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How to Use Music Therapy to Promote Communication Skills with Individuals with Autism

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Abstract

First year music therapists are often unprepared when finding the most appropriate means of working with individuals with Autism. Music therapists understanding of Autism and music therapy interventions were examined through a needs assessment survey. This survey revealed that first year therapists have the basic understanding of interventions and characteristics of autism but do not line up with current research and evidence-based uses of interventions.

Introduction

Music therapy and Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) emerged around the same time. This has led to a trial and error approach to treatment and specific interventions that are the most effective for the population.

Music therapists receive some training in ASD however it varies from one school to another. Once they are out in the clinical field they may not have the tools needed when working with individuals with ASD.

Methods

The study consisted of a one-time anonymous needs assessment survey lasting approximately 20 minutes.

A Survey Research design was used to collect quantitative data through the needs assessment survey. A cross-sectional survey design examined the therapists opinions and practices by evaluating their current knowledge and understanding of different evidence-based strategies using music therapy with individuals with autism.

Data

Six female and one male board certified music therapists from a local therapy center participated in the survey. There was one masters degree in music therapy and six bachelors degree in music therapy. Therapists experience ranged from 2 months to 6 years working as a music therapist.

Analysis

The results of the survey demonstrated that music therapists had an understanding of autism and its primary characteristics.

Music therapists were able to identify the characteristics that are associated with some individuals with autism but were unable to identify difficulties with sensory skills.

Music therapists were able to identify some forms of treatment and assessment with individuals with autism however they were related more to other services rather than being specific music therapy techniques.

Discussion

Music therapists need a handbook to help with criterion, treatment, and methods which are always evolving. Further research should be conducted looking at using music therapy to address social and sensory needs with individuals with autism.

References

