

How is Music Therapy Used in Special Education?

Music therapy has proven to be effective in special education for students with various types of disabilities and special needs. This type of therapy can be used in different ways, depending on each individual child.

What is Music Therapy?

This type of therapy focuses on using music as a way to address the physical, cognitive, emotional and social needs of a child. It is important to note that this form of therapy is not provided by just anyone who knows about music. Therapists must attain a bachelor's degree from one of 72 accredited schools and 1200 hours of clinical training. Music therapists must also have the required credentials and licenses. Just like with any type of therapists, the student's strengths and weaknesses are assessed to determine the type of treatment. This treatment can involve singing, listening to music, moving to music, creating music and using various instruments, rhythms and sounds. Research has shown the effectiveness of this type of therapy in many areas including:

- Facilitating movement
- Providing avenues of communication
- Increasing motivation
- Providing a way to express feelings

Therapy set to music can be effective in various environments including schools, in the home, hospitals, and can be done in groups or individually.

Special Education

Thanks to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), schools are required to evaluate and provide for the education of eligible students with disabilities. A curriculum is then designed to help meet these students' unique ways of learning. Oftentimes, even though two students might present with the same diagnosis, they will not learn in the same way. For instance with a diagnosis of cerebral palsy, one child might have limitations due to restricted mobility while another child has mobility but is unable to communicate verbally.

Connections Between Music and Education

It is important to note that therapy using music is not meant to replace a child's special education curriculum, but instead it is intended to complement it. According to various research, there are proven connections in the following areas:

- Singing and Speech
- Rhythm and Motor Skills
- Lyric memorization and memorizing academic material
- Listening and increased focus

Music has also proven to help students with special needs behave appropriately, interact with others, relax the muscles and provide a distraction from pain, anxiety and discomfort. When recognized as a related service, therapy associated with music can help students with special needs to meet educational goals as set by their Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Types of Disabilities

There are many disabilities and types of special needs in which music has been proven to be helpful. Some of these included:

- Autism
- Cerebral Palsy
- Childhood of Apraxia of Speech (CAS)
- Learning Disabilities (LD)
- Asthma

Other instances where this type of therapy can be beneficial include students who struggle with depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety and those who lack self-confidence.

Music therapy provides a way for some children with certain disabilities to learn in ways they never have before. For this reason and many others, this type of therapy is extremely effective.