

Music Therapy

Delphine: [00:00:00] Welcome back to the access to education podcast, where we talk about everything having to do with learning disabilities and learning challenges today on the show, we're going to talk about music, but not just any kind of music today. We're going to talk about music therapy. My guest today is Cheryl Lee Campbell, a Toronto musician and music therapist working in the East end of Toronto.

Cheryl has worked with clients who have diagnosis such as cerebral palsy, ASD, and other genetic disorders. Her work has led her to work with children from infants in the NICU to working at Holland Bloorview is children's rehabilitation hospital. She offers programs for both children and families working to a common goal to enhance a child's life.

Cheryl, welcome to the show.

Cheryl: [00:00:43] Hello. Thank you for having me.

Delphine: [00:00:45] Nice to have you here. So, let's jump in with the first really obvious question. Okay. What is music therapy?

Cheryl: [00:00:53] Okay, so obvious question. Difficult answer. So, music [00:01:00] therapy, I could go on probably for five minutes and describe what it is, but in a really brief description, music therapy is when you have a, an accredited music therapist.

So, in, in Canada, that's going to be an MTA, which is. Is a therapist accredited. I don't know if you have people listening in the US, but it would be an MTBC there, which is music therapists, board certified. So different countries have their different credential. And that person works with people across the lifespan.

There are people who are music therapists who work in the birthing room and there are also people who work with people. Palliatively right. So right across from birth to death and they work with people to help with too. Improve and enhance health of all kinds. And many different domains.

So, we're talking, cognitive development all the way [00:02:00] over to psychosocial concerns or psychotherapy with somebody who's has dementia. For instance, you would be working with for very different goals than you might be. Working towards for somebody who is a child in the case of children, it's often developmental things that you're working on.

And beyond that, it really is very client focused. The music therapist will do an assessment and then work with the client or in the case of a child, sometimes with the client's parents to create goals and then figure out how to use their tool, which is music to achieve those goals.

Delphine: [00:02:52] That's a lot of information and I'm processing the leg from it.

The thing that got me was from like, from the [00:03:00] birthing room, all the way across. I think when I think of music therapy, I think of it in a very narrow window of our non-communicative ASD children. That's where I see music therapy. And so, I'm trying to like branch my vision of it further. But you talked about an assessment that happened.

So, when I think of assessment, I think of an assessment as a teacher where I would sit with the child and I would read a book and I would tick off, how many words did they get right in that sentence. And do they understand what happens at the beginning of the end, in the middle and all that good stuff?

What does an assessment look like for music therapy?

Cheryl: [00:03:38] Okay. So, an assessment for music therapy will, again, depend on the type of client. But for a child, as an example, when the child comes into the room, I'm going to be looking. For first of all, a bunch of non-musical things. So, I'll be looking to see what [00:04:00] their strengths are as well as to see, for instance if a child has.

More strengthened in one arm than the other. Then I'm going to want to keep note of that because that's going to tell me where they're going to, how they're going to play an instrument, right? Cause this is part of music therapy is that we have to adjust what we're doing. And that might mean that you might give them a different instrument to play based on what their particular strengths are or what their challenges are.

So there's all of that stuff. And then at the other end, There's music stuff. So, the child themselves is not going to know that they're being assessed. They're just going to think, Oh, we're playing some nice music, but I'm going to be listening to hear. Okay. So, they're playing the instrument. How are they playing that instrument?

Does that indicate. That they're trying to play the instrument the way they think that they're supposed to play the instrument. Do they seem to enjoy that [00:05:00] instrument? Are they drawn to that instrument over another instrument? And what about their interaction with me? That's a really big one. Do they even notice that I'm playing an instrument?

If I join them? I will follow them in their music making. Do they notice that I'm following them? And a lot of kids really do notice that very rapidly. And that actually is one of the ways that music therapists can have kind of an in, especially with those children who are non-verbal who do not speak, we can get in there with the music, and we can start to use that as a language.

And go back and forth, and you can often get that going really quickly. Parents do find that kind of shocking sometimes, but it's not really the music therapist that's doing that. It's just the draw of the music itself. So that example there for me, [00:06:00] with you, like they pick up the instrument, they start shaking the Maracas for example, and then you copy them.

That's their communication in terms of how they can communicate. So, the speed might indicate the excitement that they have exactly in the instrument. That's right. And I will watch to see, where the, usually when I work with kids the first time, it really depends on the child and the age and all sorts of things.

