Music Therapy Encyclopedia Article

Music Therapy

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Music Therapy

Music therapy is administered by a trained music therapist to individuals of all ages who require special services because of behavioral, social, learning, or physical disabilities. The controlled use of music helps people overcome problem conditions or behaviors. Music therapy can be found in hospitals, clinics, day care facilities, schools, community mental health centers, substance abuse facilities, nursing homes, hospices, rehabilitation centers, correctional facilities, and private practices.

Music therapy sessions can be conducted in a group setting or in an individual one-on-one setting. The length of the sessions can vary, but are on average 30-60 minutes.

A qualified music therapist first assesses the strengths and needs of each client and then provides the appropriate treatment, including creating, singing, moving to, and/or listening to music. A client's abilities are strengthened and then transferred to other areas of their lives through their musical involvement in a therapeutic context. Research supports the effectiveness of music therapy in improving communication, facilitating movement and overall physical rehabilitation, providing emotional support for clients and their families, motivating people to cope with treatment, and providing an outlet for the expression of feelings. Clients can develop their auditory, visual, motor, communication, social, academic (cognitive), and self-help skills through many different types of music activities.

A music therapist must prepare and carefully plan in order for music therapy treatment programs and intervention strategies to be effective. The four basic steps for a music therapist to prepare for a new client are: (1) define the client's problem or area of need (assessment); (2) set a therapeutic goal for the client; (3) devise music activities that are related to the goal and appropriate to the client's level of functioning and capacity to respond; and (4) implement the procedure and evaluate the client's responses.

Music therapy often elicits changes in non-target behaviors that may be just as significant as those initially sought. In the music therapy literature, positive "side effects" are almost always reported, as a result of the many influences of music. Frequently observed increases which often accompany musical experiences are: motivation to try new things, pride in self, and enhanced fine motor coordination.