



ART BRIDGES: Lesson Plans for Enrichment, Growth and Healing

Music Enrichment for Veterans

**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 add a refreshing and healthy dynamic to a veterans' support group or PTSD recovery group if conducted by facilitators who are passionate and knowledgeable about the issues facing this population. Music can be especially helpful in strengthening camaraderie among vets, relieving PTSD-related anxiety, opening the door for honest emotional expression, constructing a future plan, and elevating mood. All music enrichment facilitators in this setting should have at least a basic understanding of the challenges and goals that exist for veterans with PTSD and mood disorders. Be aware of visual and auditory triggers that exist in your group, and do your best to avoid them.

For example, a veteran with PTSD may be triggered by loud, sudden noises that resemble gunshots, so it may be helpful to avoid drumming in this case. Also, keep in mind that the veteran culture traditionally values stoicism and toughness, and this value system can easily conflict with these individuals accepting mental health treatment and honestly expressing emotion. This is why music can be a powerful and sometimes essential tool to allow veterans to tap into emotions, accept support, and be honest. As always, music enrichment is most safely and effectively conducted under the consultation or direct supervision of a Board Certified Music Therapist.

Song Request and Chat

Materials:

1. List of songs from a variety of client-preferred genres (If you have mostly senior veterans in your group, include songs that were popular in the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's. If your group contains more young people, include a more current set list.)
2. Accompanying instrument like keyboard or guitar
3. 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: healthy interaction among group members, rapport development between clients and leader, mood elevation with preferred music, honest expression of memories and emotions in a non-threatening environment

Coping Skill Brainstorming

Materials:

1. CD player or iPod 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 self, gratitude list)
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 ways to handle stress, anxiety, or depression in a constructive way.
2. Begin the brainstorming process by asking clients 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. 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. Give each client a chance to share a few healthy coping skills on their lists. Emphasize that expressing emotion and practicing self-care is not exhibiting weakness. In fact, it helps us be as effective as we can be on the job or at home.
6. Encourage clients to practice at least 3 coping skills in the week to come.

Desired outcomes: understanding the value of self-care and coping to lead a happy productive life; brainstorming healthy alternatives to behaviors like substance abuse, fighting, self-harm or masking emotion; building a strategy for the client to manage PTSD triggers independently; practicing healthy coping through writing, honest discussion, and preferred music listening

Relaxation Music

Materials:

1. Accompanying instrument like keyboard or guitar
2. Chord charts for slow, sedative songs that fall into preferred music genres (i.e. “Bridge over Troubled Water” for classic rock lovers)

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. Encourage clients to use their imaginations to take a “mind vacation” during the music to a new or familiar place that helps them feel safe and calm.

5. 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. Discuss safe places they imagined and strategize how to call up peaceful images to calm mind after a PTSD triggering image or event.

Desired outcomes: relaxation, establishing group rapport, slower heart rate, relief in emotional anxiety, assistance in brainstorming healthy coping skills to manage PTSD symptoms and triggers

Name That Tune for Senior Veterans

Materials:

1. Accompanying instrument like keyboard or guitar
2. Chord sheets for a variety of songs popular in the 1940's, 1950s', and 1960's

Procedure:

1. Briefly explain that in the "name that tune" game, the idea is to sing along or shout out the name of a song if you recognize it.
2. Sing the most recognizable portion of a popular song using "la". This often means starting with the chorus and using a steady rhythm that's slightly slower than the recording.
3. If a client guesses the song correctly, offer enthusiastic verbal praise and begin singing at least one more verse and chorus of the song using words. Encourage group members to sing along.
4. If clients aren't guessing the song, sing the words that lead up to the line where the song title is revealed, and pause to allow clients to finish the phrase (i.e. "So we'll travel along, singing our song...Side by side", "Take Me Out to the...ball game").

Desired outcomes: healthy interaction with group members, positive cognitive/memory stimulation, mood elevation, increased verbal interaction

Coffee and Concert

Materials:

1. Accompanying instrument like guitar or piano
2. Set list of preferred, age appropriate songs

3. Microphone
4. Snack foods, beverages, plates, cups, and utensils

Volunteer Considerations: For a potentially large community event like this, it may be helpful to recruit volunteers as 1) door greeters, 2) food preparers, 3) food servers, 4) guest speakers, 5) sound technicians, and 6) musicians to add variety and inspiration to your existing set list.

Procedure:

1. Meet with any volunteers and site managers prior to event for proper program planning, marketing of community event, and organization of to-do list. Discuss the expected age range of veterans that will attend, consider acknowledging any patriotic holidays that will happen around the time of the event, and design program to fit expected preferences.
2. Allow time at the beginning of the event for guests to get a plate of food and network with other guests.
3. Thank guests for attending, and briefly explain the purpose of this event and what to expect (i.e. food, music, and community to lift us up and honor the role we've played to serve our country).
4. Begin the musical portion of the program, which may include your own live music contribution as well as additional musicians/groups.
5. Encourage guest participation by leading a clapping or stomping rhythm with more energetic songs or leading a sing-along with more familiar tunes. Try to include songs with positive lyrics or inspirational messages to add a therapeutic dynamic to the concert.
6. Consider including a veteran guest speaker to discuss a community or wellness-related topic that may interest the expected guests.

Desired outcomes: healthy social interaction with fellow veterans, professional networking opportunity for discharged or retired veterans, mood elevation with preferred music, increased feeling of veteran pride and community

*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/pianopeaceemt>.

If you have used this activity, we’d love to hear from you! Please send questions or comments through our website 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.