But when they walk into the room, I will have instruments, which I have specifically placed around the room at specific places, because I want to see where they go, because that tells me a lot about them. Sometimes. They will avoid an instrument. And then I have to try to, I make note of that because that's something that tells me something and I just don't know what it is yet.

There's some reason that they're hiding that instrument. It could be that they don't understand it. It could be that it's [00:07:00] too hard. It could be that they don't like that sound. That kind of sound right. And that tells me a lot about that child. And in some cases, with kids with ASD, you might be that might end up being part of the goals, right?

If they are having some auditory integration issues, then the tolerance of that instrument that they're avoiding. Could be somehow down the road, maybe something to pull into those goals. And then that if you can somehow try to make it fun, then down the track hopefully there'll be a little bit of a wider tolerance and make their life a little bit easier as a result.

So, if we take. A student with an exceptionality of something outside of ASD. So, I think ASD is probably what most listeners would say. So, when we say just for listeners who maybe don't know when we talk about ASD, we're just short forming the autism spectrum [00:08:00] disorder. So, we know that autism is on a spectrum and that's the one I think that many of us see in the movies.

Delphine: [00:08:06] You've seen it in the movies where they use it as an example of how the child was able to communicate. But I'm trying to think of other examples for those families who are listening. So, they might have a child with down syndrome, for example, or they might have a child who has a sensory processing disorder of some sort or an auditory processing disorder.

How. It not how question isn't how that the way in which you work with them as a music therapist is similar in terms of your trying to get them to pick the instrument and then create a goal around what you want to have communicated back or how they behave with the music. Is that kind of no. So that will tell me lots of about the child and will give me.

Ideas as to ways that I can work with them. But usually the [00:09:00] goals are non-musical. So, the goal, you can have some musical goals as well, but often the major goals are non-musical. So, it might be for instance that a child has trouble with impulse control, just to use that as an example, for those ADHD families like mine out there of Hmm, how can I use music to work on impulse?

So go ahead. I'm curious to see how this goes well with music is a really great way to work on impulse control because you can pick a really super fun song and you can work in a break in that song and everybody has to stop, and you have to wait. And then the music goes again and it becomes really funny.

And then they, it's not such a chore then. And I think that's often where music therapy can really help kids. Is that it's fun, right? It's not. So hard [00:10:00] necessarily because the reward is this fun thing. And it's not that you can't have other fun ways of doing it, but you know, it can be a really fun way.

I have a shaker song. Do you want me to sing it? All right. Have a shaker. Here's my here's just an example. Okay. Kids love shakers and they're one of those instruments. That's great. Because even if a kid. It's not able to grasp a shake reach and, wrap it around their arm or their leg or whatever.

So they're very useful. This is just a safety sheet. Okay. Hey.

Shit.

And then I can hold that as well. This I want and

and you try to push it hard, farther, and farther along and see how, and because it's kind of a dance-y song as well. There's often a lot of movement around the room when they're doing that. So they don't just, [00:11:00] they're not just. Stopping their arm. Like they stop their whole body and that can be really challenging, but and sometimes there's fits of giggles, but those are good though.

Giggles. Great. So let's talk about who music therapy is for. Cause I think we've talked about a very specific band of children who potentially might benefit from, but can music therapy really be used for all children regardless of whether or not there is an exceptionality or whether they're neuro-diverse or whether they're neuro-typical can it be for all totally.

It can. So as an example, a lot of kids right now are dealing with anxiety because of the pandemic. And one thing that a music therapist will work with kids or anyone on is a playlist that they can [00:12:00] use for themselves to lower their anxiety. And I mean, if you're now I will say if you're going to work with a music therapist on Anxiety or depression or any of that sort of thing.

And you're in Ontario, you need to have somebody who's a registered psychotherapist or who is in another way allowed to do that because the act of psychotherapy is controlled in Ontario. But assuming you have them in their music therapists who are both they can help you. Work on a playlist that you can then use at home.

They can do things like we do songwriting with kids to help them express themselves. We might do Lyrica Nalla PSSAs. So like for instance, if they have a song that they really like. Making share it with you. And then we can talk about why do they like that song, what the song means what the song means to them, maybe, you know, adjusted if it makes it feel more real to them.

