



American Music Therapy Association, Inc.

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MUSIC THERAPY FOR PERSONS IN CORRECTIONAL AND FORENSIC SETTINGS

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 a well-established healthcare profession in which various music-based methods are used to address the specific needs of individuals with illnesses, disabilities and special needs. The music therapist assesses the needs of the clients, develops and implements a treatment plan based on assessment findings, and evaluates the treatment process. Because music is a powerful and non-threatening medium, unique outcomes are possible with a variety of populations

How Does Music Therapy Make A Difference for Persons in Correctional and Forensic Settings?

In correctional and forensic settings, clients may include adolescents and adults who are incarcerated, individuals adjudicated for treatment in secure mental health facilities, persons living in half-way houses, group homes, and intensive sanctions programs, and individuals on probation and parole who live independently in the community. Research in the field and clinical anecdotes attest to the validity and efficacy of music therapy with these individuals, many of whom have physical, psychological, emotional, social, behavioral, cognitive, communicative, and/or spiritual needs and challenges.

What Do Music Therapists Do?

Music therapists use four basic methods to help clients achieve predetermined treatment goals and objectives:

- *Receptive* methods involve listening and responding to live or recorded music. For example, the use of music as a rhythmic support and motivation for exercise, movement, and dance may be helpful for individuals living in confined spaces. Listening to and discussing popular songs provide opportunities for clients to express themselves in safe and socially accepted ways and to examine personal issues. Music-assisted relaxation can aid in the reduction of anxiety.
- *Improvisation* revolves around the spontaneous creation of music using media such as voice, instruments, and body sounds. Engagement in this form of active music-making allows for creative expression, the release of energy, the development of personal insight, and a redirection of difficult or counterproductive emotions in individual and/or group settings.

- *Recreative* experiences focus on singing and playing precomposed music. In corrections and forensic settings, this method allows individuals to develop skills that lead to a sense of mastery and increased confidence. Experiences in ensembles such as choruses, popular music combos, and chime choirs provide opportunities for meaningful social interaction and can contribute to the productive use of leisure time.
- *Composition* methods involve creating vocal and instrumental pieces. Songwriting can be an effective means of expression and a source of self-satisfaction in individual and group treatment settings, as well as a vehicle for learning foundational music concepts. This generative process also encourages thoughtful work over time, ideally leading to completion of a musical product which may be preserved in tangible form (songsheet, audiotape, etc.).

As with all populations, the trusting and respectful relationship that develops between the therapist and the forensic client serves as the basis for therapeutic change through shared music experience. When individualized experiences are designed by the music therapist to support and challenge the client's unique abilities and needs, desired results may be immediate and readily apparent.

Clients need not have prior music training or experience in order to benefit from music therapy treatment.

Specific goals in correctional and forensic settings may include the following:

- Increase self-awareness
- Improve reality testing and problem-solving skills
- Improve respect for others, including peers and authority figures
- Develop healthy verbal and non-verbal communication skills
- Decrease impulsivity through practical techniques
- Accept responsibility for thoughts and feelings
- Learn relaxation and coping skills
- Improve physical conditioning
- Develop effective leisure skills
- Explore feelings and make positive changes in mood states

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 with Correctional and Forensic Clients?

Music therapists offer services in a variety of correctional and forensic settings, including: maximum security hospitals, jails, prisons, detention centers, group homes, sanctions programs, and community-based probation and parole programs. Music therapists may also encounter forensic clients in homeless shelters, missions, refuge houses, substance abuse treatment centers, volunteer training programs, churches, aftercare programs, mental health facilities, medical hospitals, schools, skilled nursing facilities, rehabilitation centers, and private practice. Some professionals in these settings acquire advanced training in psychology or forensic medicine.

Is There Research to Support Music Therapy?

A vast amount of clinical- and research-based information exists to support the use of music therapy with forensic populations. Both quantitative and qualitative research studies have been published in forensic journals, as well as in peer-reviewed journals within the creative arts therapies, including the *Journal of Music Therapy*, *Music Therapy*, *Music Therapy Perspectives*, *Arts in Psychotherapy*, and the *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy*.

Why Music Therapy?

Mike Morgan, Chaplain at Fremont Correctional Facility in Canon City, Colorado comments:

“The use of music therapy in corrections facilitates a connection with people from every socio-economic level and race. By entering their world through music, principles and values can be communicated so that the people who are incarcerated can live, love, learn, and leave a legacy. Music therapy in corrections is not an undocumented fad. It works and creates positive change in a very negative environment.”

Joy Prelznik, Asst. Deputy Warden, Ionia Temporary Correctional Facility in Michigan states:

“Music Therapy is very helpful in a prison setting with psychiatric patients. These patients often have had no life experiences with music and positive emotions or with bodily movement related to music. The patients find themselves responding to music therapy when they cannot cooperate with conventional therapy.”

James Neville, Chief of Rehabilitation at Atascadero State Hospital in California comments:

“Here at Atascadero, music therapy provides an opportunity for our patients to learn cognitive, social, and functional skills using a non-threatening and an expressive modality.”

Susan Davis, Deputy Warden at Scott Correctional Facility in Plymouth, Michigan writes:

“Music therapy is an integral part of our residential treatment program. Many of the women articulate their problems and needs through songs and channel their physical energy through instrumental music lessons and performances. The unit is a positive and more peaceful environment because of music therapy.”

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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