

Music – General Guidance

Music is often said to be like a language, enabling people to express and communicate feelings, relationships and 'internal world' experiences. This expression is often not direct and conscious but works more at the symbolic level when people listen to, sing or perform music.

What can music mean for people?

Many different kinds of meanings, purposes and qualities have been attributed to music through different cultures and eras.

- Music provides readily recognised tunes and songs which can come to represent particular groups or movements.
 - Most countries have a National Anthem – music chosen by the state to glorify their achievements or unify their people. Hearing their national anthem can provoke feelings of pride and togetherness in people, or conversely fear and shame.
 - Football clubs usually have simple refrains which their fans sing together in the stadiums to cheer their team on, feel part of a community and to express the powerful feelings provoked by the match.
 - In pop and rock music, different trends and fashions in music spring up. Young people often feel quite 'tribal' about the kind of music they prefer, perhaps wearing clothes, hairstyles etc which are associated with it, and going to particular clubs which play the music. This seems an important part of young people's developing sense of individual and community identity.
- Many religious groups use music as part of their process of worship or to enhance meditation
- Music has been linked to healing, offering a capacity to reduce tension and distract the mind from pain
- People often feel music can match, deepen or allow them to escape their mood
- Performing music can be cathartic expression, providing an outlet for stifled or repressed emotions.

Using music in working with children

Through the discipline of music therapy, research has shown that music has a range of therapeutic benefits with children and adults in terms of enhancing communication, self-expression and personal growth. It can be used in a variety of ways, depending on the theoretical approach, the skills of the practitioner and the musical resources available (Wigram et al, 2002). Social workers may be able to use it to help build rapport, develop a trusting relationship, and allow a child's experiences to be processed at a symbolic level.

Key points to consider

It is important that you do not step outside the boundaries of your skill and experience. Seek appropriate support and supervision and undertake additional reading or training where it is needed.

Unless you have undertaken additional training you should be wary of using musical skills and techniques with very traumatised or distressed children as a primary therapeutic method. Such intensive work should be referred to a music therapist. If you are unsure, consult with a specialist worker such as a therapist, first to find out whether the work you are considering is appropriate and should be carried out by you.

Do not avoid direct communication where it is necessary within your role and to achieve particular tasks. Instead you should see the musical activities as bridges "to open up communication with children who are finding it hard to express themselves and engage with others at a direct or verbal level" (Lefevre, 2008, p.130). Always consider whether children might benefit more or additionally from some direct verbal contact about issues of concern to them.

Further Reading

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

Lefevre, M. (2008) Communicating and Engaging with Children and Young People in Care through Play and the Creative Arts, in B.Luckock & M.Lefevre (eds.) *Direct Work: Social Work with Children and Young People in Care*. BAAF, London, pp. 130-150.

Wigram, T., Pedersen, I.N. & Bonde, L.O. (2002) *A Comprehensive Guide to Music Therapy: Theory, Clinical Practice, Research and Training*. Jessica Kingsley, London.