



THE SOUND OF
SUPPORT

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MUSIC AS A TOOL FOR MENTAL WELLNESS

INTRODUCTION TO



The Sound of Support



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INTRODUCTION TO

The Sound of Support

Children, young people and adults with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) experience the world in unique and diverse ways. Sensory processing differences, communication challenges, attention regulation needs, learning differences and emotional intensity can all shape how someone engages with their environment.

Music can be a powerful and flexible tool in supporting these differences. Within UK practice, music therapy is a regulated profession guided by the British Association for Music Therapy, with an emphasis on person-centred, ethical, relational work.

Alongside this, SEND guidance such as that promoted by the Autism Education Trust encourages adults to understand individual needs, adapt environments, and prioritise regulation and predictability.

This booklet explores practical musical techniques that can be used safely and thoughtfully to support individuals with a wide range of SEND needs - including autism, ADHD, learning disabilities, sensory processing differences, speech and language difficulties, and social communication needs.

Music is not a cure. It is a support - and when used responsively, it can make daily life more manageable, meaningful and connected.



My sessions are tailored to meet the unique needs of each child or adult, ensuring a personalized and effective experience.

- Laura Seymour

CHAPTER I

Why Music Works Across SEND Needs

Music is structured, sensory, and relational — three qualities that make it especially supportive within SEND contexts.

1. Structure

Rhythm and repetition provide predictability. Predictability reduces anxiety and supports transitions.

2. Sensory Input

Music can be:

- Auditory (sound)
- Tactile (vibration)
- Proprioceptive (movement with rhythm)
- Visual (watching instruments)

Importantly, sensory input can be adjusted — tempo, volume, complexity — making it adaptable for different needs.

3. Relationship

Music creates shared attention without requiring complex verbal interaction. Two people can connect through rhythm, listening, or parallel play.

British music therapy practice since 2020 has emphasised co-regulation and attunement — matching the individual's energy before gently supporting change.

Reflective question:

What does this person need right now — more energy or less?



CHAPTER II

Musical Techniques for Regulation

Regulation must come before learning, social engagement, or behaviour change.

Technique 1: Steady Beat Grounding

Best for:

- Anxiety
- ADHD
- Emotional overwhelm

How:

- Tap a steady rhythm (knee, drum, table)
- Keep tempo slow and even
- Encourage breathing alongside beat

Why it works:

Predictable rhythm helps organise the nervous system.

Technique 2: Matching and Modulating

Best for:

- Escalation
- High energy
- Dysregulation

How:

1. Match the person's tempo or intensity musically
2. Gradually slow or soften
3. Watch for signs of settling

This mirrors therapeutic improvisation techniques used in UK music therapy.

Technique 3: Sensory Sound Choice

Best for:

- Sensory processing differences
- Communication difficulties

Offer two sound options:

“Drum or shaker?”

Allow control and consent.

Choice reduces anxiety and builds agency.



CHAPTER III

Musical Techniques for Communication and Social Development

Music can support:

- Turn-taking
- Listening skills
- Shared attention
- Emotional expression
- Cooperative play

Technique 4: Copy and Expand

1. Copy the individual's sound
2. Pause
3. Add a small change
4. Wait

This builds communication without pressure.



CHAPTER III CONTINUED

Technique 5: Start-Stop Songs

Best for:

- Transition difficulties
- Autistic individuals who benefit from predictability

Use the same short melody to:

- Begin activities
- End activities

Consistency builds safety.

Technique 6: Call and Response

Best for:

- Speech and language support
- Social interaction practice

Adult: “Ba-ba!”

Child: repeats or responds

Keep it playful, short and pressure-free.

Everyday Implementation Tips

- Keep sessions short (5-10 minutes is enough)
- Always allow opt-out
- End on success
- Observe body language
- Avoid overwhelming volume
- Follow the individual's lead

Music should support - never overwhelm.



CHAPTER IV

Supporting Specific SEND Profiles Through Music

Autism

- Prioritise predictability
- Reduce sudden changes
- Allow parallel participation
- Respect sensory thresholds

Music can provide a safe shared space without forcing eye contact or conversation.

ADHD

- Incorporate movement
- Keep activities short
- Use rhythm to support focus
- Build in active breaks

Rhythm can act as an external organiser for attention.

Learning Disabilities

- Use repetition
- Keep instructions simple
- Pair music with visual cues
- Celebrate small successes

Music supports memory through repetition and emotional association.

Speech & Language Needs

- Use singing to support rhythm of speech
- Slow tempo for clarity
- Repeat key phrases musically

Singing can reduce pressure compared to spoken demands.

CONCLUSION

The Sound of Support

The sound of support is not about perfect singing or musical skill.

It is about attunement, responsiveness and understanding.

When used thoughtfully and in line with UK SEND guidance and British music therapy standards, music can:

- Support emotional regulation
- Encourage communication
- Reduce anxiety
- Build confidence
- Strengthen connection

Across a wide range of SEND needs, music offers something unique: it meets individuals where they are.

Small, consistent musical moments - offered with patience and care - can become powerful tools for support.

If you feel that more individualised intervention would be beneficial, consider seeking support from an HCPC-registered music therapist.

