

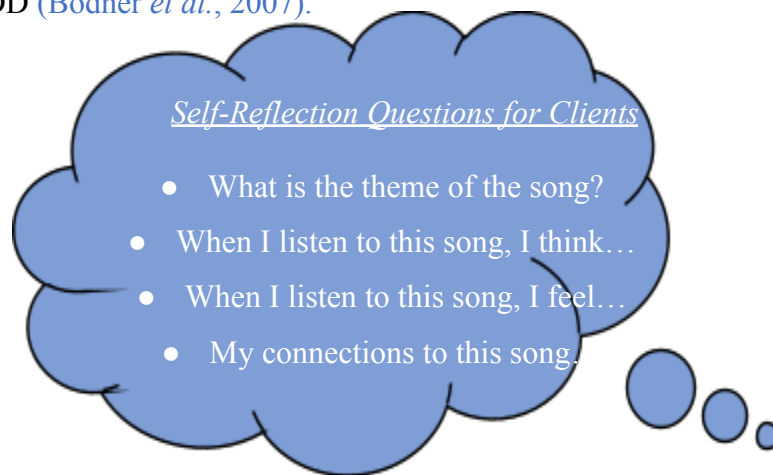
Tips for Utilizing Music Within Counseling & Therapy

Music for Social/Emotional Goals

When people are distressed, they seek comfort in music that mirrors their state (Hense, Silverman, & McFerran, 2018). Music therapy research has shown that preferred music can help achieve positive shifts in affect for adolescent psychiatric inpatients and helps the therapist understand the emotional issues of the client (Wooten, 1992). Music listening has been linked to reduced amygdala hyperactivity in patients with PTSD, as well as increased levels of oxytocin, an important peptide hormone involved with social affiliation and trust (Legge, 2015; Olf et al., 2014). Nilsson (2009) found these increases were exhibited even an hour after music listening.

Music Listening Exercises

An important strategy when using music with clients is to ask them to bring in music that is “important to them” and then for the professional to listen to it (without talking), finding out what makes the music important. Using music, specifically music the client deems “sad,” is a recommended means in psychotherapy for bypassing the verbal barrier experienced by clients, specifically with MDD (Bodner et al., 2007).



Sample Therapist Probes

- *Talk to me about this song.*
- *What was going through your mind when you heard this?*
- *What images were going through mind as you listened?*
- *Tell me about the lyrics you highlighted/underlined.*
- *What was the singer/songwriter experiencing?*
- *What is the overall mood or message of the song?*
- *In what ways is your life like this person's life?*
- *How does the song connect with what you are going through?*
- *How do you relate to that?*
- *What was, or is, going on in your life that causes you to relate?*
- *What emotions or personal experiences/memories are triggered by those lyrics?*

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Music for Cognitive & Sensory Stimulation

Music listening is a senses-based experience that can help clients focus on the present moment, providing reality orientation when needed. Music has been proven to be significantly effective in suppressing and combating the symptoms of psychosis (Silverman, 2003).

Additionally, hearing music activates the entire limbic system, bringing forth memories and emotions related to the song. Hearing music associated with our past can “evoke a strong ‘feeling of knowing,’” providing opportunity for reminiscence (Jäncke, 2008).

Sample Music Exercises

- Mindful Music Listening
 - Close your eyes and closely listen to a song. Follow the lyrics, notice the different sounds and instruments, or take in the song as a whole experience. If you are familiar with the song, did you notice anything new?
 - As another option, pick a song that has a repetitive melody line, phrase, or lyric. Count how many times you hear this recurring detail.
- Reminiscence
 - Using client-preferred music, songs can provide avenues of discussion through the lyrics. This can lead to life review, exploring the dynamics of their relationships, and can provide a way to learn more about your client as a whole.
 - When working with any population, a good frame of reference is to use music that would have been popular when the client/patient was in their 20’s. However, everyone is different, and music can transcend generations!

