and Plato. The 20th century discipline began after World War I and World War II when community musicians of all types, both amateur and professional, went to Veterans hospitals around the country to play for the thousands of veterans suffering both physical and emotional trauma from the wars. The patients’ notable physical and emotional responses to music led the doctors and nurses to request the hiring of musicians by the hospitals. It was soon evident that the hospital musicians needed some prior training before entering the facility and so the demand grew for a college curriculum. The first music therapy degree program in the world, founded at Michigan State University in 1944.

Music Therapy



Makes a Difference

“Music therapy helps speech, but also motor skills, memory and balance. Also emotionally uplifting.”

- Dr. Sanjay Gupta

Jimmy's Story

“Music therapy is much more complicated than playing records in nursing homes. Therapists are trained in psychology, group interaction, and the special needs of the elderly.

“Simply put... in the right hands, music can heal people..”

- Senator Harry Reid, Nevada

Diagnosed with a brain tumor at 4 months, 11-year-old Jimmy has received care from Children's Hospital his entire life. Jimmy is full of light, energy, and a love for music runs deep in his bones. He can constantly be found tapping out rhythms, singing the latest Maroon 5 jam in the hospital elevator, and strumming a guitar like the rock star he is and always will be!

Anytime Jimmy has to come to the hospital, his first request is to see the music therapists. Music therapy has provided Jimmy an outlet of expression, normalization of the hospital environment, and coping skills for procedures, tests, and treatments.

After breaking his femur, the music therapist collaborated with the physical therapy department to provide Jimmy motivation to get out

of bed and begin gait training with his walker in rhythm to “Can't stop the feeling” by Justin Timberlake. He took his first steps in healing his leg that day.

Jimmy's mother states: “Thank you for making Jimmy so happy with a gift of music that we all know runs very deep in him! Music Therapy is such an important part of Jimmy's life.”



Congressman Gabby Giffords' Story

On a daily basis, Music Therapists sing or play musical instruments, such as keyboard, guitar, or percussion instruments. They observe and document client reactions, progress, or other outcomes related to music therapy.

Ten years ago, Congresswoman Gabby Giffords was shot at close range while meeting with constituents outside a supermarket. The bullet entered near her left eye and passed through the left side of her brain before exiting at the back of her skull.

She survived and was transferred to the Institute for Rehabilitation and research, called TIRR for short, at Memorial Hermann Medical Center in Houston.

Early on, during her time at the TIRR rehabilitation center in Houston, her caregivers used what's called neurologic music therapy.

"We also used neurologic music therapy, because we are firm believers that the language center is connected to other parts of the brain that can help recover not only speech. It can also help recover cognition and movement as well. Our premise is that neurologic music therapy works, because it can help induce brain plasticity, or, very simply, the healing of the different connections between brain cells," said Gerard Francisco, the chief medical office who oversaw her care.

- Adapted from
the PBS News Hour

*see page 21 for selected videos
to accompany these stories



What Instruments Do Music Therapists Use and Play?



Music therapists must also be trained, accomplished musicians. Common instruments used are guitar, piano, percussion, voice, etc., but a music therapist must be versatile and able to adjust to changing circumstances. Many different instruments can be used within a therapeutic context. There is no one single instrument every music therapist needs to play in every session, but rather, music therapy students choose one instrument to be their major instrument of focus during their educational study and are given basic training on a variety of instruments. The choice of instrument or musical intervention used in a music therapy session is dependent upon goals and objectives, the client's preferences, and the music therapist's professional judgment.

“Why a music therapist? Won't the radio, TV or CD player accomplish the same goals? The music therapist's specialized training enables him or her to choose and adapt music experiences that match the individual's interests, needs and abilities. At every stage of Alzheimer's Disease, there is a greater chance of success when a music therapist is present to structure the experience and to offer encouragement. Music therapy can be a gift that helps to reveal hidden sources of creativity, and to restore a sense of their personhood.”

- Ann Lipe, music therapist



About Music Therapy

“Music allowed Mr. Smith to die peacefully. The two songs that he specifically requested conveyed the messages he needed to share before departing from this world. Music therapy provided him the crucial opportunity or medium to express what he felt.”

- Sharon Graham, music therapist



“I have been disabused of any notion that music therapy is simply about strumming a guitar. In the hands of a skilled music therapist, the guitar and voice are spiritual and deeply connected tools that can be extremely meaningful to a patient that is in pain, or family that is in need of healing. I was so moved by this experience, and so aware that this experience plays itself out every day in countless rooms and homes across the nation. Music therapists help provide peace to patients and families at the end of life.”

- Edo Banach, CEO, National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization

“When the music therapist would peek through the window of my daughter's hospital room door, guitar in hand, we would heave a sigh of relief and wave her in... Music has the power to transport the listener.”

