

## COLUMNS

# Music as a Modality in Pediatrics

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By Carolyn O. Cantu, MS, OTR

The beauty of music as a therapeutic modality is its adaptability and flexibility.

Classical, country, vocal, jazz, children's jingles or musical rhyme are all usable in homes, schools, hospitals, group homes, rehabilitation centers and private music therapy practices. Whether participating in a structured program in one of many therapeutic settings or listening to the wide variety of music available at home, children with special needs may develop performance skills applicable to all areas of their daily lives when specifically selected musical pieces are integrated into individual or group therapeutic intervention to meet therapeutic goals.

Music for special-needs children may be considered in a variety of therapeutic contexts; structured therapeutic settings such as music therapy under the guidance of a registered music therapist or therapeutic listening under the direction of a sensory therapist. Others include unstructured settings such as home programs designed by therapists and supervised by parents or caregivers.

We must keep in mind that there are very specific operational terms and definitions in this field, coupled with specialized training. When a pediatric practitioner gives time and effort to training, collaboration and consultation with both music therapists and occupational therapists with expertise and experience in the therapeutic use of music, children may benefit from the therapeutic selection, gradation and modification of music specifically designed to meet therapeutic goals.

### Responses to Music

Responses to musical intervention are as varied as there are special needs. For some children with psychosocial behaviors, music may offer an escape or conversely a way to express distress, confusion, even joy. For kids with physical (sensorimotor) involvement, music and song stimulate movement, facilitate neurodevelopmental organization, promote attention, develop self-calming and modulation and allow engagement in basic activities such as self-care through lyric prompts.

Music intervention also can affect those children with a wide range of developmental delays. Skills acquired through these musical experiences may well carry over to other areas of occupation in a child's daily life.

Therapeutically, music provides an activity that develops from individual to group participation, thereby promoting acceptable social behaviors. The orderliness, structure and anticipation of expected sounds develop awareness of order and structure generally, and children may transfer this cognitive awareness to other performance areas such as school, work or self-care.

Although proponents of music intervention promote its value in physical, social and cognitive realms, it is recommended that therapists investigate recent studies. Research tends to evidence both positive and negative results of effectiveness and efficacy questions. Therapists considering music as modality would benefit from an ongoing search of recent literature examining both effectiveness and non-effectiveness for specific populations. If the therapeutic objective is solely the child's participation in an activity enjoyed by the child, his/her therapy group and family members, research studies would have little to no bearing.

There are a wide range of music interventions that therapists can consider for their own use or suggest to parents and caregivers.

### Music Therapy

A clear and thorough overview of music therapy for children with special needs is presented in the Internet text "Music Therapy for Special Children," by Sandra Cornies, BMT, based out of the Cochrane Temiskaming Resource Center in Timmins, Ontario Canada ([www.nt.net/~a815/music.htm](http://www.nt.net/~a815/music.htm)). According to Ms. Cornies, music therapy "is the structured use of music experience to facilitate positive changes in human behavior. Music therapy is a goal oriented process with sessions carefully planned, executed and evaluated to address the specific needs of the child." The Web page includes additional benefits such as increasing attention span, self-esteem, listening skills, turn-taking, non-verbal communication and self-expression through singing, playing instruments, moving to music, listening to music and creating music.

"Any style may be used, depending on preferences and needs of the child," Cornies adds. If OT practitioners choose music therapy as modality, they may draw upon the extensive, intensive and specialized training of music therapists for training, collaboration and consultation, or make a referral to a certified music therapist for parents and caregivers.

### **Auditory Interventions**

Sheila Frick, OTR, and Colleen Hacker MS, OTR/L, present "Auditory Interventions: What is Right for my Child?" on their Web site (<http://www.music.nt4kids.com/auditory.html>).

This Web text presents a comprehensive overview of auditory interventions from their history to practice today. Among these interventions, Frick and Hacker include descriptions of such modalities as auditory integration training, the SAMONAS Method, integrated listening, the Listening Fitness Program, home listening programs using sound stimulation designed by Paul Modale, and Interactive Metronome therapy.

Of special interest is the review of therapeutic listening, "a highly individualized method of auditory intervention utilizing electronically altered compact discs in protocols specifically tailored by sensory integrative professionals to match client needs."

Pediatric occupational therapists and speech language pathologists who specialize in sensory interventions may collaborate their expertise and specialized training in this area, offering their young clients the most therapeutic music intervention fitting individualized needs.

### **Home Music Programs**

Pediatric practitioners are continually faced with suggesting therapeutic activities to parents that are inclusive of all members of the family. Music introduced at home may be just that activity designed for fun for the entire family. Both listening and participation develop skills such as attention, social connection, movement to rhythm, and group interaction to name a few. Imitation of siblings singing or moving to a tape, experimenting with a rhythm piece, or following along with a song's lyrics increase a child's sense of expression and participation which has potential of carrying over into other group (family) activities.

Two web pages most beneficial to parents and caregivers interested in the introduction of music to their special needs child are Tekete Ipurangi's Defining Space Using Instruments

([www.tki.org.nz/r/arts/music/specialneeds/instruments\\_e.php](http://www.tki.org.nz/r/arts/music/specialneeds/instruments_e.php)) and Sandra Cornies, Music Therapy for Special Children ([www.nt.net/~a815/music.htm](http://www.nt.net/~a815/music.htm)).

Music for the special-needs child can be one of the most rewarding modalities chosen to achieve therapeutic goals.

**Resources available at [www.advanceweb.com/OT](http://www.advanceweb.com/OT) or upon request.**

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