

How music therapy can help my child?

By Jerry O'Leary, MA, MT-BC

Is it the melody or the rhythm? What about dynamics, pitch, timbre? Which one of these musical elements help children find happiness? How can music make someone feel excited one minute and relaxed the next? It really depends on the type of music and how the music is used.

Music has been around since the beginning of mankind. Over the past 50 years, a group of dedicated professionals have applied music as a therapy to relieve stress, improve health and overcome physical difficulties and mental challenges. They are called music therapists. Educated with a delicate balance of music and psychology, these skilled artists apply and study the powerful effects of music as a therapeutic tool on our daily lives.

Music therapists employ both individual and group therapy sessions to assist people in developing socially, sharpening their focus and attention, managing pain, elevating their cognitive ability, alleviating stress, building self-esteem and essentially enjoying life.

HOW DO THEY DO IT?

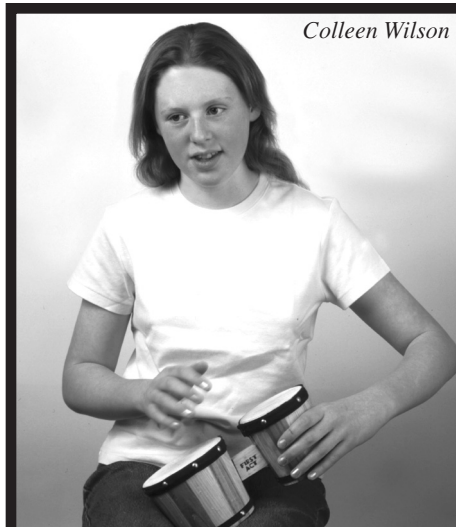
Music therapists create goals and objectives intended to answer the needs of their clients through the use of carefully constructed treatment plans. Music therapists interact with other professionals treating infants, young children, teenagers, young adults, middle-aged adults and seniors. Two particular groups that benefit tremendously from music therapy intervention are young children and seniors. In this brief article we will look at some of the benefits children receive from music therapy.

WHAT ATTRACTS THEM?

Children are fascinated by music because they can hear it, they can feel it, they can see it and they can make it. Music attracts their attention and focus. It provides children with a unique opportunity to express their creative spirits. With the professional guidance and oversight of a trained music therapist, children come to appreciate music as an innovative and expressive art. But what about children that face difficult challenges due to developmental or cognitive delays? How does music therapy impact their lives?

MUSIC THERAPY AND SPECIAL NEEDS

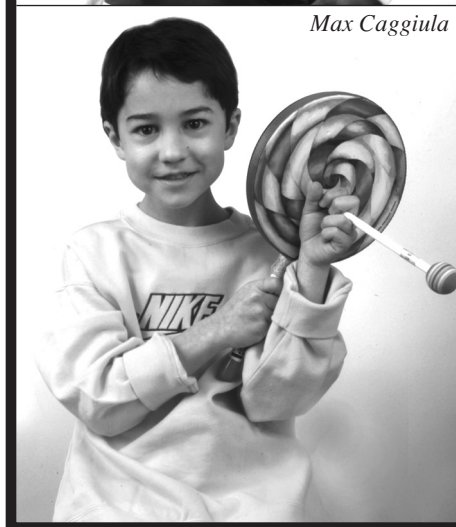
As parents and professionals have



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become more aware of the various indicators of the presence of Autistic Spectrum Disorders or ASD, an astonishing number of cases have been discovered. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the recognition and diagnosis of autism has increased by 870% over the past decade. Music therapy can provide a safe and effective means for addressing the needs of children affected by ASD.

Group music therapy sessions provide the social interaction so desperately needed by children affected by ASD. It incorporates sensory integration techniques into a supportive environment in which the children can flourish. As a practicing music therapist, I constantly hear from parents that their child loves and responds positively to music. Music provides stimulation to the entire brain while fostering growth, social development and learning. Music therapy focuses on their abilities, not their disabilities, to help them and their families overcome their personal isolation.

Using sing along songs and rhyming patterns, children can be taught routine tasks and responsibilities. Through the repetitive nature of a music therapy sessions, ASD children find a safe haven where the playing field is more level in light of their specific challenges.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Music therapy professionals continue to reach out to special needs groups in the hope of offering solutions to the obstacles these children face. We offer a fulfilling and rewarding experience through the use of music as a therapeutic tool. We search for the little victories that can successfully offer positive alternatives to special needs individuals, in conjunction with other traditional therapies. With perseverance and the power of music, we can strive to seek the answers to many of the unknown questions about ASD and the children it affects.

Jerry O'Leary, MA, MT-BC, is a board certified music therapist practicing in the Delaware County area. He is the founder of MusicWorks, a music therapy service provider in the Delaware Valley. For more information, please contact Jerry O'Leary at (610) 449-9669 or visit www.MusicWorksWonders.com.