And a lot of times [00:13:00] that will work really well in a group environment as well. Yeah, there's lots of. Different ways in which to use music therapy. It's quite, it's sort of in some ways, very similar to, if you had a. Challenge of movement. You might go to a physio therapist, right? So music therapist is usually that there is a challenge of some sort, but it doesn't have to be that the child has an exceptionality.

I mean, like everyone has challenges at some point, right? So my challenge is continually moving my keys. So can music therapists help me with constantly losing my keys. You could make up a song that reminds you where your keys I'd have to change the song every day. So how does it look different when you work with a child who's non-verbal to a child who is verbal, is there a difference in your approach [00:14:00] when you're working with a non-verbal compared to a verbal.

So a non-verbal child, I am aware that our main form of communication together is probably going to be music. Now that said, there's lots of body language that goes on and there's, you know, eye to eye sometimes and all that kind of stuff as well. But the, that's the main difference, right?

A child who. Who speaks? We can, I can ask them what they're thinking of something. Whereas somebody who is non-verbal, I'm going to really watch them for the reaction,

because that's the way the person is reacting is how you structure your entire session with them. And you might drop everything you were planning to do on the day because it's not getting.

The reaction that's what is needed at that time. So that's the main difference. How long does a [00:15:00] session usually last for anywhere between half an hour and an hour? It depends on the age and the child themselves, right? Like you don't want, what you don't want is for it to become a chore. You want them to go out the door with still in a positive light.

So I, I tend to serve when I start with a kid, I will start with a lesser amount of time. And then if they seem to really want more than we can sort of increase the time I find that kids often do really well with half an hour, but it really depends. It really depends on the kid. How does a parent go about.

Deciding, whether they think music therapy is a good fit for them. So you're looking for therapies for your child, whether they're verbal, non-verbal exceptionality, no exceptionality. There's something going on. You're looking to dig deeper. You're looking for help. How do [00:16:00] parents, or what should parents consider when they're trying to figure out if music therapy is going to be a good fit, are there some ways or things that they would be able to tap into to know that it might work well, if your kid likes music, That's a pretty good, you know, most kids do like music.

And some kids are very drawn to music. If it is, if you have a kid who is really struggling with sound and being. Overwhelmed with sound. It's not that you can't get a music therapist involved and often it can be really helpful. But that's something that, you're going to want to start a chat with the music therapist beforehand.

It might be something that you want to do and integrate with an OT as well. And music therapists often do work with other providers. So that's what you know, and that sort of situation, I would say, get your music therapists, get your OT, get them talking together.

See if you know what maybe the OT [00:17:00] first and then add on a music therapist, just cause you don't want. You don't want it to be this really negative experience, but most music therapists that I know are going to back off, they're not going to come out a child, like all music blasting. That's not how we work.

Have we will sit there silently. Like usually we wait the, you wait till the child leads, the child starts everything. And then the music therapist will surge join in usually. So the child will set the stage for the session by walking through the door based on. What sort of frame of mind they're in.

Yeah. So you're not just going to have a drum kit at the back of the space and like just hammer on the drums the minute they walk in the door. No. We're not going to do that. Speaking of drum kits, I know you had, Morocco's just, now you're a little shaker, a little baby shaker, right? What are [00:18:00] some of the other instruments that you have used or do use, or that are used in music therapy?

Is it all instruments or is it

The drum kits, actually, when I did my internship at Holland Bloorview, they have a drum kit there and it's not the, you know, it's an electronic one. I can turn the volume down. Yeah.

And it was also easy to cert it, to talk in the back. But That gets some of the kids that just make B line, but then other kids would make a beeline for the piano.

Like it really just, some different children are drawn to different things and music therapists are out there all the time. Constantly trying to go back to Morgan starts. It's terrible. Actually, I have so many drums. One of the instruments that we use is called an ocean drum. Have you ever heard an ocean drum?

No, I don't think so. Hold on, let me just a second.

Okay. This is an ocean drum. So it makes, [00:19:00] sounds like waves. Now it might be quite loud, but

Oh yeah. I can totally hear the wave crashing and then stopping. Right. Exactly. And it's really easy to play. And it's very, a lot of people find that very calming. I actually almost like the rain sticks. Yes. Very much. It's the same sort of, and I actually find that water sounds, I don't know.

It seems to be something very deep within a lot of people that it really started. Grabs them and centers them. I often will use a, an ocean drum in long-term care as well, just before I leave with a group because it really pulls everybody down helps them to really Get on an even keel and a lot of kids, same thing.

