



Secondary Schools' Music Therapy Pack



Shooting Star
Children's Hospices

Music Therapy



What is music therapy?

Music therapy uses music to explore, understand and express emotions. At our hospices we use music therapy to help very sick children and their families cope with the challenges they face.

Music can provide a new language for children, so that they can communicate what they would like to say.



How does music therapy help?

Music therapy helps the children we support to identify and communicate feelings which they may not otherwise be able to understand or express.

Music therapy can help by providing a time and space for children to explore, identify and express their feelings using music .

Music goes beyond words. It draws upon a child's natural affinity to music, using drums to vent anger and songs to express feelings.

What happens in a session?

Rather than teaching a child to sing or play an instrument, the therapist allows the child the freedom to express themselves through sounds, silences, gestures and words.



Benefits of music therapy

- Helps children feel happier and more positive
- Explores new ways of expressing feelings
- Improves confidence
- Makes sure children are heard and listened to no matter how they communicate



Music Therapy Room



A peek inside our music therapy room...

Shooting Star Children's Hospices has a music room at both hospices, used for fun times and music therapy sessions. Music therapy enables children to understand and express their feelings in a way they may not otherwise be able to do.

Our Music therapy room offers a safe, secure space where children are not under instruction but helped to use all their capabilities for making sounds, encouraging new ways of communicating their needs and feelings.



In our music therapy room during a music therapy session...



We have lots of musical instruments that you might recognise from your music lessons at school, as well as some special instruments to make sure that all the children we support can join in, whatever their mobility; such as bells that can be tapped instead of rung.

Accessible musical instruments are chosen and arranged with a particular child in mind. Rather than teaching the child to sing or play an instrument, the therapist allows the child the freedom to express themselves through sounds, gestures and words.

Day in the life of a Music Therapist

at Shooting Star House Children's Hospice



9.15am

After arriving at Shooting Star House, I attend a meeting with other members of the care team. We talk about which children are in the hospice that day, what their individual needs are, and what therapy will be offered to them.

After the meeting, I prepare for the day's music therapy sessions and think about what each session will cover. Ultimately though, I'm completely guided by what the individual child wants to get out of the session.

10am

I start my first session with a supported child. At the beginning of every session I chat to the child and try to find out what they would like to do. Many of the children I see are not able to use words and language to communicate. I make sure we have percussion instruments that are easy for them to handle, so that we can communicate through the music instead of words.

I try different instruments that produce different vibrations and sensations to provoke smiles, sounds and other positive responses. We also have a collection of highly specialised

and popular instruments. The electric guitar is a favourite instrument as even if you only have the strength to move your finger a tiny bit, the sound you create is big and booming. This means that everyone can be a rock star!

"At the beginning of every session I chat to the child and try to identify what they want to get out of it'."

11am

I hold a group session. I call this an 'open group' as every child at the hospice is welcome to join in if they wish. This is an opportunity to bring everyone together. I pick songs that build each child's communication skills, encourage them to play and interact with each other and help the children to be expressive.

My favourite thing about the group is that the children often surprise us with their musical ability and their level of awareness. This brings pleasure to the parents who are watching and the care team who are supporting the children.



"I pick songs that build upon each child's communication skills, encouraging them to interact with each other and to be expressive."

12pm

I meet with our play therapist to plan a special day we are holding for the brothers and sisters of the very sick children we care for. The play therapist and I think of creative activities that will help the children identify the hurdles they face every day and especially when their brother or sister is very sick or taken into hospital.



2pm

I often hold concerts for the children in Sparkle Day Care. Today we have a concert for children at the hospice, which includes a cellist from the Royal College of Music, a singer-songwriter and a Celtic harpist. The concert includes classical tunes on the cello that will soothe and relax us, and up beat songs which will lift the room, so that all the care team will be dancing with the children, twirling wheelchairs or rocking them in their arms.



3pm

I have appointments with children who come to see me each week after school. I see supported children of all ages, and their brothers and sisters. Whilst their worries might be very similar to other children their age, children supported by Shooting Star Children's Hospices and their siblings very quickly can feel overwhelmed and burdened because of how complex their everyday life is already.

It is so important to spend time in sessions thinking of coping mechanisms and unburdening them through using the music to share what they feel.

The biggest hurdle of children's therapy is that even if children are able to speak and communicate through talking, it is difficult for them to describe how they are feeling. This is where we use music in the form of creating compositions, songs, play-lists, albums and making-up music on the spot.

Whatever music is played, I will play along to support and encourage the child, telling them that it is okay to share feelings of all kinds.

"It is so important to spend time in sessions thinking of coping mechanisms and unburdening them through using the music to share what they feel."

5pm

After I finish my last session, I write up the session notes and check my appointments are still on track for the next day.

In the evenings I enjoy practicing my harp – just like the children, I find music very relaxing after a busy day!





