



# Update . . .

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*A group of children participate in music therapy.*

## Music Therapy for At-Risk Kids

*by Maya Bakshi-Yair, music therapist*

Music therapy is in fact an emotional treatment by means of music and musical instruments, which provide an alternative channel of expression to the feelings and emotions of the patients, who often, as a result of the nature of their life, find it hard to express themselves in words.

Children, because of their young age, are more open to music as it allows them to express themselves through sounds instead of through words. Sometimes their vocabulary might not be developed enough for them to express themselves freely.

Music enables the patient to connect to his/her healthy part – the creativity inside.

It enables a dimension of expression and a dimension of creation. Since everyone can do it – music therapy is fun. It empowers the patient to feel as though he or she has accomplished something.

The advantage of music therapy is that it works on two fronts simultaneously: Music *in* therapy, and music *as* therapy. Music *in* therapy is a state where something musical happens and is then discussed with the patient. Whether the patient chose to play, sing, listen or write – afterwards he/she will discuss the feelings and emotions experienced at the time, with the therapist. The music itself serves as a stimulator for a verbal conversation about the patient's state.

In music *as* therapy, the music itself holds the healing power. As patients create music they undergo a healing process which allows them to relax and connect to themselves and their inner feelings.

Moreover, the children that come to therapy usually arrive with no feelings of stability, no base.

The music offers them tools through which they can strengthen these feelings, with the use of repetitive musical boxes, rhythms and breathing. What the child chooses to do with the sounds is in fact the reflection of his/her inner world. For example, a child with low self esteem might show up to therapy hunched, quiet and scared. If we work with him on powerful, intense playing, loud singing and displaying a presence – there will definitely be an outcome of this outside the therapy room.

Another example – it is very common for children to arrive to therapy with fear of abandonment. Here is a good place to work with them on a “goodbye song” which they can sing together with the therapist at the end of every session, and by doing so, to help them cope with a life full of separations, or even with a regular life, which also has its share of goodbyes from people and places from time to time, while understanding that this is a natural process and a cyclic part of life.

**Maya Bakshi-Yair** has been a music therapist for 10 years. She earned an M.A in Music Therapy from Bar Ilan University and has been part of the therapeutic staff at Bet Elazraki Children’s Home for nine years. As a music therapist she has treated psychiatric groups, the mentally handicapped, and adults through the Ministry of Education. In addition, she treats children with behavioral problems and counsels their parents.

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