

## Music Therapy in the Treatment of Eating Disorders

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*Note: None of the interventions outlined in this series should be applied to your own healthcare/treatment without the direct consultation of a board certified music therapist (MT-BC). If you are interested in seeking music therapy treatment, you can find an MT-BC in your area by visiting [www.musictherapy.org](http://www.musictherapy.org).*

In this third and final installment of this series, I would like to impart some strategies around using music in your life and in recovery. Music can be an integral part of your coping skills and can assist in relaxation and mindfulness, self-exploration, and self-expression. If music isn't a part of your life, I hope you will consider reevaluating the role it can play in assisting you in maintaining recovery.

### Part Three

First, if you've made it through the other two parts of this series, thank you. It has been a privilege and a joy to write these pieces for EatingDisorderHope.com and hope that in it you have found a desire to strengthen your relationship with music. I hope that any blurred lines around what is music therapy and what isn't were clarified. I hope you enjoyed reading this as much as I have enjoyed writing it. I am very passionate about my profession and think every treatment facility for every patient population should have a board certified music therapist to support their clientele.

Let's take a look at how you can independently use music in specific ways to assist in recovery.

#### Self-Guided Music-Assisted Relaxation

In the previous part of this series, I mentioned music-assisted progressive muscle relaxation. That is the technique I will outline for your own use at home. It is not complicated and can be used in a number of settings, not just your home. This relaxation technique, like any other, works best in a quiet, comfortable, and dimly lit room that is free from distractions. First, you want to choose your music. The music that works best is instrumental, predictable, and steady in tempo (speed). There shouldn't be too many changes in volume and should include a small number of instruments (stringed instruments such as guitar are recommended). All of this to say, choose music that YOU love and find relaxing...keeping in mind that the tempo should be steady. The music should be approximately 10-15 minutes in length with minimal changes in tracks.

You should get into a comfortable position either on your bed, on a mat, or in a chair. Focus on your breathing without changing it. Gradually deepen your breathing until you feel yourself sink into your bed/chair/mat. Once you feel your body loosen a bit, tense the muscles in your right foot for approximately 5 seconds (or 4 beats of the music)...tighter...and release. [Pause for about 4 beats] Now tense your right calf muscles...tighter...and release. (You would continue this pattern until you've systematically gone through the entire body, focusing on each small muscle grouping.

It's important to do this in tempo with the music. This will not only help maintain focus but also keep your pace consistent. For this to be effective, you should hold tension for the same amount of time for each part of the body. If this is something you are interested in learning more about, feel free to contact me and I will provide guidance around it for you.

### Autobiography in Song

This self-explorative project melds lyric analysis, journaling, and visual arts techniques. This project is an opportunity for you to explore your past and present self through examining the music that has been with you throughout your life. The lyrics of the songs you choose for this project should be the driving force behind selecting the music to represent each section of this assignment.

1. Stages of your life
  - a. Adolescents
    - i. Divide your life into 3 years stages and choose a song to represent each stage.
  - b. Adults
    - i. Divide your life into 5 years stages and choose a song to represent each stage.
2. Support Persons
  - a. Choose 3 people in your life who provide you with emotional support and find a song to represent each of these 3 people.
3. Eating Disorder
  - a. Choose a song to represent your eating disorder. Maybe the song is representative of how the eating disorder has affected you...maybe it's the way you feel about your eating disorder...maybe it personifies your eating disorder
4. Recovery
  - a. Choose a song to represent your recovery. The lyrics of this song should convey your vision of recovery.
5. Album Artwork
  - a. Using any visual art medium, design an album cover to represent all the pieces of your life, either represented or not in the songs used.

Take your time with this project. In our treatment community here at TranscendED, the individual presents this project and I perform portions of the song while they talk about the meaning behind it for them. For you to independently do this, journal about what each of the songs mean to you and specifically why you chose it to represent parts of your life or people in your life.

### Inventory of Recovery Music

Take a personal inventory of the music that inspires you. Make a playlist of this music and keep it on your personal music playing device(s). The music should draw your attention away from symptom use, negative self-talk, and/or anxiety. It should take you on a journey.

The playlist should begin with music that validates your present feelings and emotions. Each song should move closer toward the emotion/feeling you want to experience. Be creative with this. Analyze the music and take the experience seriously. Take control of your experience. Jung said, "I am not what happened to me, I am what I choose to become." (Jung, 1989) Choose music that meets you where you are in your process and above all, choose recovery. You are worth it.

## References

Jung, C., & Jaffe, A. (1989). *Memories, dreams, reflections: Recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffe ; translated from the German by Richard and Clara Winston*. (Rev. [ie. 2nd] ed.). New York: Vintage.

### Boiler Plate

Dean Quick, MT-BC is the Program Director and Board Certified Music Therapist for TranscendED where we understand the value of recovery, and believe that all individuals should have equal access to treatment. At TranscendED it is our goal to provide quality treatment, vigorous advocacy, multi-disciplinary education, and abundant support to those directly and indirectly affected by eating disorders. TranscendED is one of very few eating disorder treatment centers to accept Medicaid.

## References

Bauer, S. (2010). Music therapy and eating disorders: A single case study about the sound of human needs. *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy, 10*(2).

Trondalen, G. & Skårderud, F. (2007). Playing with affects... and the importance of "affect attunement." *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy, 16*, 100-111.