

Exploring the Many Benefits of Music Therapy for People with Sensory Needs

How music therapy can profoundly affect the intellectual, emotional, and behavioral development of individuals with sensory sensitivity



[ASD](#)

For most individuals, music provides a form of escape. When you lose yourself in the music, studies have shown that it can actually promote relatedness, relaxation, learning, and self-expression amongst numerous other positive benefits. And that is great news! Who doesn't want to take time to enjoy music throughout their day?

Unsurprisingly, music, specifically music therapy, has also been proven to have profound positive impacts in working with people with sensory needs. Throughout the nation, more and more people are turning to music therapy to help themselves and their children with sensory processing differences, and the results are powerful. Below, we will explain what it means to be sensory sensitive, what music therapy entails, how to decide if you would be a good candidate for music therapy, and lay out all of the benefits music therapy can have for those with sensory needs! At the end, we provide a resource to find music therapists in your area.

Understanding Sensory Sensitivity



[Sensory Sensitivity](#)

Sensory sensitivity is categorized by a disruption in the organization of sensory input that affects appropriate responses to the demands of the environment. Those with [Sensory Processing Disorder](#), Autism, ADHD, Anxiety, and numerous other conditions may experience sensory sensitivity, which can drastically impact emotional and intellectual development as well as behavioral learning. According to the book [Early Childhood Music Therapy And Autism Spectrum Disorders](#), researchers have categorized sensory processing into three primary patterns:

1. **Hypo-responsiveness** (under responsiveness)
2. **Hyper-responsiveness** (overly responsive)
3. **Sensory seeking behaviors**

Most children with sensory needs are some combination of both hyper-responsive patterns and other hypo-responsive patterns. The sensory systems include: auditory, visual, olfactory, tactile, gustatory, vestibular, and proprioceptive.

What is Music Therapy?



[Person with guitar](#)

[Music Therapy](#) is the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic setting. The patient forms a relationship with an accredited professional who has completed an approved music therapy program, and together they work to help with the patient's sensory needs.

Music therapy is a well established practice that utilizes music to address behavioral, social, psychological, communicative, physical, sensorimotor, and/or cognitive functioning. It may include the use of behavioral, biomedical, developmental, educational, humanistic, adaptive music instruction, and/or other models, and has been shown to enhance one's quality of life as well as numerous types of relationships in a patient's life.

Who Is A Good Candidate for Music Therapy?



[Brothers with Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)

The good news is that music therapy is a very versatile type of treatment, and has been shown to help people with a wide range of sensory needs. For instance, it is particularly suitable for individuals with a [sensory processing disorder](#) because music and the sensory system are both linked to the nervous system, which suggests that there is a need to better understand the relationship between the sensory system and music.

For people with conditions such as **Autism** and **Asperger's**, music therapy has been shown to improve sensory integration and encourage positive behavioral changes. It may help individuals develop responses to their environment by helping to regulate the brain processes and improve how they organize their thoughts.

In addition, music therapy can also be used to treat patients with **dementia** and other forms of **Alzheimer's Disease**, as a study reported in [Dementia UK](#) that music accesses different parts of the brain than language, and thereby enables therapists to better calm those who struggle with speech differences.

Before looking into music therapy, it is important for individuals or parents to consider how their child responds to each of the [following musical elements](#), so that you may choose the appropriate music therapy group:

- **Intensity** – Do you prefer loud or soft sounds?
- **Frequency** – Do you want the same sound over and over again or new sounds?
- **Duration** – How long do you enjoy the sensation?
- **Rhythm** – Do you enjoy rhythmic predictability or more variation and unpredictability?
- **Novelty** – Do you respond aversively to change and newness?
- **Complexity** – Do you enjoy multiple sensations within music (i.e. orchestra) or minimal instruments (i.e. only voice or guitar)?

Be sure to record you or your child's response to the aforementioned questions about musical elements, so that you may share your observations with your music therapist and they can tailor the music therapy to best suit you or your child's needs.

The Many Benefits of Music Therapy



[Music therapist and patient](#)

The profound ability of music to influence emotions and moods is universally acknowledged, and music therapists have long known that engaging the brain through music is pivotal in obtaining remarkable growth in those with unique sensory needs.

Below, we outline many of the positive aspects of music therapy, and the tremendous benefits it can have on your life or the life of your kid!

Music Therapy is Enjoyable

Unlike other forms of treatment for sensory disorders and similar conditions, sensory music therapy is not invasive and is often very enjoyable for the patient. Most people enjoy some type of music, and thus using music in individual therapy sessions helps individuals with specific sensory needs to relax and communicate more effectively.

The Benefits of Music Therapy are Measurable

A number of research and case studies found in various [medical and scientific journals](#) exemplify statistically the positive effects that music therapy can have on patients with sensory sensitivities. For instance, patients have been shown to improve on everything from social skills to better focus. Studies have also shown that therapeutic listening programs improved the sensory profiles of children with sensory needs, increasing the plasticity of their sensory system, motivation, self-confidence, communication and identity formation.

Furthermore, the patterns inherent in music therapy can help individuals with autism regulate their emotions, sensory input, and selective attention skills. A [summary](#) that reviewed various studies into the effectiveness of music therapy also found that it was associated with improved “global and social functioning in schizophrenia and/or serious mental disorders, gait and related activities in Parkinson’s disease, depressive symptoms, and sleep quality.”

Music Therapy Can Be Incorporated With Other Sensory Activities

Music therapy is amenable to incorporation with various other types of sensory activities, including visual and auditory effects. Depending upon the specific needs of the patient, some music therapists may immerse individuals within a multisensory environment. Noises such as waves or a crackling fire, paired with related images on a sensory projector work to soothe and de-escalate individuals while encouraging communication. The results of multisensory therapy point to two types of associations in patients: between music and the sensory system, and between sensation-seeking and features of music.

Music Therapy May Strengthen Bonds in Relationships

One of the most powerful aspects of music therapy is that it can be used to communicate and engage with individuals in a way that words cannot. Because music therapy helps patients to [strengthen their individual identities](#) by: (1) offering a sense of empowerment, independence and achievement; and (2) allowing access to alternative identities through associations with wider cultural contexts, patients become more secure within themselves and are then open to form stronger intrapersonal relationships. Family members, therapists and friends may bond with the individual

through a shared interest in music, and the ability of music therapy to improve behaviors can help the individual to interact and form strong relationships.

This is a blog for a music therapy company. We do not want them to go online

Find a Music Therapist:

The [American Music Therapy Organization](#) is a resource and organization dedicated to professional music therapists with the mission to advance public awareness of the benefits of music therapy and increase access to quality music therapy services. They offer an online directory of music therapists, which you can access by clicking [HERE](#) or copying and pasting the following link:

<https://netforum.avectra.com/eweb/DynamicPage.aspx?Site=amta2&WebCode=IndSearch>