



Serenity
Sensory
Music

MUSICAL BRIDGES

*Helping Children With ADHD and
Autism Through Therapeutic Sound*

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Made with **GAMMA**

A stylized illustration of a woman with long brown hair and a child with curly brown hair sitting on the floor, playing two large, round, brown drums. The woman is on the right, holding a drumstick and looking at the child. The child is on the left, also holding a drumstick and looking at the drums. The background is a soft, warm-toned illustration of a room with a lamp and some decorative elements. The text is overlaid on the top left of the image.

Musical Bridges

Helping Children with ADHD and Autism Through Therapeutic Sound

A practical and hopeful guide for parents, carers, educators, and support workers. Discover how music can build meaningful connections, support communication, and celebrate every child's unique way of being in the world.

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This booklet is designed to be dipped into at your own pace. Each chapter builds on the last, but you are welcome to start wherever feels most relevant to you and your child right now.

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How to use this booklet:

Read it cover to cover, or use it as a reference tool.

The practical activities and parent tips can be tried at home at any time.

There is no right or wrong way to engage with music alongside your child.



Introduction

When words feel difficult, when emotions become overwhelming, or when the world feels too loud, too bright, or too unpredictable, music can offer something different. It can meet a child exactly where they are, without requiring anything in return.

Both Autism and ADHD can influence how a child communicates, pays attention, regulates their emotions, and experiences the world around them. These differences are not deficits. They are part of what makes each child unique. Therapeutic music-making provides a gentle, flexible space for connection, expression, play, and understanding to grow.

"Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and life to everything."

Plato

In the United Kingdom, Music Therapy is a well-established clinical profession. Registered Music Therapists work with children across a wide range of developmental and emotional needs, using live music and improvisation to build relationships, support communication, and foster wellbeing. This booklet draws on those therapeutic principles and translates them into practical, everyday approaches that families can use at home.

Did You Know? Music Therapy has been practised in the UK since the 1980s. The profession is regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), ensuring high standards of practice and safeguarding for all clients.



Chapter 1: Understanding Autism, ADHD, and Sensory Processing

Autism and ADHD are neurodevelopmental differences that shape how a child perceives, processes, and responds to the world. Many children experience both, and each child's profile is entirely their own. Understanding these differences is the first step towards meaningful support.

Autism

Autistic children may experience differences in social communication, sensory processing, and patterns of behaviour or interest. Many autistic children have remarkable strengths in pattern recognition, honesty, creativity, and deep focus on topics they love.

ADHD

Children with ADHD may experience differences in attention, impulse control, and activity levels. Many have extraordinary creativity, energy, enthusiasm, and the ability to think in original and innovative ways.

Common Overlaps

- Sensory processing differences
- Emotional regulation challenges
- Executive functioning differences
- Intense interests and passions

Understanding the Child Behind the Diagnosis

Labels can be useful for accessing support, but they do not define a child. An autistic child who loves rhythm and movement may respond beautifully to drumming activities. A child with ADHD who struggles to sit still may thrive when music involves their whole body. Seeing the whole child, not just the diagnosis, opens up possibilities.

Communication Styles

Some children communicate primarily through behaviour, movement, or sound rather than words. All of these are valid and meaningful forms of communication.

Sensory Processing

Children may be hypersensitive (over-responsive) or hyposensitive (under-responsive) to sound, touch, light, or movement. Music can be adapted to meet either profile.

Individual Strengths

Many autistic and ADHD children show exceptional musical memory, pitch sensitivity, rhythmic ability, and emotional responsiveness to music.

❏ **Key Takeaway:** Every child is unique. Understanding their individual sensory profile, communication style, and strengths is more valuable than any diagnostic label.

Chapter 2: Why Music Creates Bridges for Connection and Communication

Music operates in ways that spoken language cannot. It does not require words, it can be adapted instantly to match a child's emotional state, and it offers structure alongside freedom. For many autistic and ADHD children, music feels safer than conversation because it is predictable, patterned, and non-judgemental.



Shared Attention

Playing music together creates moments of joint engagement. When a child and adult focus on the same sound or rhythm, a bridge of shared attention is formed naturally.