Music-Centered Psychoeducation

Music listening has been shown to affect neurotransmission in the brain’s reward pathways by changes in dopamine activity. Dopamine has been established as a critical neurotransmitter for learning and neuroplasticity, and Stegemöller (2014) proposes that music-induced changes in dopamine activity may help strengthen synaptic connections related to newly learned behaviors and educational content paired to the music.

Psychoeducational material paired with music lyrics that explore those specific topics provides clients a way to actively engage with the topic, identify examples, and introduce and discuss alternative coping skills and behavioral responses.

Sample Therapist Probes

- *Which lyrics represent thoughts/ideas that are rational, irrational, healthy, or unhealthy?*
- *What specific cognitive distortions can you identify in the lyrics?*
- *What types of boundaries are addressed in the lyrics? Are they healthy, rigid, or porous?*
- *What does this person do when he or she experiences difficult feelings?*
- *How does that work for him/her?*
- *How can he/she cope?*

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- *What would you tell this person?*

Music-Assisted Relaxation

Research with music assisted relaxation has been shown to lower heart rate, blood pressure, and even boost one's immune system. In one study, listening to preferred music showed significantly less anxiety than subjects not listening to music (Walworth, 2003). Relaxing music – as defined by minimal, consistent, and slower-tempo songs – has also been shown to decrease blood levels of cortisol, which is a marker for stress (Legge, 2015).

Predictable rhythms of a piece of music can change the pacing of the body's rhythms (breathing, heart rate, blood pressure). This is called entrainment. Music provides structure and

Ideas for Selecting Music for Relaxation

- Slow tempo (50-70 beats per minute)
- Steady and unaccented, few volume changes
- Minimal dissonance (harsh or clashing sounds)
- Minimal instruments or sounds
- Music without words, or words with calming messages
- No recognizable melodies
- Music and sounds that the client/patient prefers!

movement to assist traditional relaxation techniques (such as autogenic and progressive muscle relaxation) and can support imagery focused relaxation by adding a “soundtrack” to the image.

Suggested Recordings to Use with Clients/Patients:

Sawyer Small, Ed.S., LPC-MHSP(t), NCC, MT-BC

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Script & Music:

- Belleruth Naparstek
- Nielsen/Miller/Holten: "Healing Blue Sky" (ChristianNielsenMusic.com)

Harp:

- Hilary Stagg

Guitar:

- Mike Howe: "Time Stands Still"
- Will Ackerman: "Imaginary Roads"

Piano

- Piano Dreamers: A Collection
- Tranquility Collection (RealMusic.com)

Bamboo/Native American Flute

- R. Carlos Nakai: "Earth Spirit", "Canyon Trilogy"
- Richard Warner: "Quiet Heart, Spirit Wind"

Resources

Bodner, E., Iancu, J., Gilboa, A., Sarel, A., Mazor, A., & Amir, D. (2007). Finding words for emotions: The reactions of patients with major depressive disorder towards various musical excerpts. *Arts in Psychotherapy, 34*(2):142-50.

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Jäncke L. (2008). Music, memory and emotion. *Journal of biology, 7*(6), 21.
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Nilsson, U. (2009). Soothing music can increase oxytocin levels during bed rest after open-heart surgery: A randomized control trial. *Journal of Clinical Nursing, 18*(15), 2153–2161.

Oloff, M., Koch, S. B. J., Nawijn, L., Frijling, J. L., Van Zuiden, M., & Veltman, D. J. (2014). Social support, oxytocin, and PTSD. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology, 5*, 26513 (eCollection).

Silverman, M. J. (2003). The influence of music on the symptoms of psychosis: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Music Therapy, 40*(1), 27–40.

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Walworth, D. D. (2003). The effect of preferred music genre selection on experimentally induced anxiety levels. *Journal of Music Therapy, 40*(1), 2-14.

Wooten, M.A. (1992). The effects of heavy metal music on affects shifts of adolescents in an inpatient psychiatric setting. *Music Therapy Perspectives, 10*(2), 93-98.