- Jeffrey Franks, parent of a child with cancer



About Music Therapists

Where do Music Therapists Work?

Music therapists work with all ages, “from the cradle to the grave,” and with a large variety of needs and illnesses.

To learn more: www.musictherapy.org

Music therapists work in a variety of settings and with a wide array of people and needs. See the charts at right for a breakdown of common settings and populations.

Music Therapists use training education and research to:

- Assess client functioning levels, strengths, and areas of need in terms of perceptual, sensory, affective, communicative, musical, physical, cognitive, social, spiritual, or other abilities.
- Integrate a wide variety of behavioral, developmental, improvisational, medical, or neurological approaches into music therapy treatments.
- Communicate with clients to build rapport, acknowledge their progress, or reflect upon their reactions to musical experiences.
- Design or provide therapeutic experiences using live music to address client needs, such as using music for self-care, adjusting to life changes, improving cognitive functioning, raising self-esteem, communicating, or controlling impulses.
- Engage clients in live music-making experiences to identify client responses to different styles of music, types of musical experiences, such as improvising or listening, or elements of music, such as tempo or harmony.

Music therapists work with many populations...

Autism Spectrum	School Age Population	Alzheimer's/ Dementia	Elderly Persons	Neurological Impairment		
	Dual Diagnosed	Early Childhood	Cancer	Physical Disability		
Mental Health	Multiple Disabilities	Medical/ Surgical	Stroke	Emotionally Disabled	Head Injuries	
Behavior Disorder	Learning Disabilities	Terminally Ill	Chronic Pain	Music Therapy College Students	Abused/ Sexually Abused	
		Speech Impairment	Substance Abuse	Visually Impaired	Hearing Impaired	
Hospice/ Palliative Care	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder	Bereavement/ Grief	Parkinsons	Forensics	Non-Disabled	Rett Syn.
				Eating Disorders	Coma	Other

...and in many settings.

School (K-12)	Children's Hospital or Unit	Private Music Therapy Agency	Self-Employed/ Private Practice			
Inpatient Psychiatric Unit	University/College	General Hospital	Community Based Service			
	Adult Day Services/ Adult Day Care	Child/ Adolescent Treatment Ctr.	Oncology	Forensic Facility	Geriatric Facility - not nursing	
Hospice & Bereavement	Outpatient Clinic	Other	Early Intervention Program	Partial Hospitalization	Geriatric Psychiatric Unit	
		Children Day Care/ Pre-school	State Institution	Physical Rehabilitation	Community Mental Health Ctr.	Day Care/ Treatment Ctr.
Nursing Home/ Assisted Living	Group Home	Home Health Agency	Veteran's Affairs	Drug/ Alcohol Program	Correc-tional Facility	Support Group
				Wellness Program		

A Day in the Life...

There's a lot more to being a music therapist than performing and playing music. Every day is different and each music therapist has a different schedule, so there's no standard day, but here's one music therapist's experience to give you an idea of a "typical day."

7:00 am:
I arrive at the office and check in, catch up on email, calls, or with coworkers. I make sure I'm organized and ready with my schedule and all the instruments I'll need.

5:45 am:
There's the alarm. I start the day with a quick meditation or workout, getting ready, and centering myself to prepare for what will be a busy day.

7:30 am: My first session is in the music therapy clinic, so I'm ready when my client, a child with autism comes. We work on making eye contact and I give visual cues when to play the maraca.

6:30 pm:
Home, dinner, and decompression time. I make sure to make time for my own creative outlets and take care of myself (otherwise I can't care for others!) and get ready for the next day.

8:30 am: I head to the hospital NICU where I'll work with premature babies, but first check in with staff for updates on each baby's condition. I need to be well-informed to provide what they need.

5:00 pm:
I make sure to document what I did in each session in case I didn't have time to write down observations and progress I saw in the moment earlier. I make plans for the next session in which I'll see each client.

9:00 am: I use my voice and soft guitar to soothe the babies, mask loud equipment sounds, and help regulate their vital signs. This is careful work and not just any song or sound will do. I could hurt them if I'm not careful.

4:00 pm:
Back at my office, I have two more clients. Each session is tailored to what that person wants to work on to meet their goals, but is almost always live music-making, so I can adjust in the moment if needed.

