



## **ART BRIDGES: Lesson Plans for Enrichment, Growth and Healing**

### **Music Enrichment for Children and Adolescents Recovering from Trauma**

**Activities submitted by Board-Certified Music Therapist  
Rachel Rotert**

#### **Disclaimer**

The arts are a powerful modality to influence positive change in a number of clinical, medical, and educational settings. However, there is a significant difference between expressive therapies (i.e. music therapy, art therapy, and creative arts therapy) and arts enrichment programs. For example, therapy addresses individualized goals based on assessed treatment needs, and enrichment helps expose a group to a positive arts experience and may lead to positive functional lessons among the group as a whole. Therapy may require more arts-based skill and versatility from the group or session leader (i.e. live music, improvisation, hands-on or complex art making), whereas enrichment can often be accomplished with recorded music and by non-therapist staff members/volunteers who are skilled with that particular population. The purpose of the “Art Bridges” activities is to offer ideas to support arts enrichment programming, but none of these activities can be called “therapy” unless performed by a Board Certified Music Therapist, a Licensed Art Therapist, or a Licensed Creative Arts Therapist.

## Considerations for Non-Music Therapists

Music enrichment groups with this population can be quite effective due to the way preferred music helps stimulate the trust hormone oxytocin, which is essential for helping PTSD clients of all ages feel safe in a therapeutic environment. Music can be a powerful tool for accessing memories and emotions for these kids, so any enrichment leader should have at least basic education in the mental health field and should attend a training (usually conducted for staff and volunteers within the facility) that teaches proper crisis management and de-escalation techniques. Of course, these groups have the power to be more effective with less potential of negative triggering under the supervision of a Board Certified Music Therapist. With this in mind, a volunteer should try to choose music that is familiar and preferred for the clients, and he or she should proceed with caution when utilizing drums or other instruments that may stimulate a startle response or emotional trigger with PTSD clients.

## Song Request and Chat

### Materials:

1. List of popular songs that contain age-appropriate lyrics and represent a wide variety of age-appropriate genres
2. Accompanying instrument like keyboard or guitar Chord charts for each song on the list unless songs are memorized by leader

### Procedure:

1. Explain that the activity is a song request game where the clients may choose songs that they like and then talk about why they chose them.
2. Play soft background music or sit in silence as clients look over the list. Once someone speaks up, acknowledge that they made a great choice, and begin playing.
3. Encourage singing or clapping along during music if clients are comfortable with active participation, but make it clear that it's okay to simply sit and listen too.
4. As the song ends, ask the requester why he or she chose that song. If they are vague or unsure point out that sometimes songs become our favorites because of their meaningful words, their energetic rhythms, a personal memory that is linked to them, or the happy/relaxed feeling we get when we hear them.

**Desired outcomes:** establishing trust between client, therapist, and fellow group members, sharing memories and processing emotions in a non-threatening environment, assertiveness to speak up with a request, mood elevation with preferred music

## **Relaxation Music**

### **Materials:**

1. Accompanying instrument like keyboard, guitar, or harp
2. Chord charts for slow, sedative songs that fall into preferred music genres (i.e. “A Thousand Years from Twilight” for a group of adolescent girls)

### **Procedure:**

1. Be aware of client music preferences prior to group to determine selections or style of improvisation.
2. As instrumental begins with simple bass pattern, soothing timbre, and medium-slow tempo, encourage group members to take a few deep breaths with you and lead a few simple stretches that can be performed from a seated position.
3. Sing preferred music with voice no louder than your speaking voice. Encourage continued deep breathing.
4. Have tactile grounding tools available for kids who are likely to become triggered (play dough, textured cloth patch, rubber band, or ask therapist on site for more ideas).
5. Maybe allow kids an option to draw, read, or hold a stuffed animal during background music to promote a feeling of safety and to help distract kids from physical anxiety.
6. Periodically remind clients that it is safe to relax in this room and in the presence of these people. If any client appears overly anxious, give permission to take a break if client feels that would help him or her regroup.
7. Keep in mind that kids often have short attention spans with quiet time, so plan for this activity to last ten or fifteen minutes at the most.
8. Allow time at the end of the activity to ask clients if they were able to relax, what helped them relax most, and what was most difficult. This can help them figure out how to best cope and relax outside of group.

**Desired outcomes:** relaxation, establishing that group is a safe place, slower heart rate, relief in emotional anxiety, assistance in brainstorming healthy coping skills and sleep strategies

## **Ocean Drum**

### **Materials:**

1. Ocean drum



2. CD player or iPhone with ability to play instrumental, sedative music (consult with music therapist for good relaxation CD options, avoid CDs that include verbal relaxation prompts since you will be there to prompt as the facilitator)

### **Procedure:**

1. Turn on recorded music at a low volume (loud enough that every group member can hear clearly, soft enough that you can use a soft speaking voice and still be heard).
2. Introduce the ocean drum as a fun and unique instrument that all group members get to try out. Remind group members that respectful turn taking is a must for this activity to work.
3. Shift ocean drum gently in a subtle circular motion to make wave sound. Ask clients to close eyes, take deep breaths, and pretend they're at the beach.
4. Walk around the circle and allow each client about 30 seconds to hold the opposite side of the ocean drum, watch the beads, and feel the drum vibrations. With higher functioning clients who are old enough to manage the somewhat heavy drum, let go of your side of the drum, and allow the

client an additional 30 seconds to produce the soft wave sound independently.