I mean, just like anything else you will once in a while have somebody that reacts in a different way and that's okay too. And kids also really like to sort [00:20:00] of you can't see it clear, see, and it's got the beads, so it's really cool to watch. And some of them have mines just plain, but some of them have little pictures of fish the back as well.

So it's also this sort of visual thing. It's a really nice thing. And it's one of those, it's an instrument that. Pretty much every music fair, just test and nobody's else has ever heard of. I had never heard of it until today, so that's my something new for today. So thank you.

That's awesome. I'm wondering if you have any ideas for parents in terms of maybe musical apps that are really good or websites that are good for families to go and take a look at for music in terms of learning more about music therapy and, or in terms of integrating more music into their houses.

Sure. If you go on Google, there is a whole. Set of apps called Google Chrome lab. And it's like they're just [00:21:00] fun, little music sort of games you can do compose your own music and stuff. Kids really are really into that. I actually really enjoy it as well. Most of the apps. Most of my stuff.

There, there are music therapists who are very into the apps. I don't do the apps as much. But I do use a fair amount of Spotify and that kind of thing, because then I can integrate. Movement to music, which is really great, especially for kids like half an hour. You're not going to be just playing instruments that whole time.

You need something else to break things up. This youth be well aware. You know, just playing recordings and music, and I've got to say that recorded music. There's a bit of an idea out in the world that, it should be classical music and classical music is [00:22:00] lovely. And I did my bat before I did my master's in music therapy many years ago.

I did my Bachelor of Music and then I did an artist diploma in voice. So, I'm a very. Very trained in the classical manner. So I have a very big appreciation for that, but really the best kind of music is a preferred music. That's the music for whatever reason, says something to you at this time.

So if I, if a child really likes some stuff you might, it might get to the parents on the 10th or 15th. Playing there's nothing. It's obviously something that for whatever reason has really appealed to your child. So why not try playing that music and interpreting it in a different way, play maybe dancing with some scarves or you [00:23:00] you can take out some art materials and.

Create some sort of a painting or a drawing or whatever that is inspired by that. Those are two really good ways to use music at home. The other really fun thing is to take, if you have a drumstick or a mallet, that's great, but it doesn't have to be, take something that you can sort of hit with, but isn't going to enjoy it.

Thanks. And you don't have something just your hands are fine. I have not, no, I don't have any right here, but that have little Soft ends on them. And then you can go on like a musical scavenger hunt in your house and go with your parent. Of course you don't want to just send, especially the little ones on their own, but you go around your house and you shake things and you hit them with the stick and you see what makes music.

Cheryl: [00:23:53] Right. And they love that. I don't know if you've You don't live in Toronto too. You definitely do. Yep. You do in the East end as well. Yep. [00:24:00] Oh, okay. Okay. I should have known that. So if you have been to kids park that the science center, you have that whole area, and it's all just normal. Household items, and kids go up and they have the best time. And that's the thing it's very easy to think, Oh, you need this properly made drum from these X store. And that's great because they have really good sound, right? Like it's a beautiful sound, but professional drum, but you can also make really neat sounds by shaking a macaroni and cheese box.

I was thinking the ear worm saw that drive parents crazy. I was thinking of the, let it go song from frozen that played over and over and over. And my daughter would like dance feverously to it. And I'm thinking, wouldn't it be good to put it on and say to her here's some paint, paint a picture and see what comes out.

Like in my head, I was envisioning that sort of, a thing. I will say when my daughter was young, she's almost 13 [00:25:00] now, but when she has, we went on a family trip on a weekend to Ottawa and we left to right at rush hour and it took us and we had just bought the frozen soundtrack and it took us nine full play throughs, frozen soundtrack.

But I bet she was happy. The whole car ride so happy. There was absolutely no complaining. There was no, are we there yet? Nope. That's what you want in the back seat. Yeah, it was great. Cheryl, thank you so much for today's conversation. This was really fun to do, but also just to learn more and understand more about what music therapists do.

So thank you so much. And I'm really hoping that it'll help some other families maybe dig a little deeper and see if this is an option for them. So thank you again for sharing a bit about what you do. Can you tell people where they can find out more about you and what you do? Sure. So I own East Toronto music [00:26:00] therapy, which is East Toronto music therapy.ca.

So they can find me there. Perfect. Well, I will link that for people in the description of the podcast. And once again, Cheryl, thank you so much for this. Really fun and conversation. You're very welcome.