

Music Therapy and Dementia Care

Motivate, Engage, Connect, Communicate, Create, Community

Background

Methodologies can be employed by music therapists to address problematic symptoms that accompany cognitive decline. These symptoms include: expressive-receptive aphasia; lack of, or loss of cognitive and emotional contact with our shared world, i.e., reality; inward preoccupation, “scripting”; delusions-delusional thinking; perseverative thinking and behaviors, and negative behaviors (e.g., agitation, aggression).

Goal(s)

Renewal and restoration of, e.g., receptive-expressive language abilities for the purpose of facilitating purposeful, meaningful two-way communication; the ability to receive, store, recall, and express new information. In this process, we witness the re-emergence of the self, once thought buried and lost to the ravages of dementia.

Method

Presenting preferred songs and repertoire in a music therapy session to motivate, engage, and connect with participants and their caregivers.

Approach

Provide music therapy programming based on messages and information (i.e., music, verbal, physical, etc.) that are clear, simple, succinct, and to the point. In doing so, the programming is accessible to the participant(s).

Definitions Within a Music Therapy (MT) Framework

Lesson Plan = Session Plan

Understanding the commonly seen symptoms, behaviors, and needs leads to defining the overall goals for the group, while simultaneously considering and meeting the needs and preferences of the individual members of the group. This is based on short term and longer-term assessments and regular review and updating.

Creative Aging (CA) Practiced Within a Music Therapy (MT) Framework

Creative Aging might be defined as:

Engaging older adults (55+) in participatory arts programs, with a focus on:

Mastery of New Skills

- In an MT Framework: Singing and listening to preferred songs for the purpose of restoring and renewing dormant or “rusty” skills and abilities, while simultaneously “re-learning how to learn.”

Further benefit = “Lighting up” the brain, leading to the creation of new neural pathways (i.e., neural plasticity), a more efficient cognitive state, a brighter affect, a decrease in stress, anxiety, and negative behaviors, and an increased quality of life.

Social Engagement

- In an MT Framework: Establishing community, facilitated via participation in group music; singing preferred songs; exploring recalled memories; finding common ground between the participants (and mt facilitator), leading to discussion among the group members.
- Further benefit = Increased receptive and expressive verbal skills. Importantly, this community completely and absolutely includes the consumer’s caregivers, whether the caregivers are family, professional, in-home, or in-facility aides, and the staff (e.g., CNAs, nurses, doctors, social workers) who populate a long-term care facility (e.g., nursing homes, assisted living).

Life Review

- In an MT Framework: Reminiscence, evoking memory, people, places, events, moments, via singing and playing of preferred songs, and the accompanying discussions led by a skilled music therapist.

Universal Design* (UD) Practiced Within a Music Therapy (MT) Framework

Please Note: All designs include and welcome caregivers, whether family or professional. Their input, talents, knowledge, skills, and feedback contribute to successful music therapy sessions.

Equitable Use: This design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.

- In UD:
- Provides the same means of use for all users: identical whenever possible; equivalent when not; Avoid segregating or stigmatizing any users; Provisions for privacy, security, and safety should be equally available to all users; Make the design appealing to all users.
- In an MT Framework:
- Everything the therapist does conveys a message. Thus, simplicity and clarity of message, whether musically, verbally, physically, body posture, eye gaze, affect, etc., is critical to a successful session. This approach allows the consumers to access and embrace the music and the moment. Importantly: All are welcome, all are valued, their creative input is welcome, regardless of physical, emotional, cognitive, financial status.

Flexibility in Use: The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

- In UD:
- Provides choice in methods of use; accommodate right or left-handed access and use; Facilitate the user's accuracy and precision; Provide adaptability to the user's pace.
- In an MT Framework:
- Providing choice, a sense of control, command, and agency; Welcomes all, by tailoring the message and methods to both the group and the individuals; Allows the individual to experience the music therapy session in the ways in which they can and do; Flexibility in using the various musical elements, e.g., tempo, volume, pitch, dynamics to meet the needs and expectations of the individual participants.

Simple and Intuitive Use: The design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

- In UD:
- Eliminate unnecessary complexity; Be consistent with user expectations and intuition; Accommodate a wide range of literacy and language skills; Arrange information consistent with its importance; Provide effective prompting and feedback during and after task completion.
- In an MT Framework:
- Keep it simple, communicate every message clearly and concisely; Understand the consumer, based on their individual needs and preferences; Present a wide range of programming (i.e., repertoire) in languages (e.g., Russian, Yiddish, French, Spanish, Italian) that are meaningful for the consumer(s); Plan the session so that it presents the desired messages and information; Use the whole body (and any musical instruments) to cue, prompt, and convey relevant messages.

Perceptible Information: The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.

- In UD:
- Use different modes for redundant presentation of essential information; Provide adequate contrast between essential information and its surroundings; Maximize legibility of essential information; Differentiate elements in ways that can be described (i.e., make it easy to give instructions or directions); Provide compatibility with a variety of techniques or devices used by people with sensory limitations.
- In an MT Framework: Present preferred songs with/without music accompaniment to emphasize rhythm, prosody, structure, and language use; Keep it consistently simple, clear, concise, and to the point; Utilize verbal skills in ways that are simple, efficient, and easy to understand (i.e., accessible), while modulating one's voice, timbre, and tone to meet the mood of the moment and the consumer; Use appropriate and relevant technology such as an iPad to present audio/video programming; Allow consumers to have a hands on sensory experience by, e.g., guiding their hand to safely strum the music therapist's guitar and produce their own music.

Tolerance for Error: The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

- In UD: Arrange elements to minimize hazards and errors; Most used elements, most accessible; Hazardous elements eliminated, isolated, or shielded.
- In an MT Framework: Arrange the workspace to be free of clutter, distractions, and possible hazards. This allows for space, clarity, and a relaxed setting. When appropriate, provide musical instruments that the consumer can safely use and enjoy.

Low Physical Effort: The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.

- In UD: Allow user to maintain a neutral body position; Use reasonable operating forces; Minimize repetitive actions.
- In an MT Framework: Each consumer has a unique cognitive and physical presentation. Thus, everyone engages with the music in the ways in which they can. For example, a person might sing along with the therapist, while another person, who is non-verbal, might smile, tap their hands, and present with a bright affect.

Size and Space for Approach and Use: Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.

- In UD: Provide a clear line of sight to important elements for any seated or standing user; Make reach to all components comfortable for any seated or standing user; Accommodate variations in hand or grip size; Provide adequate space for the use of assistive devices or personal assistance.
- In an MT Framework: Prepare and provide a musical space that is safe, clean, comfortable, with room for the consumer (and/or their caregiver) to, e.g., chair dance, clap, tap feet, sway, play an instrument, etc.

*Source: National Disability Authority, 2020. Accessed here: <https://universal design.ie/what-is-universal-design/the-7-principles/>