



ASSOCIATION FOR
MUSIC THERAPY
(SINGAPORE)

Guidelines for the safe use of music at your facility

While many people appreciate music in their lives, the use of music in institutions should be handled with sensitivity and with care. Beneficiary needs are varied and can extend far beyond recreation and entertainment. When in doubt of whether or not to use music, what kind of music to use for specific individual needs, or how to use music, consult a music therapist. When the individual has therapeutic needs and is open to music, speak to a music therapist for follow-up.

Music Therapy is the scientific use of music interventions within a therapeutic relationship towards measurable functional, educational, rehabilitative or well-being outcomes by a credentialed professional. (AMTS, 2007)

Before you start using music, consider why you want the music to be played:

- to motivate movement during morning exercise group?
- as a targeted listening activity with clear intent, e.g. building rapport?
- to reduce boredom and increase the liveliness of the environment?

Sound principles to consider

1. The effect of music will differ for each individual, as influenced by their age, background experiences, mood, mental, physical, and spiritual states.
2. Familiar and preferred music may lead to a relaxation response.
3. Music can have strong psychological associations and may trigger negative memories.
 - e.g. for individuals not oriented to reality and/or has history of trauma, certain sounds or a repetitive pattern may cause a psychotic reaction or bring up suppressed/repressed memories.
 - A “favourite” piece of music may sometimes evoke an unexpected emotional response.
4. Music, as a sensory input, may be overstimulating or increase confused states in individuals with traumatic brain injury or other neurological disorders.
5. Overuse of music listening may reduce its positive effects.
6. The volume of music presented must be monitored to consider individuals’ hearing ability, and the existing ambient noise level.
7. Access the best quality equipment available (e.g. low audio quality of a music player may reduce enjoyment)
8. Find a quiet and conducive environment for the best possible experience.

Music Safety Guidelines:

1. Screen for hearing loss. Check if the individual has had a recent hearing test or is using hearing technology. Monitor the volume of music and how it will be played, e.g. live, free-field, or through headphones.
2. Consult with the Music Therapist to create a personalized music playlist for the individual.
3. The function of the music player (mobile media device, portable music player, or similar) needs to be easy for the individual to toggle between songs, or to stop music when desired. For music to be a bedside companion to promote sleep hygiene, headphones may be used to minimize disturbance to fellow individuals in the ward. Monitor for fatigue.
4. If individual is non-verbal and/or unable to indicate preferences, it might be appropriate to try music that was popular in their culture during their teenaged years to young adulthood (when they were 16 -30 years of age). Also, it may be appropriate to try different artists and genres, including traditional music. Observe the individual's response carefully.
5. Individuals with dementia must be monitored during music listening. They may become anxious or agitated when they no longer wish to hear music and are not able to turn the music off.
6. The individual's response to recorded music must be regularly assessed and the auditory stimuli altered when not appropriate.
7. If you observe an emotional response, ask the individual if you are needed. Offer support if individual indicates that you are needed.

Music for Self-Care

1. Choose music that is meaningful or inspiring to you for support, tapping on the powerful associations and memories that it evokes.
2. Create your own playlists for relaxation, exercise, uplifting mood, motivation, etc.
3. Participate in other creative and expressive arts activities such as drawing to music.

When to consider music therapy?

1. When individuals may be limited in how they communicate or express themselves
2. When individuals are experiencing strong emotions, or have difficulty getting along with others
3. When individuals have limited mobility, physical, or cognitive functioning and respond well to sound or music
4. When individuals do not respond well to other modalities or have low motivation

The Association for Music Therapy Singapore (AMTS) can support you in advocating for music therapy services at your facility. Contact us at musictherapy.sg@gmail.com for more information.

Co-authored by:
Ng Wang Feng, MMT, MT-BC,
Melanie Kwan, MMT, MT-BC,

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