Turn-Taking Through Sound

Musical call-and-response and turn-taking games build the foundations of conversation without the pressure of finding the right words.



Emotional Expression

Music allows children to express feelings they may not yet have words for. A drum can hold anger, a lullaby can hold sadness, a fast rhythm can hold excitement.

The Science Behind Music and Connection

Research in Music Therapy, including work by the Nordoff Robbins Centre and the University of the West of England, has shown that improvisational music-making activates brain regions associated with social engagement, emotional regulation, and reward. Studies have demonstrated improvements in social communication, joint attention, and parent-child relationships when Music Therapy is used alongside other support.

Did You Know? The brain processes music across multiple regions simultaneously, including those linked to emotion, memory, movement, and social connection. This is why music can reach children in ways that other approaches cannot.

"Music is the shorthand of emotion."

Leo Tolstoy

Key Takeaway: Music creates connection without demanding it. It offers a safe, flexible medium through which communication and trust can grow at the child's own pace.

Chapter 3: Therapeutic Music Activities for Everyday Life

You do not need to be a musician to use music therapeutically with your child. These activities are designed to be simple, flexible, and adaptable to different ages, interests, and sensory preferences. Follow your child's lead, keep it playful, and remember that there is no wrong way to engage.



Rhythm Copying

Tap a simple rhythm on a table or drum and invite your child to copy it. Then let them lead and you follow. This builds turn-taking and shared attention.



Call-and-Response Songs

Use simple songs with predictable phrases. Sing a line and pause, giving your child space to respond with a sound, word, or movement.



Instrument Exploration

Offer a range of instruments (shakers, drums, chime bars) and allow free exploration. Notice which sounds your child is drawn to and join them there.



Movement and Music

Play music and move together. Use scarves, ribbons, or just your bodies. Match your movement to your child's energy level and rhythm.



Emotion Songs

Create or find songs that name feelings. Sing about being happy, tired, excited, or cross. This helps children connect emotions with language and sound.



Regulation Playlists

Build personalised playlists for different states: calming music for overwhelm, energising music for low mood, familiar music for transitions.

Top Tips for Parents and Carers

- Keep sessions short: 5 to 10 minutes is plenty
- Follow your child's interest, not your plan
- Use familiar songs for comfort and predictability
- Reduce background noise and visual distraction
- Celebrate any response: a glance, a smile, a sound
- Be consistent: regular short sessions work best

When Things Do Not Go To Plan

Sometimes a child may not respond, may become overwhelmed, or may want to stop. This is not failure. It is information. Notice what happened, adjust your approach, and try again another time. Flexibility and attunement are the most important therapeutic tools you have.



If a child becomes distressed, stop the activity, reduce stimulation, and offer a calm, predictable environment. Their wellbeing always comes first.

Key Takeaway: Simple, playful musical activities used regularly at home can support communication, regulation, and connection. You are your child's most important musical partner.

Chapter 4: Building Confidence, Relationships, and Emotional Wellbeing Through Music

Every time a child experiences success with music, however small, their confidence grows. A child who struggles to join a group activity may confidently play a drum. A child who rarely makes eye contact may look up and smile when a familiar song begins. These moments matter.

Building Self-Confidence

Music offers immediate, tangible success. When a child plays an instrument, sings a note, or completes a rhythm, they experience mastery. Celebrate these moments warmly and specifically: "I loved how you played that rhythm with me."

Supporting Friendships and Social Interaction

Group music activities, such as drum circles or singing groups, provide structured opportunities for social interaction. The shared focus on music reduces the social pressure that can make friendships feel difficult.

Strengthening Family Relationships

Singing together, dancing in the kitchen, or listening to a favourite song in the car creates shared positive experiences. These moments of connection build the secure relationships that children need to thrive.

Supporting Emotional Wellbeing

Music can help children identify, express, and process emotions. Over time, a child who uses music to regulate and communicate develops a stronger sense of self and greater emotional resilience.

Creating a Musical Toolkit for Home

A musical toolkit does not need to be expensive or elaborate. It simply needs to be accessible, familiar, and meaningful to your child.

