

Psychotherapy Guidebook



MUSIC THERAPY

George L. Duerksen

Music Therapy

George L. Duerksen

e-Book 2016 International Psychotherapy Institute

From *The Psychotherapy Guidebook* edited by Richie Herink and Paul R. Herink

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Music Therapy

George L. Duerksen

DEFINITION

The music therapist uses music and musical activities to help accomplish specific therapeutic aims in diagnosis, restoration, maintenance, and improvement of mental and physical health. The music therapist, using music systematically, attempts to bring about desirable changes in behavior. The process attempts to help the individual undergoing therapy develop better understanding of self and environment and become increasingly competent in adjusting both for best health.

HISTORY

Although references to music in medical practice appear in literature from the earliest times of Western civilization, psychiatric Music Therapy received great impetus during World War II. Over two hundred U.S. psychiatric hospitals maintained active music programs in 1944 (National Music Council, 1944). University curricula designed specifically to prepare professional music therapists were initiated in the mid-1950s, and university research accelerated development of the profession's database. A group of

practicing music therapists and college teachers organized the National Association for Music Therapy (NAMT) in 1950. In 1954 the NAMT recommended a curriculum for preparation of music therapists, and soon began a registry of individuals who had completed this curriculum. In 1977 the NAMT listed fifty U.S. academic institutions accredited to prepare music therapists, and 109 clinical institutions accredited for Music Therapy internships. Professional organizations of music therapists also exist in England, on the European continent, in South America, and in Australia.

TECHNIQUE

Music Therapy techniques apply individual and cultural functions of music in a variety of contexts. These techniques require knowledge of the influence of music on behavior. Music's influences stem from 1) the individual's genetic and experiential makeup, and personality structure; 2) the cultural and social environment; and 3) the physical and acoustical environment.

Music, as well as the other arts, fills basic physiological and psychological needs for pattern, form, sensory stimulation, and sensory elaboration. Music is an artistic way of controlling and adjusting the auditory environment; a way of making that environment more suitable.

Evidence from anthropology and sociology indicates few cultures that

do not have music. Almost all cultures attribute great power to music. Although a few believe music to be evil, and attempt to repress it, most use music for important constructive functions. Music almost always is used when man attempts to transcend everyday reality — when he participates in his most sacred and most important activities. It almost always is used to identify and unify groups. In most cultures, music is used for physical stimulation and sedation.

There are few individuals for whom some sort of music does not have a strong attraction. Thus, it can provide a focus for therapeutic activity and motivate and reinforce extended participation in therapeutic relationships. Music also provides a vehicle for nonverbal communication. Musical stimuli evoke and induce feelings that cannot be obtained through other means. Musical activity provides a healthy and socially acceptable way of expressing feelings. Music promotes psychological closeness, and allows that closeness to develop without the need for words, or the feeling of threat. In most cultures, individuals will express with music the words they are hesitant to say in nonmusical contexts. Musical stimuli provide a vehicle onto which feelings may be projected, and then examined in retrospect.

Music tends to dissipate feelings of aloneness. During active music making or listening, music distracts — from pain and from attention to unpleasant parts of the environment. Musical stimuli tend to free imagination

and feeling. Music reduces aloneness by helping the individual become more unified in feeling with the group. It reduces hostility among individuals and permits (in some cases even encourages) physical contact.

Musical stimuli, and the activity required to produce them, provide structured reality. Auditory stimuli are real, and provide grounds for discussion and agreement or disagreement. Participation in musical activity objectifies behavior, and the participant's contact with musical reality becomes directly observable.

Part of the unique motivational and reinforcing value of music stems from its gratifying quality. For most individuals there are some musical stimuli that simply "sound good." In many cases, these individuals prove willing to devote much time, effort, money, and behavioral change to the pursuit of this music. Musical performance also provides gratification; successful performance allows development of self-esteem and the esteem of others.

Music provides a Gestalt (a perceptual whole) of individual and group activity. It elicits individual responses according to various psychological and physical needs; it integrates psychological, affective (emotional), cognitive, and psychomotor activity in a complex behavior characteristic of the well-functioning human being. Group musical activity coordinates these individual

patterns into a goal-oriented activity that may combine cooperation and competition, precisely organize group physical behavior, and stimulate affective and psychological unity among group members.

Musical control of behavior pervades ordinary life.. Activities signaled by musical stimuli become folkways; thus, music is nearly always directly influenced by custom. Examples of this include the physical command to “stand up” that the

“National Anthem” communicates, the affective meanings conveyed by the song “Happy Birthday to You,” and the sophisticated patterns of conversation and eating that are encouraged by the complex stimulus of proper background music, lighting, table setting, individual attire, and other artistic aspects of the formal dinner. In addition to these musical persuasions based on custom, certain structural characteristics of musical stimuli tend to elicit physical stimulation while other characteristics elicit physical sedation.

Music’s adaptability allows it to serve individuals or groups of various sizes. Musical activity is adaptable to a variety of locations, materials, and environments. The physical and psychological needs of several individuals may be met by a single musical activity, and that activity can be adapted to individual differences among the participants. Music may be used as foreground, a stimulus on which to focus attention; it may also serve as

background, where it can influence without attracting attention.

APPLICATIONS

Psychiatric Music Therapy takes place in mental hospitals, geriatrics institutions, community mental health centers, and private practice. There is also a mental health aspect to Music Therapy practice in orthopedic hospitals, general hospitals, and in special education.

Most Music Therapy applications involve processes from one or more of the following categories: experience within structure (behavior inherent in, or required by, the musical experience itself); experience in self-organization; and experience in relating to others (Sears, 1968). Therefore, applications are approached through individual or group participation in musical activity, through use of music as a reinforcer or motivator, and through specifically programmed foreground or background music for nonmusical activities.

Applications of Music Therapy include using musical situations for cognitive development, including development of self-knowledge and academic learning; using musical situations for psychomotor development, including physical coordination, flexibility, dexterity, motor control, and reduction of speech disfluency; using musical situations for social development, including reduction of antisocial behavior, stimulation of socializing behavior, and development of group esprit; using musical

situations for perceptual development, including auditory discrimination and concepts; and using musical situations for affective development, including self-esteem, the esteem of others, good feelings for others, and relevant attitude formation.