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## Surviving as a Music Therapist

### The Importance of Communication With Parents and Related Health Professionals

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In music therapy, establishing relationship among music, clients, and therapists is an important factor in determining success. During my trainee period in NY, I thought that making a musical and therapeutic relationship with the client was the most important thing in therapy. After the training, I came to realize that I had to communicate not only with the client, but also others.

When I worked at an integrated preschool in the U.S., children who were too hard to control in a classroom were sent to music therapy by teachers and other therapists. In other words, children who were not ready for any other therapies or class activities were sent to music therapy due to their interest in music. After a week or a month, when they showed changes and improvements in speech or behavior, children were taken away from music to other therapies such as speech therapy or counseling. Teachers and other therapists agreed that children respond well to music, but they did not fully comprehend the therapeutic aspects of music. It seemed that for them, music therapy was only a preparation for children to get better results in other therapies. To continue providing music therapy to children, I constantly had to explain the importance of music therapy to teachers and other therapists through a case presentation in staff meetings, as a part of the therapy process.

Since returning to Korea, I have been working at a music therapy clinic that specializes in music therapy for children and adolescents. First I thought that it was great because I could now concentrate on building the therapeutic relationship with the client, without having to deal with other professionals. Soon I realized that I need to communicate with parents. When children are first diagnosed as PDD, Autism, ADHD, delayed speech, and other conditions, parents become desperate for help and not sure about what is the best for their children. At the same time, they want to avoid the situation. In most cases, children are already familiar with music, so that parents choose music therapy service not as a form of 'therapy' but rather as a play or a music lesson. Again, when the children show some signs of change or improvement after 1 to 2 months, parents gain their confidence in their decision and want to stop music therapy in order to seek other therapies such as speech, cognitive, sensory integration, physical, occupational, art, and even movement therapy. Also music therapy can be the first one to cut down in all the forms of therapies, when parents need to make a decision which therapy to stop for many reasons such as expenses, time, and preference.

For a music therapist, the client's improvements and changes through music are important, but communication with the parents cannot be ignored to continue the therapeutic outcomes. There are several ways that I have tried to help the parents to understand the benefits of music therapy for their child. Understanding the therapeutic aspects of music can give parents a motive to continue the sessions, therefore, after each session I spend time explaining what the child did in the session, how it worked for the child, and why expressive components of music

are important in terms of the child's development. Since parents are not allowed to observe a live session, a verbal processing time with parents is essential. With parents' consent, every session is video taped for therapeutic and research purposes. During parent conference, I use recorded tape to explain how the child responds and enjoys the music. Approximately 1 to 2 months into the therapy, I arrange a parent conference in order to help both the parents and myself. Through the conference, the parents have the opportunity to comprehend what the child is experiencing by watching video clips which are chosen and edited for that purpose. At the same time, the therapist gathers additional information about the child from the parents by discussing what is observed in the clips.

Also, I have tried to communicate with other professionals who work with my client, if possible. As one way of sharing the information with other professionals, I compare my observation of the child's progression with those of other therapists. In addition, I invite the parents to a music therapy improvisation group, if they are interested in it. Being in a session as a client is not easy for parents or anyone in the beginning, but once they experience the power of music through the group, they become enthusiastic in music therapy especially for their child. Sometimes, parents still want to stop music therapy even after all of these efforts, but at least they have some belief in music therapy that it works for their child's development. In fact, I learned about the importance of holding parent conferences and music therapy improvisation groups at Nordoff-Robbins Center for Music Therapy at New York University.

To be able to thrive as a music therapist, we need clients, and one way to keep clients is having a reliable and trusting relationships. In the case of a child client, we need to keep a good relationship with the guardians or the one who is in charge of deciding which therapy to choose. A good outcome from music therapy such as a client's improvement in music, behavior, or speech is important for a therapist, but sometimes it is not enough to persuade parents to let the child participate in music therapy. Communication is required. I think our profession is not only about music and the client, but also about making an effort to communicate with all people involved in therapy. To be able to be successful as a music therapist, I had to learn about the ways of developing good relationships with parents and other professionals.

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