



American Music Therapy Association, Inc.

8455 Colesville Road, Suite 1000, Silver Spring, MD 20910 (301) 589-3300 fax (301) 589-5175
email: amta@musictherapy.org website: www.musictherapy.org

MUSIC THERAPY IN RESPONSE TO CRISIS AND TRAUMA

What Is Music Therapy?

Music Therapy is the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program. It is the structured use of music to assist people of all ages in times of need. A well-established, healthcare profession, music therapy uses carefully selected music and music interventions to address physical, emotional, cognitive and social needs. While music therapy will not cure or solve problems brought on by crisis, music therapy can help children and adults in crisis learn and use positive coping skills and express difficult feelings and emotions. Because music therapy is a powerful and non-invasive medium, unique outcomes are possible.

How Does Music Therapy Make A Difference In Response To Crisis Situations?

The work of the AMTA New York City Music Therapy Relief Project, combined with over fifty years of practice and research in music therapy, has demonstrated the impact of music therapy as 'second-wave' relief in helping to cope with events surrounding a crisis and its aftermath. The directed use of music and music therapy is highly effective in developing coping strategies, including understanding and expressing feelings of anxiety and helplessness, supporting feelings of self-confidence and security, and providing a safe or neutral environment for relaxation. Research results and clinical experiences attest to the viability of music therapy even in situations outside of traditional therapeutic settings. Music is a form of sensory stimulation, which provokes responses due to the familiarity, predictability, and feelings of security associated with it. Feedback from relief workers and caregivers indicates that music therapy sessions helped to develop a stronger sense of readiness to cope with day-to-day stressors and potential future crisis situations.

How Does Music Therapy Help Those Affected By Crisis Or Trauma?

Music therapy has been shown to have a significant effect on an individual's relaxation, respiration rate, self-reported pain reduction, and behaviorally observed and self-reported anxiety levels. A coordinated program of music and music therapy interventions in response to crisis or trauma, designed and implemented by a qualified music therapist, provides opportunities for:

- Non-verbal outlets for emotions associated with traumatic experiences
- Anxiety and stress reduction
- Positive changes in mood and emotional states
- Active and positive participant involvement in treatment
- Enhanced feelings of control, confidence, and empowerment
- Positive physiological changes, such as lower blood pressure, reduced heart rate, and relaxed muscle tension

In addition, music therapy may allow for:

- Emotional intimacy with peers, families, caregivers
- Relaxation for family groups or other community and peer groups

Meaningful time spent together in a positive, creative way

What Was The New York City Music Therapy Relief Project?

The New York City Music Therapy Relief Project was a program of the American Music Therapy Association, with generous underwriting support from The Recording Academy. The project was designed to provide direct music therapy services to children and adults in the New York metropolitan area struggling with the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001. The 8-month program encompassed 25 community programs and 33 professional music therapists, facilitating over 7,000 music therapy interventions in schools, senior centers, healthcare facilities, and other locations throughout the metropolitan area. Five music therapy programs were specifically designed for caregivers and relief workers—including doctors, nurses, counselors, social workers, teachers, guidance counselors, crisis workers, and therapists—responding to the needs of others. Eleven music therapy programs, including eight schools, served over 3,000 children and teachers. Three community-based music therapy programs in Manhattan, Westchester County, NY and Hoboken, NJ provided individual and group music therapy programs, serving adults and families affected by the attacks.

What Services Does AMTA Provide When Crises Occur?

AMTA raises funds through donations and other sources for disaster response and coordinates the delivery of programs and services for individuals affected by disaster. In response to the 2005 hurricane season, AMTA initiated several support activities for music therapy professionals and students impacted by the storms. Phase I involved welfare inquiries and contact updates for individuals dealing with relocations, job loss, transportation challenges, housing problems, and/or serious financial stressors. Technical assistance and references were provided regarding PTSD, acute stress response, psychological first aid, critical incident stress management, and training in post-disaster mental health services. Phase II hurricane relief work has aimed to provide support to members who are working with those affected by the 2005 hurricanes including provision of music therapy services to first and second responders. Specific programs have included caregiver workshops and music therapy services and consultation with social workers and teachers serving young children in daycare programs. In addition, the Gulf Coast Youth orchestra participated in a youth and parent hurricane recovery music therapy experience and recording session of original music.

What Do Music Therapists Do?

