

Anger Managed: Using Music Therapy Techniques at the County Jail

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Abstract

The goal of our presentation was to inform fellow student music therapists who have not had music therapy experience in a forensic setting about providing music therapy services in a jail setting with many safety rules limiting types of activities and materials which are allowed. Our previous research grants to develop clinical applications for percussion and dance courses and to examine racial attitudes of inmates prepared us for this work. We shared the results of this research with our peers at this conference.

Methodology included weekly provision of music therapy anger management sessions in multiple contexts for adult inmates and juveniles along with session critiques and therapeutic processing in supervision. Techniques which were effective for inmates included but are not limited to: therapeutic issues sessions with song-writing, lyric analysis, theatre and art projects paired with music, expressive singing and musical performance involving energy release, use of music and sign language for emotional expression, and musical relaxation activities. Inmates reported positive mental and physical changes, identified their anger triggers, and planned and practiced choosing and using healthy responses to anger triggers.

Anger Management Goals

- Identify anger triggers
- Identify usual choices of personal responses to anger triggers
- Identify vicious cycles related to anger
- Develop successful tools for redirection away from vicious cycles related to anger
- Identify alternative responses to anger that would be considered healthy and safe
- Successfully choose healthy responses to anger triggers in the heat of the action
- Authentically participate in role play that involves choosing healthy and safe alternatives for anger expression
- Develop use of music for relaxation
- Develop use of music for healthy emotional expression
- Develop use of music to channel emotional expression via healthy outlets and redirect/deflate anger
- Develop awareness of emotions
- Develop musical repertoire of songs to use for redirection away from vicious anger cycles
- Develop coping skills for dealing with negative emotions
- Develop spiritual support system
- Develop insight and problem solving skills

Activities for Expression

- Lyric analysis to familiar songs
- Therapeutic issues sessions with song-writing
- Theatre and art projects paired with music
- Expressive singing and musical performance involving energy release
- Use of music and sign language for emotional expression
- Musical relaxation activities

Lyric Analysis



Are you living in your baggage?

Yes! Habits; the way you live your life; past abuse; guilt; the ways I take my troubles with me everywhere I go

Are other people living in your baggage? How did they become victims of your 'burdens'?

Yes! My kids are victims; shame; complaining; hearing what they shouldn't; blaming them for my problems

How might you separate others from your baggage in a healthy way?

Learn new behaviors to replace the old ones; "turn around"; forgiveness; taking responsibility;

What are some ways to "clean out"?

Exercise my mind, body, soul; express feelings through writing and music; counseling

Dance and Movement Activities

- Uses of Imagery with Movement
- Carrying buckets; different walks; opening doors
- Thinking before taking action; looking before moving
- Decision making – pause, wait, stop
- Use of space – width, length, volume
- Working options: Sitting, standing, lying
- Linking of movement with emotion
- Relaxation/Tension continuum of responses
- Constructive rest
- Miming: Passing stick, picking apples, changing light bulbs, painting ceiling, invisible yo-yos

Bring on the Games

This is an example of a song written
by a female inmate

*Another day has almost come and gone,
Can't imagine what else could go wrong.
Sometimes I'd like to run away
A single woman but not anyone's slave.*

*'Cause tomorrow's another game to play
and I'm pitchin' anyway
So bring on the game.*

*It's almost like the hard times might never leave,
A couple more and they all start to retreat.
Yeah, I might feel like I have no feet
I might stand up and fight instead,
I might be barely breathing, but I'm not dead.*

*'Cause tomorrow's another game to play
and I'm pitchin' anyway
So bring on the game.*

*Bring on the games
Bring on the games*

Therapeutic Movie Night

Finding Nemo.....Responsibility & Friendship
I Am Sam.....Family & Relationships
The Way Home.....Love & Acceptance
Saving Sarah Cain.....Prioritizing
The Lease Among You.....Sacrifice
The Ultimate Gift.....Change
End of the Spear.....Forgiveness
The Pursuit of Happiness.....Perseverance
Amish Grace.....Decision Making
No Greater Love.....Dealing with Despair
The Blindside.....Standing up for what you believe in

Perspective Changes

During our time with music therapy at the jail, we've learned that inmates are people just like us. We all have issues that we need to work on. Unfortunately, the criminal justice system doesn't always make it easy for the inmates to change. We hope, by continuing to use music therapy for intervention, to help them confront their problems and make positive changes in their lives.