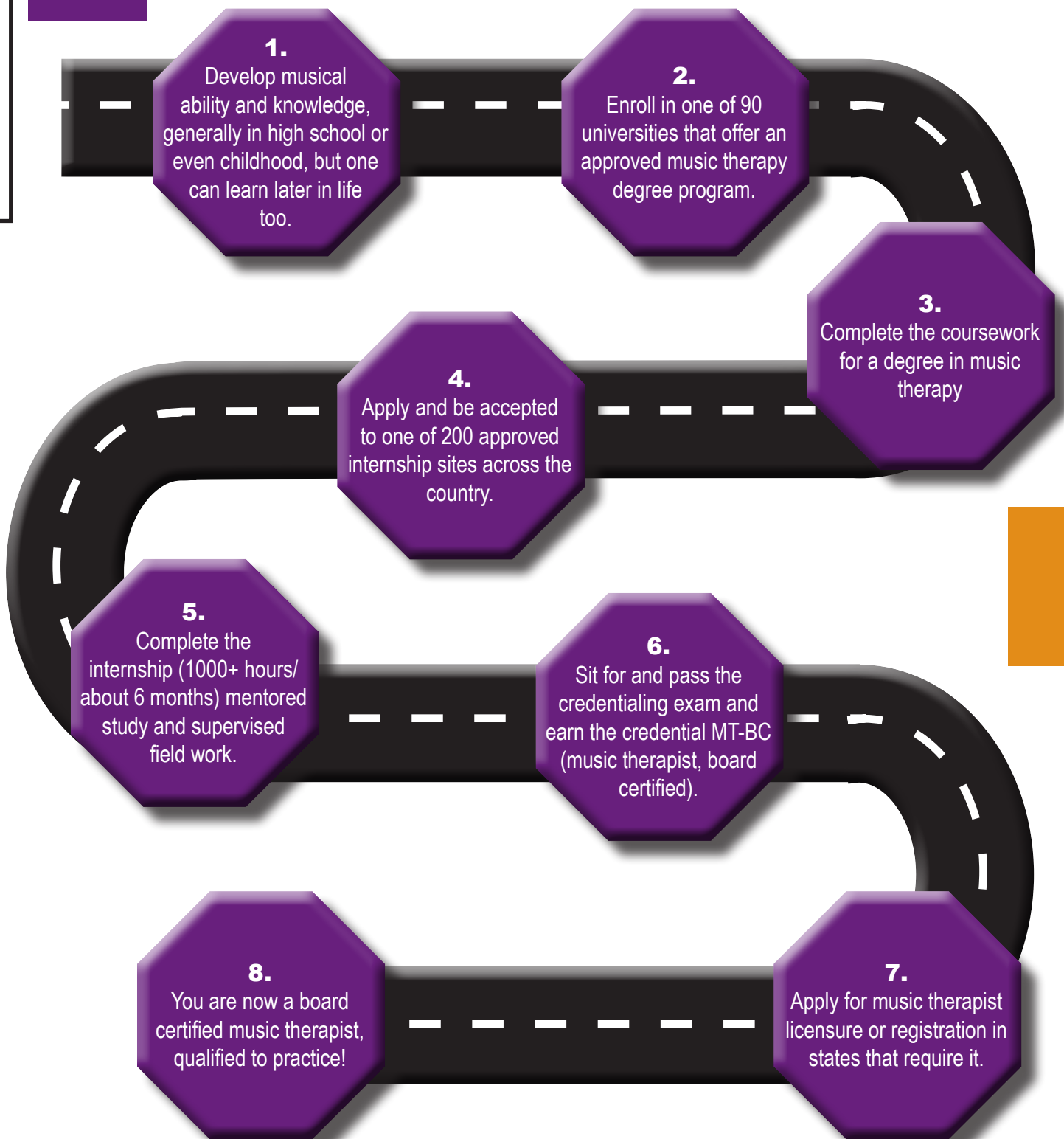
11:30 am: I grab a quick lunch and check email before leaving for the elementary school, which is where I'll spend the afternoon. If I happen to have an intern, we'll talk about sessions and upcoming plans.

1:30 pm:
The session I've planned has music interventions to support each child's goals. To finish, we might do some improvisation with lots of instruments and me accompanying on piano.

9:45 am:
Today some of the parents are here, so I spend some time helping them learn a lullaby to sing to their child and the best times and ways to do it. I also help them find ways to deal with stress with their preferred music.

1:00 pm:
As I set up the classroom, I communicate with teachers about goals and academic lessons for next week. I've already got a session plan for today, but I make sure nothing has changed or needs updates.

10 Some days are busier with more sessions, while others focus on documentation, travel, or meetings, but for the music therapist, each day contains new and interesting challenges and often, no two days are alike. If you like variation and flexibility, this might be the career for you!