Music Therapy A parent's experience

"I believe that without music therapy, our experience of having a life-limited child would have been completely different, and far poorer. As a family, we all benefitted from it at different times and in different ways. Lydia died when she was just over three years old. Born with Aicardi Syndrome, a rare neurological condition, she had frequent daily seizures and was profoundly mentally and physically disabled. In music therapy, we watched our beautiful non-verbal little girl find a special way of communicating. Not only did she learn to interact with the music itself, but also with those of us taking part in the session with her.

Sometimes this might be alone with Sarah, the music therapist, or in a session with other hospice children and members of staff. At other times, when we had music therapy as a family at home or at the hospice itself, she and her older brother, Oscar, would find a way of interacting and communicating in a way which they only really experienced through music. The sessions were a beautiful gift, encouraging us to be together in a deeper, more profound, more attentive way of being family, when often our life was highly chaotic, and the essential thing was simply getting through another day.

We feel confident that when Lydia arrived at the hospice the night before she died, hearing the familiar sounds of Sarah's flute and guitar helped her to relax, knowing that she was safe in her 'home from home'. It was just how we hoped she would die, not with tubes and machines in a hospital environment, but feeling safe and held by the community in which she had spent so much time and in which she felt loved.

Certainly, for us now, it is the music we shared while at the hospice which sustains our memories of Lydia. We still sing the songs from the sessions to each other! There are so many things you have to let go of when your child dies but, cliché as this may be, the music goes on, and for that we will always be deeply grateful." Anna, supported mum.

£41 could fund one session of Music Therapy giving children and their families the unforgettable experience of making music together, a memory they'll keep forever.

Our care is completely free so it's only thanks to our supporters that we are able to help families like Lydia's, who are going through the most unimaginably difficult circumstances, and continue providing vital care for life-limited babies, children, young people and their families.



Shooting Star Children's Hospices annual Festival of Music this year celebrated ten years of music therapy at our hospices.

Children supported by Shooting Star Children's Hospices enjoyed two days of workshops composing their own piece of music, which they shared in a grand performance in front of proud families and staff.

The Festival of Music is led by musicians and composers from London's top orchestras including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

Since its launch in 2006, the Festival of Music at Shooting Star Children's Hospices gives families a rare chance to see their children contribute to a professional performance. The event is particularly beneficial for children supported by Shooting Star Children's Hospices who have difficulty communicating, as music enables them to express themselves.

Shooting Star Children's Hospices Music Therapist, Vicky Kammin, said: "The Festival of Music is so important in giving our supported children an experience they may never have had before and it's fantastic, someone who struggles to communicate suddenly has control over an entire piece of music.

"It's particularly special for the families who watch the performance – the parents are always beaming with pride afterwards when they see what their child has achieved."



Music therapy – Teacher's help sheet

This Music Therapy learning resource provides a variety of informational sources to support you in exploring music therapy with your pupils and in learning about Shooting Star Children's Hospices and the paediatric palliative care we provide.

You may wish to use these information sources as a support for a class activity or music lesson.

Here are some practical ideas for exploring music therapy.

- Ask students to work in small group to create a sound scape that expresses a particular emotion. Each group takes a turn whilst the other students try to guess which emotion they are expressing. As a prompt you may wish to assign emotions.
- Explore the sounds different musical instruments make. Discuss what each instrument communicates most effectively. For example the sound of drums might best express anxiety, fear or anger whilst the sound of bells and chimes might convey excitement and happiness. Keep in mind that this is a subjective exercise with no right or wrong answer and should be lead by students own considered opinions.
- Select or ask students to select a piece of music to listen to and ask students to record the music in another medium such a through words, pictures, movement.
- Provide students with a section of script. Instead of speaking the lines ask students to replace them with different forms of communication such a music, gesture and mime. Compare how this changes the dynamic of communication. What is lost through the lack of spoken word? What is gained by using different means of communication and expression? How does this highlight the benefits of music therapy?
- Explore different forms of non verbal communication by spending an afternoon without speaking. Prepare with your students by learning some basic Makaton signs, creating flash cards and demonstrating common gestures and body language. Limiting communication and restricting ability to express with sounds such as laughing, shouting and talking can be very frustrating, so finish the afternoon with a music session as a way of communication through sound and demonstrating the benefits of music therapy. You could run this activity as a sponsored silence in support of Shooting Star Children's Hospices.
- Have a look at our fabulous Makaton singing group– Friendly Hands and see if you can learn a Makaton song. Search for Shooting Star Children's Hospices on YouTube.
- Add a Makaton song to your next assembly, performance or concert at school. You could even have a retiring collection in support of Shooting Star Children's Hospices and help us continue to provide vital care and support to life-limited babies, children, young people and their families.

We are more than happy to support you and your pupils in learning about Shooting Star Children's Hospices. If you have any queries or would like further information please do not hesitate to contact our Community Fundraising Team, who would be delighted to help you. How about inviting us to give a special talk or interactive session about Shooting Star Children's Hospices?

Community Fundraising Team
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