

Music Therapy and Mental Health Issues

About Music Therapy

A psychological intervention, music therapy uses the expressive elements of music as the primary means of interaction between therapist and client. Attentive listening on the part of the therapist is combined with shared musical improvisation using voices and instruments so that people can communicate in their own musical language, whatever their level of ability.

Music therapists work with individuals and groups and the methods vary according to the setting and the theoretical approach of the music therapist.

How can music therapy help people with mental health difficulties?

Music therapy is an effective alternative to more standard forms of counselling and psychotherapy for clients who find it difficult to connect with, express or differentiate between their emotions.

Music therapy can be particularly helpful for those who find expressing themselves verbally difficult for whatever reason.

Music therapists differ in their approach, but what is important is that the client feels comfortable working with the therapist concerned.

Typical reasons for referral

People are referred to music therapy with a wide variety of mental health problems,



including: stress, anxiety, depression, psychoses and eating disorders. Music therapists work with people who have suffered past or more current traumas or who have issues in their lives that are causing them distress.

What happens in a session?

In an individual music therapy session, the client is encouraged to experiment with sounds, choosing from a wide selection of musical instruments. The client does not need to have had any previous experience with using musical instruments.

Everyone's music is different - some people choose to play one note on one instrument or others may want to play lots of notes and lots of instruments. One person's music may be very quiet whilst another's may be incredibly loud. The important thing is that the sounds the client makes

feels right to them. The therapist improvises with the client in a way that supports, encourages and contains the client's music. The session may include a large or small amount of talking, according to an individual's needs. Group work enables people to make music and work together co-operatively.

How can working in this way be of help?

Improvising together allows the client to touch, explore and express feelings and images that may be too frightening to verbalise. It helps develop an honest, trusting relationship with the therapist which may have been very difficult for the client on a purely verbal basis. It also enables clients to access and express the creative part of themselves that is often flattened by feelings of low self-worth or depression.

Finding a music therapist

To find a music therapist in your area you can contact our office or search on our website at www.bamt.org

Music therapists are trained at postgraduate MA level and are registered with the Health Professions Council.

The British Association for Music Therapy (BAMT) was established in April 2011. It provides information and promotes high standards of practice, training and research to further the advance of music therapy.