Roadmap to Become a Music Therapist

Alternate Options for a Music Therapy Education

<p>A</p> <p>Bachelor's Degree in Music Therapy</p>	<p>B</p> <p>Undergraduate Equivalency in Music Therapy</p> <p><i>Open to individuals with a bachelor's degree in a related subject area</i></p>	<p>C</p> <p>Equivalency/ Masters in Music Therapy</p> <p><i>Open to individuals with a bachelor's degree in a related subject area</i></p>	<p>D</p> <p>Master's or Doctoral Degree in Music Therapy</p> <p><i>Master's open to those with Bachelor's in Music Therapy (or equivalency). Doctorate open to those with a master's in music therapy</i></p>	<p>E</p> <p>Bachelor's Equivalency in Music Therapy</p> <p>ONLINE</p> <p><i>Open only to those with a bachelor's in music</i></p>
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A Career in Music Therapy offers challenge, opportunity, and distinctive rewards to those interested in working with people of all ages. Music therapists are usually members of an interdisciplinary team supporting goals and objectives for each client within the context of the music therapy setting.

Music therapy is more than entertaining in a hospital lobby or putting headphones on a nursing home patient. Music Therapy is an allied health profession in which music is used within a therapeutic relationship to address physical, psychological, cognitive, and social needs of individuals. After assessing strengths and needs of each client, the qualified music therapist provides the indicated treatment including creating, singing, moving to, and/or listening to music. Through musical involvement in the therapeutic context, the client's abilities are strengthened and newfound skills are transferred to other areas of life. Music therapy also provides avenues for communication that can be helpful to those who find it difficult to express themselves in words

Research supports the effectiveness of music therapy in many areas such as facilitating movement and overall physical rehabilitation, motivating people to cope with treatment, providing emotional support for clients and families, and providing an outlet for expression.

The Approved Curriculum for the baccalaureate degree in music therapy includes coursework in music therapy, psychology, music, biological, social and behavioral sciences, disabling conditions and general studies. The undergraduate curriculum includes practical application of music therapy procedures and techniques learned in the classroom through required field work and internship in facilities serving individuals with special needs in the community and/or on-campus clinics. Students learn to assess the needs of their clients, develop and implement treatment plans germane to those needs, and evaluate and document clinical changes.

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Master's Degree in Music Therapy

ONLINE

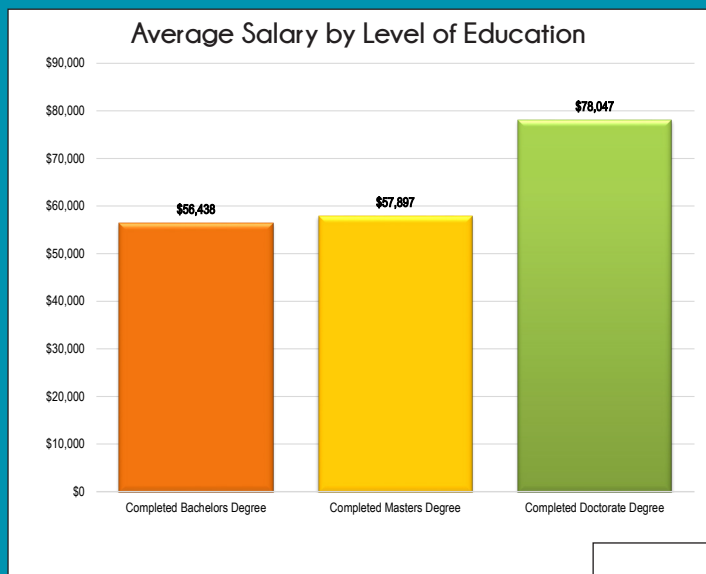
Open only to those with a bachelor's in music therapy

Options for Entering the Profession

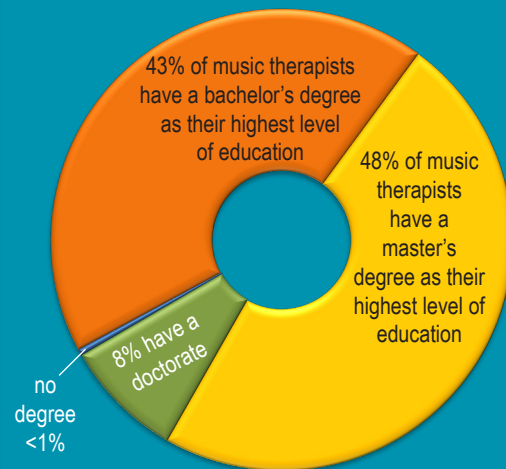
IF...	A	B	C	D	E	F
you are a high school graduate, then you may be eligible for...	✓					
you have a Bachelor's in a related subject (Education, Psychology, etc.) then you may be eligible for...	✓	✓				
you have a Bachelor's in Music, then you may be eligible for...		✓	✓		✓	
you have a Bachelor's in Music Therapy and are seeking a graduate degree, then you may be eligible for...				✓		✓
you have a wealth of music experience or strong musicianship (but no degree in music), then you are eligible for...	✓					

How Much Money Do Music Therapists Make?

