



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

### **Music Enrichment for Children with Autism Spectrum Diagnosis**

**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:

I would not recommend hosting a music enrichment group for this population without a music therapist present. Music therapy among these clients is often best received in an individualized session environment, and music groups may be over-stimulating for some clients unless a music therapist is present to address triggers and optimize communication with clients.

## Individual Black Key Improvisation

### Materials:

1. keyboard



### Procedure:

1. Show the client that the white keys of the piano sometimes make crunchy sounds together, but black keys make pretty, smooth sounds together no matter how you play them.
2. Play a simple, rhythmic bass pattern on the lower black keys, and encourage client one to play higher black keys (start with one or two at a time).
3. If the client plays a particular riff on the keyboard, validate it and connect with the client by repeating the same riff.
4. Encourage back-and forth riffs or call-and response sections to help the client practice non-verbal communication.
5. Incorporate glissandos or trills into the improvisation if the client seems open to mimicking your style and learning more techniques.

**Desired outcomes:** practice with interpersonal connection and non-verbal communication, increased self-esteem due to success-oriented instrument play

## Mirror-Mirror Drumming

### Materials:

1. Large hand drum or djembe



2. Mallets

### Procedure:

1. Introduce the drum by encouraging the client to explore it freely and figure out the different kinds of sounds it can make.
2. Begin mirroring the different sounds the client is making on the opposite side of the large drum. Encourage eye contact during this interaction.
3. Encourage client to try different sounds and rhythms, and mirror each. With rhythmic patterns, let the client play the pattern alone and then “respond”.
4. After the client has several minutes to lead, say “now it’s my turn”, and encourage the client to mirror the way you play. Incorporate a wide variety of techniques (rubbing, fingernail scratching, tapping, hand drumming, mallet drumming, and rim shots).

**Desired outcomes:** eye contact, nonverbal communication, auditory processing, empowerment when child’s own leadership is validated

\*\*\*\*\*

*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/pianopeacecent>.*

**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.