Music therapists use music and music therapy interventions, both instrumental and vocal, designed to facilitate changes that are non-musical in nature. Music therapy programs are based on individual assessment, treatment planning, and ongoing program evaluation. The professionally trained music therapist utilizes individualized music experiences and interventions to assess, treat, and evaluate patients. Frequently functioning as members of an interdisciplinary team, music therapists implement programs with groups or individuals addressing a vast continuum of outcomes, including reduction of anxiety, stress management, communication, and emotional self-expression.

Who Is Qualified As A Music Therapist?

Graduates of colleges or universities from more than 70 approved music therapy programs are eligible to take a national examination administered by the Certification Board for Music Therapists (CBMT), an independent, non-profit certifying agency fully accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies. After successful completion of the CBMT examination, graduates are issued the credential necessary for professional practice, Music Therapist-Board Certified (MT-BC). In addition to the MT-BC credential, other recognized professional designations are Registered Music Therapists (RMT), Certified Music Therapists (CMT), and Advanced Certified Music Therapist (ACMT) listed with the National Music Therapy Registry. Any individual who does not have proper training and credentials is not qualified to provide music therapy services.

Where Do Music Therapists Work?

Music therapists offer services in medical hospitals, skilled and intermediate care facilities, rehabilitation hospitals, adult day care centers, senior centers, hospices, psychiatric treatment centers, drug and alcohol programs, schools and other facilities. In crisis situations, it is important for music therapy services to be available and accessible to the community in need. Music therapists mobilize to provide services locally, working in schools, hospitals, community centers, corporate offices, senior centers, universities and colleges, etc. Some music therapists are self-employed and work as independent contractors, while others may be full or part time employees.

What Research And Resources Are Available To Substantiate And Support Music Therapy?

Through the Journal of Music Therapy, Music Therapy Perspectives, and other resources, the American Music Therapy Association has promoted research exploring the benefits of music therapy with children and adults. The CD-ROM "Music Therapy Research - Quantitative and Qualitative Foundations" offers a complete collection of research published by the music therapy associations in the United States from 1964 through 2003.

Why Music Therapy?

"Music therapy enables people to sometimes put words together in ways that are hard for them to do otherwise. ...The music seems to get through to the patient and in many ways it enables [the patient] to get through to us which [may be] very hard to do with any other modality."

- Susan Shurin, MD

"...music therapy (particularly improvisation and guided imagery and music) can be most helpful in identifying with the feelings as a pre-cursor to verbal dialogue. One who is trained to elicit, reflect, and interpret non-verbal responses can be most helpful in these beginning stages of recovery."

- Music Therapist from the New York City Music Therapy Relief Project

"Families reported having reclaimed a sense of joy through participation in a music activity with one another."

- Music Therapy Institute, Westchester, NY

"Music gives all a chance to express ourselves, to share our souls, to share our feelings with each other."

- Participant, Nordoff-Robbins Center for Music Therapy, New York University

“The training reinforced and reminded me of how much music plays such an important part in my life and how it can be used as a therapeutic tool whenever the need arises. I valued the times I played the drums and so much energy was released. I felt a sense of calm afterwards... Music was a way for us to bring the emotions or energy to the forefront, which could then possibly release some of the residue, discharging the energy from the body.”

- New York City Relief Worker

“During the Caring for the Caregiver sessions I felt some of that tension melt away, evidence of the magical way music can seep into the nooks and crannies of our souls and psyches, not to mention that raw collective nervous system we have all been carrying with us. By connecting with a community of caregivers seeking out healing for themselves through music and expression, I was able to move forward, inward and outward simultaneously in the way I needed to. I became better equipped to care.”

- New York City Nurse

“...[in music therapy] We learned not to keep in your feelings or else your stomach will twist in knots and you will get very hurt...”

- New York City Fourth Grade Student

“Thank you for helping me to understand everything... You taught me to cool down when I was mad. You taught me to solve my problems. You were there when I needed help. The music that played soothed my pain. When I was feeling sad, you were always there to comfort me. I could talk to you about anything.”

- New York City Fourth Grade Student

What is AMTA?

The American Music Therapy Association (AMTA) represents over 5,000 music therapists, corporate members, and related associations worldwide. AMTA's roots date back to organizations founded in 1950 and 1971. Those two organizations merged in 1998 to ensure the progressive development of the therapeutic use of music in rehabilitation, special education, and medical and community settings. AMTA is committed to the advancement of education, training, professional standards, and research in support of the music therapy profession. The mission of the organization is to advance public knowledge of music therapy benefits and increase access to quality music therapy services. Currently, AMTA establishes criteria for the education and clinical training of music therapists. Members of AMTA adhere to a Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice in their delivery of music therapy services.

How Can You Find A Music Therapist or Get More Information?

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