- A small basket of instruments: shakers, a drum, chime bars, or homemade instruments
- A personalised playlist on a tablet or phone for calming, energising, and transition times
- A favourite comfort song that you sing together regularly
- A visual song book with pictures of familiar songs and rhymes
- A "music corner" with soft seating, headphones, and instruments for independent exploration

❏ **Key Takeaway:** Confidence, relationships, and wellbeing grow through repeated positive musical experiences. A simple, consistent musical toolkit at home can make a lasting difference.

Reflection and Connection

Taking a moment to reflect on your child's relationship with music can help you notice strengths, preferences, and opportunities for connection that you may not have seen before. Use these prompts for personal reflection or to guide conversations with other adults supporting your child.

1

What does my child respond to?

Notice which sounds, rhythms, or songs capture your child's attention. Do they move to music? Do they hum? Do they prefer silence or sound? These observations are valuable.

2

When does music help most?

Consider times of day or situations where music seems to support your child: during transitions, at bedtime, when overwhelmed, or during play. Build on what already works.

3

What does my child communicate through music?

Listen carefully to how your child uses sound and movement. A loud drum may express excitement or frustration. A soft hum may signal calm. These are meaningful communications.

4

How can I join my child musically?

Think about one way you could engage with your child through music this week. It might be as simple as singing along to a song they love, or tapping a rhythm together.

"Every child is a different kind of flower, and all together, they make this world a beautiful garden."

Unknown

Did You Know? Research shows that when parents and carers engage in musical activities with their children, it strengthens attachment, improves communication, and supports emotional regulation more effectively than passive listening alone.

Conclusion: Celebrating Every Child's Unique Musical Journey

There is no single way to communicate, to learn, to play, or to connect. Every autistic and ADHD child carries within them a unique way of experiencing and responding to the world. Music does not try to change that. It meets each child where they are and says: *you are welcome here exactly as you are.*

Connection

Music builds bridges between children and the people who love and support them, even when words are not available.

Communication

Every sound, movement, and response is meaningful. Music gives children many ways to be heard and understood.

Creativity

Improvisation and musical play celebrate each child's individuality, imagination, and unique way of expressing themselves.

Wellbeing

Regular, positive musical experiences support emotional regulation, confidence, and a sense of belonging.

"Neurodiversity is not a problem to be solved. It is a difference to be celebrated. Music gives us a language for that celebration."

Laura Seymour, Serenity Sensory Music

We hope this booklet has offered you practical ideas, reassurance, and a renewed sense of possibility. Whether you are a parent singing a bedtime song, a teacher leading a rhythm game, or a therapist improvising alongside a child, you are building something meaningful. You are building a bridge.



Thank you for reading. For more resources, support, and information about Music Therapy, visit www.serenitysensorymusic.co.uk

Quick Reference: Key Takeaways

A summary of the most important ideas from this booklet, for easy reference and sharing with others who support your child.

See the whole child

Diagnoses provide useful information, but every child is unique. Focus on their individual strengths, interests, and sensory profile rather than labels alone.

Music is a bridge, not a cure

Therapeutic music-making supports connection, communication, and wellbeing. It does not aim to change who a child is, but to celebrate and support them.

Follow the child's lead

The most effective musical interactions happen when adults attune to the child's interests, energy, and responses. Flexibility and observation are your greatest tools.

Small moments matter

A shared glance during a song, a child copying your rhythm, a smile during a familiar tune. These are meaningful moments of connection. Notice and celebrate them.

Consistency builds trust

Regular, predictable musical experiences help children feel safe and supported. Even five minutes a day can make a difference over time.

You are enough

You do not need to be a musician. Your presence, warmth, and willingness to engage musically with your child is the most powerful therapeutic tool available to you.

Serenity Sensory Music

Providing therapeutic music support, resources, and guidance for children with Autism, ADHD, and sensory processing differences across the UK.

www.serenitysensorymusic.co.uk

Further Resources

- British Association for Music Therapy: bamt.org
- Nordoff Robbins Music Therapy: nordoff-robbins.org.uk
- National Autistic Society: autism.org.uk
- ADHD Foundation: adhdfoundation.org.uk
- Music Therapy for children: HCPC registered practitioners