



Music Therapy and Addiction Treatment

Addiction affects people from a wide range of backgrounds. Adults and teens of all socioeconomic classes, ethnic and gender identities, and sexual orientations can experience addiction or substance abuse. For some, entering into treatment will be a one-time occurrence; for others, treatment may be something they have experienced multiple times for most of their life. Individuals seeking treatment for addiction may receive services in a variety of healthcare settings including inpatient detoxification units within a medical center, residential treatment facilities, outpatient programs, or a physician's office.

Board-certified music therapists (MT-BC) can be found working with teens and adults receiving treatment for addiction. According to the 2020 American Music Therapy Association's (AMTA) workforce analysis, 160 respondents reported working with individuals who are diagnosed with substance use disorder. Treatment settings where music therapists work with individuals and/or groups can include residential treatment facilities and outpatient programs. Music therapists working in these settings may be employees of the treatment facility or outpatient programs, but they may also have contracts with these organizations as independent contractors.

ROLE OF MUSIC THERAPY

Why music therapy?

Music Therapy is part of an integrated approach to treatment for addiction. Music therapy for substance abuse recovery is the use of music and the therapeutic relationship to promote connection to self and motivation to change while learning to navigate life in sobriety. Active music-making, as well as music listening, has been shown to activate the dopaminergic pathways in a similar manner as many illicit substances. This response may reduce cravings and improve mood. Music listening also calms the parasympathetic nervous system which facilitates relaxation and decreases anxiety.

Contraindications

Contraindications for the use of music in addiction treatment include the possibility of music serving as a trauma trigger or as a trigger for use and increased cravings. Therefore, it is helpful when possible to have a complete music history when working with individuals and to be aware of how these triggers or traumatic responses can present.

MUSIC THERAPY CLINICAL PROCESS

Assessment

Currently, there is not a standardized assessment process used by all music therapists who work with individuals diagnosed with substance use disorder. Assessments conducted by music therapists can be formal, in which the music therapist is able to review the biopsychosocial information from the client or patient's chart. Assessments can also be conducted in the moment, such as with a check-in to see how the person is feeling at the moment and where they are in recovery. The assessment method used by music therapists is compatible with the facility or private practice where they work. At a minimum,



regardless of the process, music therapists should assess the effects of substance misuse on the following domains of health: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual.

Ideally, music therapists should get a complete music history including music preferences, the times and reasons for listening to, creating, or performing music throughout the lifespan, music that was listened to, composed, or performed during any phase of the addiction cycle, songs or music that may be triggers or increase cravings. However, in some settings, this is not part of the formal assessment conducted by a facility. In those cases, music therapists can assess these things in session.

Treatment Planning

Music therapists working in addiction treatment develop treatment plans based on known client needs gained from their assessment and/or to support the therapeutic goals identified by the facility. Common therapeutic musical experiences facilitated by music therapists working in addiction treatment include:

- ◆ Music listening
- ◆ Lyric analysis
- ◆ Songwriting
- ◆ Music assisted creative arts
- ◆ Music assisted mediation
- ◆ Active music-making

Implementation (Goals/Focus)

Addiction is a disease of the body (physical), mind (cognitive & emotional), and spirit. Music Therapists address each of these domains dependent upon presenting issues and client goals. Treatment facility philosophy may also provide a framework for goals. Common approaches include Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Motivational Interviewing, 12-Step, and Change Theory.

Common goals addressed include:

- ◆ Managing physical withdrawal symptoms including pain, nausea, agitation
- ◆ Manage physical symptoms related to cravings
- ◆ Understand the addictive cycle
- ◆ Identify triggers
- ◆ Decrease negative self-talk
- ◆ Decrease racing thoughts
- ◆ Increase here-and-now focus
- ◆ Develop healthy coping skills
- ◆ Identify feelings
- ◆ Increase tolerance of unpleasant or uncomfortable feelings
- ◆ Express feelings verbally and non verbally
- ◆ Connect with a higher power
- ◆ Develop healthy relationships with others

In some cases, music therapists working with people in addiction treatment settings may have completed advanced training in the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music, also known as GIM. GIM is a music-centered therapeutic approach in which sequenced music is intentionally selected to stimulate imagery that can help individuals integrate mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects of well-



being. GIM practitioners are known as Fellow/Facilitator by the Association for Music and Imagery (FAMI).

RESEARCH AREAS

The research on the efficacy of music therapy methods to address treatment goals is extremely limited and has moderate to high researcher bias. Recent systematic reviews have noted that music therapy methods have not consistently demonstrated significant results, studies have a moderate to high rate of researcher bias, most studies are single session, conducted in detoxification units. Qualitative results report patient preference for music therapy over other treatment modalities.

CLIENT QUOTES

“As I approach 10 years of continuous sobriety, music therapy while in rehab has still stuck with me all of these years later. Music therapy was so impactful by helping center my mind, finding creativity, and most importantly, peace. To this day, I use music as an outlet to reverse my sometimes negative thinking, as a motivation to persevere, and as a true source of enjoyment.” - Maria T.

References

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What is AMTA?

The American Music Therapy Association (AMTA) represents 10,000 music therapists, corporate members, and related associations worldwide. AMTA is committed to the advancement of education, training, professional standards, and research in support of the music therapy profession. AMTA establishes criteria for the education and clinical training of music therapists. Professional members of AMTA adhere to a Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice in the delivery of music therapy services. AMTA's mission is to advance public knowledge of music therapy benefits and increase access to quality music therapy services. Learn more at www.musictherapy.org.