

Music therapy

Department of paediatrics

What is music therapy?

Music therapy is an established research-based allied health profession. It has been used in Australia in hospitals and health care facilities since the 1970s and overseas since the 1930s.

The benefits of music therapy

Active music making - Children are offered the opportunity to express their emotions, 'Hit the drum and tell me how you feel right now!'

Self expression - Within a music therapy session, a child may express their anger, fear and frustration in an acceptable way. In music therapy, children can have fun and just be a child

Procedural support - A child's perception of pain may be reduced through listening to or playing music because it is structured, engaging and fun. Music therapy is used during medical procedures such as needles and cannula removal to support a child's distress.

Psychosocial - Music can be comforting, nurturing and soothing, especially songs that also involve parents or caregivers in singing their favourite songs from home. The unfamiliar environment can be given familiarity through known songs from home.

Choice and control - The music therapist empowers children to make decisions during the session. What instrument, song, fast, slow, stop, start, loud, soft. Controlling the procedure e.g. finger prick of cannula out at a particular point the song.

Socialisation and music therapy groups - Seeing other children in similar situations helps children to understand their own experience as being normal.



Partnering with Consumers - Standard 2
Consumers and/or carers provided feedback on this patient information.



Service Delivery - Standard 11
Patients and the community have access to safe, high quality healthcare services that are appropriate, effective and meet their needs.



Provision of Care - Standard 12
The intention of this standard is to ensure high quality care is delivered to consumers/patients throughout the care continuum.



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Relaxation - Most often children and their parents/ caregivers have had a long night waiting in emergency, they are tired and need to rest and recover. Music can assist in helping a child to relax and go to sleep.

How music therapy can assist your child while in hospital

Music therapy focuses on the psychosocial issues related to the child's illness and hospitalisation. Your child may:

- be having to deal with possible extended stays or repeated stays in hospital
- have never been to hospital before, and they are in an unfamiliar or abnormal environment
- be experiencing fear because they either know what is going to happen or don't know what is going to happen to them
- be experiencing anxiety with separation from family and friends and familiar settings
- be experiencing a sense of loss of control and feelings of powerlessness.

Defining music therapy is often challenging because the practice is so diverse, but Australian Music Therapy Association uses the following definition:

Music therapy is a research-based practice and profession in which music is used to actively support people as they strive to improve their health, functioning and wellbeing.

Music therapy is the intentional use of music by a university trained professional who is registered with the Australian Music Therapy Association Inc.

Registered music therapists draw on an extensive body of research and are bound by a code of ethics that informs their practice.

Music therapists incorporate a range of music making methods within and through a therapeutic relationship. They are employed in a variety of sectors including health, community, aged care, disability, early childhood, and private practice.

Music therapy is different from music education and entertainment because it focuses on health, functioning and wellbeing.

Music therapists are committed to supporting people of any age and ability regardless of musical skill, culture or background.

How music helps

While music is generally viewed and experienced for its aesthetics of beauty and general qualities of pleasure and enjoyment music therapy in procedural support offers a great deal more to the paediatric patient.

During procedures, music therapy supports children to engage in a way that deliberately seeks to switch on the parasympathetic nervous system.

Within procedural support live instrumental and vocal improvisation act as a medium to unify and hold the space and contain the room and the experience.

Music provides

Familiarity, predictability and regularity.

Through calm vocals and tempered instrumental dynamics the music therapy aims to create:

- a reduction in procedural anxiety and distress
- an altered sense of procedure time/length
- positive self regulation
- trust in the person/s performing the procedure.

Music therapy interventions that can be used while in hospital include.

- singing familiar songs
- action songs and games
- playing musical instruments
- creative musical improvisation
- songwriting and recording
- making music videos of familiar and original songs
- music and puppetry
- music and storytelling
- music and relaxation
- drawing and painting to music
- music and movement
- using digital technology.

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