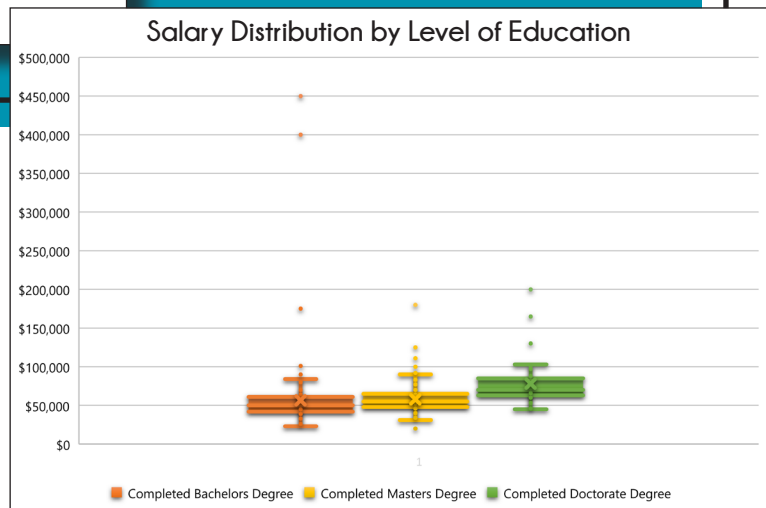
Throughout the years, the overall average Music Therapist full-time salary (purple line in the graph to the right) has stayed in keeping with increases in overall national average for full-time salaries in the United States (gold line). This overall national salary from the Bureau of Labor and Statistics includes both those who have advanced degrees including masters and doctoral degrees as well as no degree such as skilled and unskilled labor. Music Therapy, at minimum, requires a bachelors degree or equivalent. Most Music Therapists start in the profession with a bachelors degree (which includes the required internship). Music therapists can achieve competitive salaries with a bachelors degree only and in their first 10 years in the profession.