**Desired outcomes:** multisensory stimulation to ground clients in present moment, healthy imagery to provide a temporary escape from traumatic memories, physical relaxation through slower heart rate, deeper breathing, and softer muscles, empowerment to control relaxing sound, practice turn taking

## **Coping Skill Brainstorming**

### **Materials:**

1. CD player or iPhone with preferred, age appropriate music selections (or live music in background of this activity is even better)
2. Worksheets with questions designed to help clients brainstorm healthy coping skills (ways to calm down, supportive people, ways to express myself, things that I'm grateful for)
3. Writing utensils
4. Tables, desks, or other hard writing surfaces

### **Procedure:**

1. Distribute worksheets, and explain that this activity is all about figuring out our coping skills.
2. Begin the brainstorming process by asking kids to help define coping and give an example of an activity, person, or technique in their life that helps them have a better day.
3. Once all clients understand the activity and seem to have a few ideas, start music. Try to select music that is preferred but not so complex or energetic that it's distracting (indie folk music for adolescents or Hawaiian music for kids can sometimes be good choices). The music is even better if the lyrics contain a few ideas about ways to calm down and feel better (i.e. "Breathe" by Ryan Star, "Happy" by Pharrell, "Lean on Me" by Bill Withers)
4. Allow 10-15 minutes of background music time for brainstorming, and give individual guidance and attention to clients who seem to need help with new ideas.
5. Go around room so that each client can share a few healthy coping skills on their lists.
6. Encourage clients to practice at least 3 coping skills in the week to come.

**Desired outcomes:** brainstorming healthy alternatives to behaviors like self-harm, violence, and substance abuse, building a strategy for the client to manage triggers independently, establishing hope that it's possible to replace negative coping behaviors with positive coping skills, practicing healthy coping through writing and preferred music listening

## **Self Esteem Art (for Adolescent Girls)**

### **Materials:**

1. CD player or iPhone with preferred songs with positive, empowering lyrics ("Less than Perfect" by Pink, "Beautiful" by Christina Aguilera, "Fireworks" by Katy Perry, "Try" by Colbie Cailat)
2. Computer or iPad with access to YouTube
3. Blank drawing paper
4. Art supplies such as markers, colored pencils, and oil pastels
5. Pop culture magazines

### **Procedure:**

1. Distribute magazines and ask clients what they notice about the women in the magazines (attitude, weight, appearance, clothing or lack thereof). Ask if they've ever felt pressure to be like the women in those magazines.
2. Watch one of the following short videos to counteract the degrading cultural message that women have to look sexy and be perfect. Talk about how not even the magazine models really look the way they appear in ads, and that can make us feel like we're ugly or not okay. But, fortunately, we have the power to redefine what beauty means in our lives.  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYhCn0jf46U>,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7DdM-4siaQw>,  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_3agBWqGfRo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_3agBWqGfRo),  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dt8qxVZj33o>)
3. Distribute art supplies and paper.
4. Turn on music, and encourage girls to draw or write about what makes them beautiful, talented, and good. Encourage them to listen to the song lyrics or remember the YouTube video if they have a hard time believing that they're beautiful or good.

5. Help girls with brainstorming individually or ask girls to offer verbal compliments to anyone whose paper is still blank after a few minutes.
6. Verbally process positive qualities about each person, and encourage clients to add to each other's lists if time allows.

**Desired outcomes:** reconsidering cultural definitions of beauty, processing intrinsic qualities that are more important than physical appearance, establishing positive support and rapport among group members, reinforcing that we are not alone in insecure feelings, empowering girls to list and begin to believe in own positive qualities

\*\*\*\*\*

*Heartfelt thanks to Board-Certified Music Therapist **Rachel Rotert**. She specializes in using music-based strategies and interventions to assist her clients in reaching a wide variety of emotional, relational, behavioral, and physiological goals. These music interventions may include song writing, music-assisted relaxation, lyric analysis, and drum circles. Rachel has worked in a wide variety of mental health treatment settings including a residential center for adolescents, an inpatient behavioral health hospital, and an outpatient recovery program for veterans. Rachel continues her mission to impact lives through music in her work at KVC (Kansas City, MO). KVC is a health system committed to enriching and enhancing the lives of children and families by providing medical and behavioral healthcare, social services and education. Hildegard Center had the honor of seeing Rachel at work "up close and personal" when she conducted "Music Magic" Workshops for children "at risk" as part of a grant Hildegard Center for the Arts received through the Lincoln Arts Council. You can contact Rachel at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/pianopeacemt>.*

**If you have used this activity, we'd love to hear from you! Please send questions or comments through our website [www.hildegardcenter.org](http://www.hildegardcenter.org) .**

***Hildegard Center for the Arts** is a 501(c)3 Non-Profit Arts Organization whose mission is to unite people of all beliefs, cultures and traditions to inspire humanity through the Arts.*

**Donations to further our mission are always appreciated!**

P.O. Box 5304, Lincoln, NE 68505



© 2015 Hildegard Center for the Arts  
All Rights Reserved.