

Making Music Together

For those who feel confident, it might be possible to engage children in direct musical activity. Here are some examples taken from Lefevre (2004).

Singing songs together

Children tend to love songs being sung to them from a very early age. Parents and carers often spontaneously sing to their infants and children to soothe and delight them. These songs may become 'transitional objects', i.e. a symbolic projection of the loved parent which enables the separation from the carer to be borne (Winnicott, 1971). This can be seen in the young baby's babbling or toddlers singing themselves to sleep, comforting themselves when the parent is not there (Diaz de Chumaceiro, 1995).

As a worker, singing songs with a child that you both know can provide "a safe musical starting point" from which "the potentially unsafe world" of the new child/worker relationship can begin to be explored - "rather like having a musical hand to hold" (Flower, 1993, p.42).

It is important to pay attention to the song's symbolic meaning. Lullabies, for example, may provide comfort and soothing, which can re-create the dynamics of bonding and help the child have a reparative experience where this was neglectful or abusive (Diaz de Chumacero, 1995).

"Susan, aged 6, who had been neglected, arranged regular scenarios where she cuddled into cushions, with a cover over her, and had me sing her lullabies softly. She seemed to be re-experiencing early attachment experiences, but this time receiving a different (more nurturing) response which she was able to take in to her inner world".

(Lefevre, 2004, p.339)

The songwords, themselves, may hold the symbolic significance.

"Christine had experienced chronic neglect and had been abused by several male family members. She remained with her mother and felt unable to talk about this situation for fear it would cause her to be removed from her mother's care again. Early on in a period of supportive work, she brought a song with the following words:

Close your eyes and you're never on your own

*You have the power of dreams
Close your eyes and you'll find the answer
Things aren't as bad as they seem.*

This song seemed to allow her to feel, express and communicate her experience without fear of reprisal”.

(Lefevre, 2004, p.339)

Making sound together with percussion

Percussion instruments can still make an expressive or satisfying sound without previous training or skill. This enables children and workers to make sound together freely without needing to be constrained by creating melody or harmony. Drums, tambourines, cymbals, castanets, maracas and bells can be played loudly even violently to depict chaotic, confusing and angry experiences and are usually sturdy enough not to be easily broken. Glockenspiels, triangles and ‘rain sticks’ can make more soothing sounds.

Communication may occur through an interplay of you and the child making some rhythmic sounds in ‘conversation’, perhaps with one leading and the other responding. The more you are able to mirror, imitate and respond ‘in tune’ with the child, the more they will feel that their expression has been heard and accepted.

Those workers who are more musically skilled will be able to develop this further:

“James had been expressing feelings regarding emotional abuse and neglect in his foster home by smearing faeces and engaging in risky behaviour, e.g. fire-setting. In our sessions, his rhythmic improvisation on drums was fast, frantic and extremely loud, being magnified by the microphone and accompanied by screeching sounds he obtained via electrical ‘feedback’ - pointing the microphone into the loudspeaker. He was able to see that I could bear hearing and being with the overwhelming and painful sounds he made. By me mirroring and reflecting back the rhythms he played, using crashing dissonant piano chords, he was aware that I had listened to, and made sense of his expression. The message he received was ‘these emotions can be expressed, understood and borne. You can even play with them’”.

(Lefevre, 2004, p.340-1)

Further Reading

- Diaz de Chumaceiro, C.L. (1995) "Lullabies are transferential transitional songs: Further considerations on resistance in music therapy". *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, **22**(4), 353-357, 20-26.
- Flower, C. (1993) Control and creativity: Music therapy with adolescents in secure care. In *Music Therapy in Health and Education* (eds. M. Heal & T. Wigram), pp. 40-45, Jessica Kingsley, London.
- Lefevre, M (2004) 'Playing with Sound: The Therapeutic Use of Music in Direct Work with Children', in *Child and Family Social Work*. Vol. 9, pp. 333-345