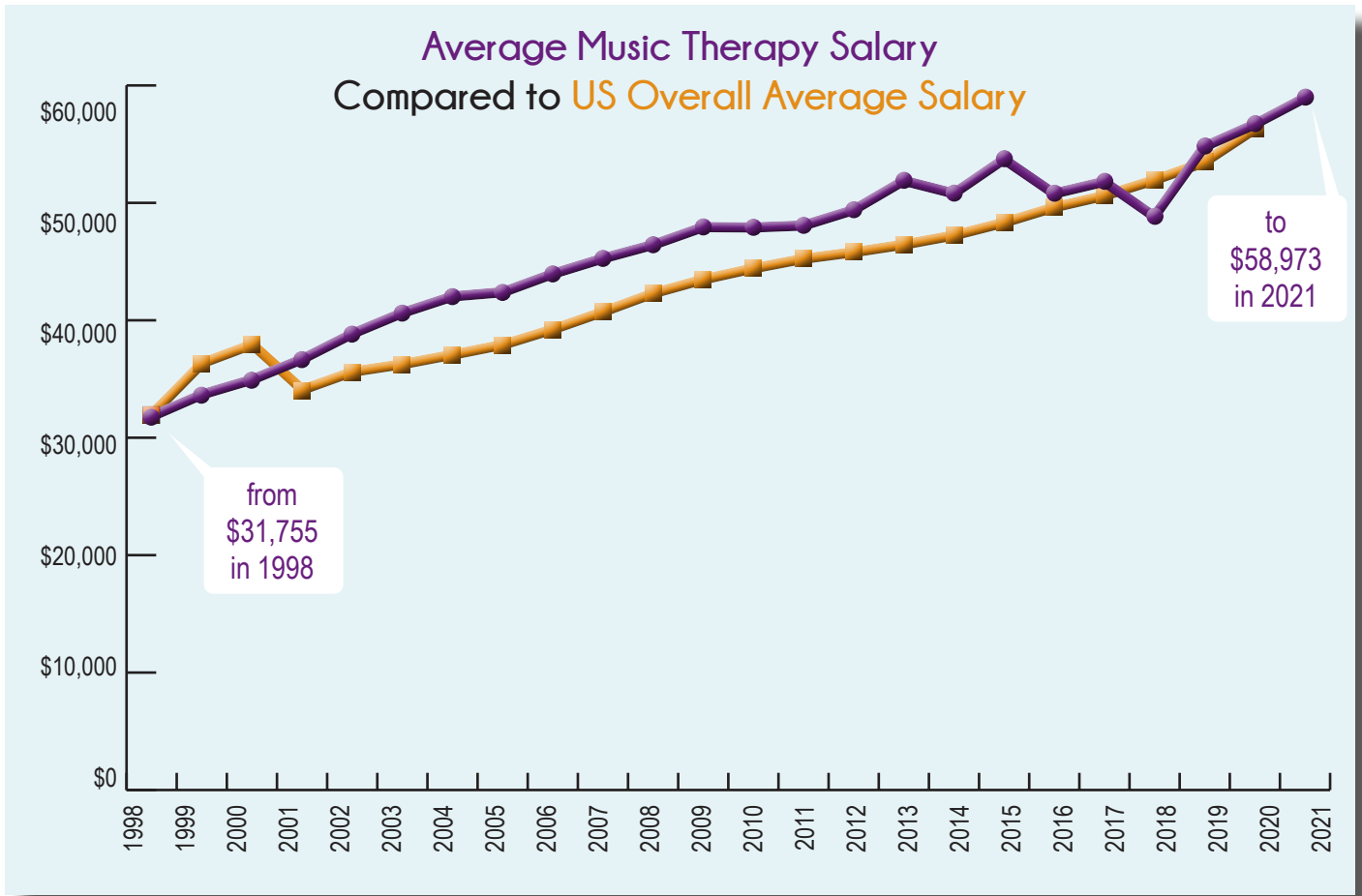
Education Levels of Music Therapists



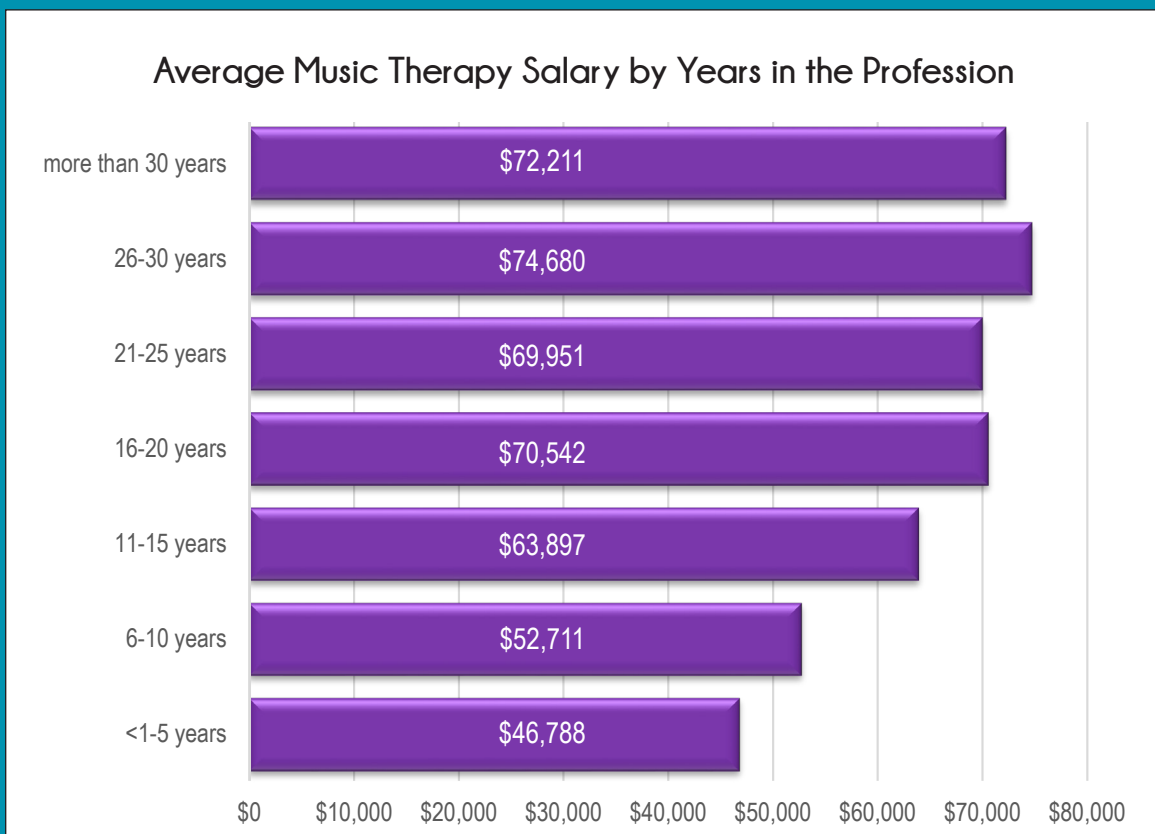
As in any business endeavor, multiple factors are considered when establishing fees and negotiating salaries for music therapy services: education; experience; location; costs; benefits; time involved in assessments, interventions, documentation, billing, treatment team meetings; etc. Clinicians consider a combination, rather than any one factor, when setting fees to determine a reasonable and customary rate that is agreeable to clients, employers, and service providers.



