



## ***Music Therapy with Persons with Special Needs***

### **What is Music Therapy?**

Music therapy is a well-established allied health profession similar to occupational and physical therapy. It consists of using music therapeutically to address behavioral, social, psychological, communicative, physical, sensory-motor, and/or cognitive functioning. For individuals with special needs, music therapists utilize music as: 1) an educational related service to promote learning and skill acquisition, 2) as a tool for improving communication skills, 3) as a strategy for improving social and emotional behavior, 4) to improve motor skills, 5) as a leisure activity and other individualized applications. ***Because music therapy is a powerful and non-threatening medium, unique outcomes are possible.***

### **Why Music Therapy for Children with Special Needs?**

- Music therapy involvement can stimulate attention and increase motivation to participate more fully in other aspects of the educational setting. It is highly motivating and engaging and may be used as a natural “reinforcer” for desired responses.
- Music is considered a “universal language” which provides bridges in a non-threatening setting between people and/or between individuals and their environment, facilitating relationships, learning, self-expression, and communication.
- Music therapy interventions apply the inherent order of music to set behavioral expectations, provide reassurance, and maintain structure for children with special needs.
- Music therapy can adapt strategies to encourage a child’s participation in the least restrictive environment.
- Music therapy experiences can support pre-academic and academic tasks.
- Music provides a predictable time-oriented and reality-oriented structure while offering opportunities for participation at one’s own level of functioning and ability.
- Music therapy can help a child manage pain and stressful situations.
- Music therapy may address several needs simultaneously in a positive and exciting medium: it may provide pleasurable learning that promotes success.

### **What Do Music Therapists Do when working with Special Needs Children?**

Music therapists involve children in singing, listening, moving, playing, and in creative activities that may help them become better learners. Music therapists work on developing a child’s self-awareness, confidence, readiness skills, coping skills, and social behavior and may also provide pain management techniques. They explore which styles of music, techniques and instruments are most effective or motivating for each individual child and expand upon the child’s natural, spontaneous play in order to address areas of need.



Often working as a part of an interdisciplinary team, music therapists may coordinate programming with other professionals such as early intervention specialists, medical personnel, child-life specialists, psychologists, occupational and physical therapists, speech/language pathologists, adapted physical education specialists and art and dance/movement therapists. Music therapists may also furnish families with suggestions and resources for using music with the child at home.

Music therapists develop a rapport with children. They observe the child's behavior and interactions and assess communication, cognitive/academic, motor, social/emotional, and musical skills. After developing realistic goals and target objectives, music therapists plan and implement systematic music therapy treatment programs with procedures and techniques designed specifically for the individual child. Music therapists document responses, conduct ongoing evaluations of progress, and often make recommendations to other team members and the family regarding progress. Music therapists will also often make recommendations to team members and the family regarding ways to include successful music therapy techniques in other aspects of the child's life.

### **How Does Music Therapy help Families?**

Music therapy can provide enjoyable, yet purposeful activities & resources for families to share with their special needs children. Families can learn to use music through meaningful interactions & nurturing experiences. Music therapy may serve as a positive outlet for interaction, providing fun activities that can include parents, siblings, & extended family. Often music therapy allows a family to see a child in a new light as the child's strengths are manifested in the music therapy environment.

Music therapy enhances the quality of life. It involves relationships between a qualified therapist and child; between one child and another; between child and family; and between the music and the participants. These relationships are structured and adapted through the elements of music to create a positive environment and set the occasion for successful growth.

### **Special Needs Diagnoses that Music Therapists Work With**

- Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Learning Disabilities
- Developmental Disabilities
- Mental Retardation
- Williams Syndrome
- Emotional/Behavioral Disorders
- Downs Syndrome
- Cerebral Palsy
- Muscular Dystrophy
- Spina Bifida
- Sensory Disorder
- Neurological Disorders



### **Can a Music Therapist work at a School?**

Music therapists may work in public school systems, where, in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), music therapy is recognized as a related service that provides a “significant motivation and/or assist” in the achievement of Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals and objectives.

In June 2000, the U.S. Department of Education issued a letter of policy clarification related to the use of music therapy. The letter reiterated the Department’s continuing policy that “[i]f the IEP team determines that music therapy is an appropriate related service for a child, the team’s determination must be reflected in the child’s IEP, and the service must be provided at public expense . . .” [This interpretation stands with the 2006 regulations.]

#### ***An occupational therapist writes:***

*“I love having a music therapist on our interdisciplinary team. When we co-lead sessions, I notice that the children are much more motivated to push themselves when working with such things as fine motor control and range of motion activities.”*

#### ***The mother of a 6 1/2-year-old child diagnosed with Down Syndrome states:***

*“Music therapy has helped my son to learn turn-taking, sharing, listening skills and some colors, animals, parts of the body and clothes.” (Child participated in group music therapy for 2 years in preschool and then in individual music therapy for 1 year in kindergarten.)*

### **What does Peak View Music Therapy Provide?**

*Our Mission:* Peak View Music Therapy is committed to providing high-quality, goal centered music therapy services to restore, maintain, and improve the health of children, adults, and seniors in Northern Colorado. Peak View Music Therapy provides individual and group sessions in the community, homes, schools, skilled-nursing facilities, community centers, assisted-living facilities, hospices, and other various locations.

**Please contact Deborah Palmer, MM, MT-BC, NMT, for more information about music therapy at (970)-290-5097 or [www.peakviewmusictherapy.com](http://www.peakviewmusictherapy.com).**