Music Therapy Salaries



*2021 data from Bureau of Labor and Statistics not yet available.

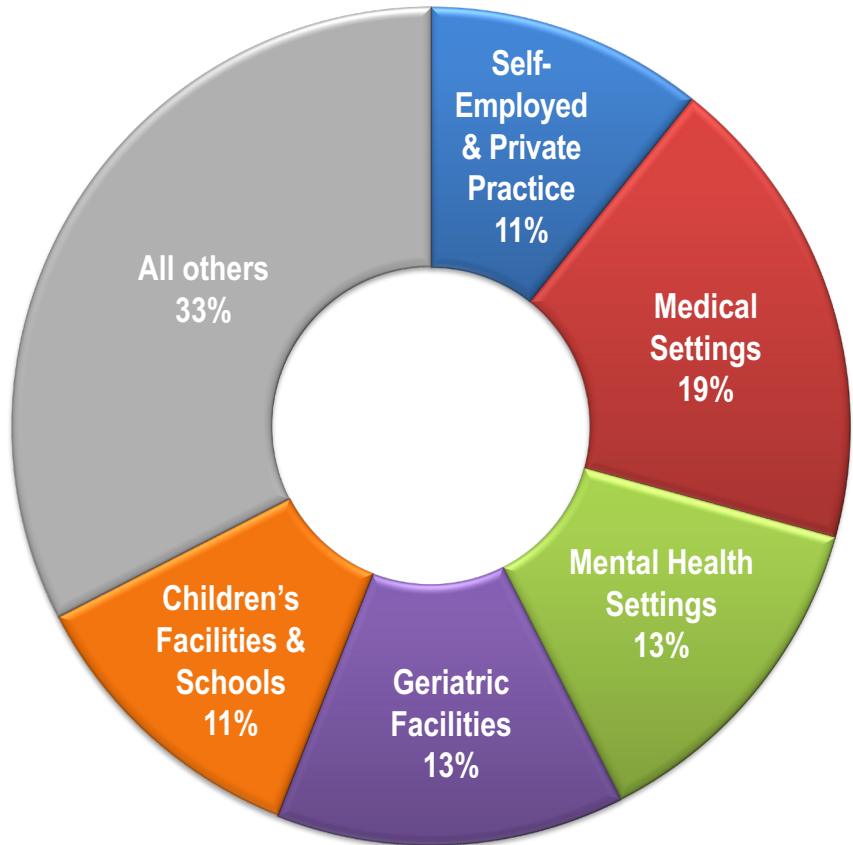


Salary Breakdowns



*for a much more comprehensive view of salary breakdowns, see the AMTA's Workforce Analysis, published each year.

Common Settings Served by Music Therapists



Though music therapists work with many different settings and populations, the five most common settings are shown in the donut chart above.

In the graph to the left, you can see where in the country music therapists make more overall (black lines/dots) and how the setting (colored lines/dots which correspond with the chart above) where a music therapist works in that area of the country might change that average salary. Regions are defined with the map below.



Regions



Personal Qualities of a Music Therapist

Music Therapists need a genuine interest in people and a desire to help others. The essence of music therapy practice involves establishing caring and professional therapeutic relationships with people of all ages and abilities. Empathy, patience, creativity, imagination, an openness to new ideas, and understanding of oneself are all important attributes.

Because music therapists are musicians as well as therapists, a background in and love of music are essential. If you are interested in music therapy, you can gain experience to prepare you through volunteer opportunities, part time or summer work in nursing homes, camps for children with disabilities, and other

settings which serve the needs of people with disabilities.

People who are suitable for this job tend to like working with forms, designs, and patterns. Self-expression, flexibility, self-direction, and independence are all important qualities as sometimes they might be the only music therapist in a facility.

Music therapists like working with, communicating with, and teaching people. They like helping or providing service to others, which is a major part of the work.



Take the Quiz

Think you might be interested in a career in music therapy? Take this quiz to see if it's something you should explore further. There are three possible answers to each question:

- **NOPE** if you tell yourself, "Sounds boring" or "I'm not sure I'd really like that."
- **MAYBE** if you tell yourself, "Not my favorite thing, but I think I would be okay with it."
- **YES!** if you tell yourself, "Yes, I'm interested in learning" or "That totally sounds like me."

Ready? Let's start

Question	Yes!	Maybe	Nope
You love music and have a background in performing, have taken lessons, or played in school music groups.			
You play more than one instrument or are interested in learning others.			
You love music but are more interested in using it to help others than in receiving accolades for performing.			
You are self-directed and able to work independently.			
You are flexible and roll with the punches when things change unexpectedly.			
You advocate for what you believe in and take the time to explain to others.			
You are interested in human behavior and performance; individual differences in ability, personality, and interests; learning and motivation; psychological research methods; and the assessment and treatment of behavioral and affective disorders.			
You are interested in principles, methods, and procedures for diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of physical and mental dysfunctions, and for guidance.			
You like to create or provide experiences to address a need, such as using music for self-care, adjusting to life changes, improving cognitive functioning, raising self-esteem, communicating, or controlling impulses.			
You are interested in observing functioning levels, strengths, and areas of need in terms of perceptual, sensory, affective, communicative, musical, physical, cognitive, social, spiritual, or other abilities.			
You like working with forms, designs and patterns.			
You like work that requires self-expression and that can be done without a clear set of rules.			
You like working with, communicating with, and teaching people.			
You like helping or providing service to others.			
You like working with ideas, and require an extensive amount of thinking.			
You like searching for facts and figuring out problems mentally.			
TOTAL POINTS			

Done? Add the points you have for each answer as follows:

- NOPE** = 0 points
- MAYBE** = 1 point
- YES!** = 2 points

Now, check your results:

- 0–16 points = You may not like this career.
- 17–32 points = You could be the right person for the job.
- 33–48 points = You are perfect for this career.

In a Nutshell...

Music Therapists plan, organize, or direct medically prescribed music therapy experiences designed to positively influence psychological or behavioral status. On a scale from “a little” to “a lot,” here’s how the categories match up:

Education: ★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

- Minimum bachelor’s degree with required internship. When complete, you are ready to sit for the credentialing exam.
- MT-BC credential (music therapist, board certified)
- Licensure or registration in states that require it.

Duration to become a music therapist: ★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

- 4-5 years, but alternate options exist.
- Curriculum includes 120 credits with core classes in music, music therapy, liberal arts, and sciences.

Difficulty to become a music therapist: ★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

- Requires training and education in music, psychology, education, and medicine.

Salary: ★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

- \$59,000 (2021 U.S. average).

Work Hours: ★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

- Generally a standard 40-hour work week, but may not always be 9-5 hours.

Job Satisfaction: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

- 74% of music therapists find their job very satisfying
- 82% say they believe what they do helps improve others’ lives and makes the world a better place.

Job Growth and Flexibility: ★ ★ ★ ★ ☆

- Ability to work in a facility, contract part time, or own your own business.

Personality Match:

- Creative, Artist, Helper,

Interest Match:

- Fine Arts, Music, Psychology, Sociology, Healthcare, Physiology, Education, Neuroscience, Education

Resources to Learn More

www.musictherapy.org

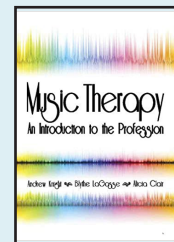
- The website of the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA), a non-profit organization. AMTA is committed to the advancement of education, training, professional standards, credentialing, and research in support of the music therapy profession. It offers education, professional development, networking, and advocacy through an annual conference, academic journals, research efforts, government relations activities, social media and volunteer activities.

Selected Stories and Videos

- Jimmy's story <https://youtu.be/ddV3gp-uF28>
- Gabby Giffords' story <https://abcnews.go.com/WNT/video/person-week-celebrating-music-therapists-29455541>
- Jeffry Franks' story <https://musictherapy-assets.azureedge.net/assets/JefriFranksstory.wav>
- Music Therapy in Larry's Life <https://youtu.be/SvOH6eoXBlw>
- Music Therapy and Medicine <https://youtu.be/LGnWyS2Y4r8>
- Mr. Gregg, the Life of the Party <https://youtu.be/ZCAJdLglucU>

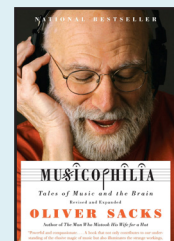
Music Therapy: An Introduction to the Profession

- This textbook from editors Andrew J. Knight, A. Blythe LaGasse, and Alicia Ann Clair is used in college level music therapy courses and designed to help future music therapists learn about the many facets of a career in music therapy.



Musicophilia

- In this non-fiction exploration, noted neurologist, Dr. Oliver Sacks, M.D. looks at the place music occupies in the brain and how it affects the human condition.



Sing You Home

- *New York Times* best selling author Jodi Picoult tackles the controversial topic of gay rights in a powerful tale about a music therapist. Picoult explores all sides of a hot-button issue and offers CD of folk songs that reflect the main character's feelings.



The Music Never Stopped

- Based on the book *Awakenings* by Dr. Oliver Sacks, M.D., this film is heartwarming tale of a father and son who find a connection through the music that embodied the generation gap of the 1960s. Stars include J.K. Simmons, Julia Ormand. An unforgettable soundtrack features The Grateful Dead, Bob Dylan, Crosby, Stills and Nash, and more.





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