



Incorporating music therapy techniques into speech therapy

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Introduction

Some children with autism may be difficult to be engaged in a variety of activities and showed limited interest in toys. However, they may respond differently when participating in musical activities. Through musical activities, children's abilities to focus and interact with others are enhanced (Wan, Demaine, Zipse, Norton & Schlaug, 2010), which are fundamental for further developing receptive, expressive and pragmatic language. A speech therapist equipped with knowledge in clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals may help these children, which is incorporating music therapy into speech therapy.

Ways of incorporating music therapy techniques into speech therapy

To incorporate music therapy techniques into speech therapy, the speech therapist has to undergo three procedures:



(I) Assessment

Areas to be assessed include the following:

(i) Language and communication:

- Receptive language
- Expressive language
- Pragmatics skills
- Oral motor development
- Speech sounds repertoire

(ii) Interest towards music:

- Genre of music: children songs, pop songs, etc.
- Languages of songs: Cantonese, English, Mandarin, etc.
- Medium of music: live singing, videos, instruments, etc.
- Child's response to music: movement, joint attention, eye contact, sound production, etc.

After gathering the above information, the speech therapist sets communication training goals for the child, selects appropriate musical activities, and applies music therapy techniques to achieve the communication goals.

(II) Implementation

Below are some examples in the implementation stage:

(i) Area of communication focused: Receptive language

Goal: Following commands

Activity: Action song (Pang, 2017)

The speech therapist sings an action song (eg 人人快快到這裏) which consists of some repetitive lyrics and some gaps for inserting commands (e.g. 人人快快到這裏 拍拍手). The speech therapist selects commands that are appropriate to child's receptive language abilities to fill in the gap. Then, the speech therapist sings the song and does the actions with the child together. Next the speech therapist sings the same song again but let the child acts out the command by himself/herself. By applying the above steps, the child's ability to follow commands are enhanced progressively with gradual fading support by the speech therapist.

Ways of incorporating music therapy techniques into speech therapy (Con't)

(ii) Area of communication focused: expressive language

Goal: Encourage the use of sounds

Activity: Use of kazoo (Pang, 2017)

Kazoo is an instrument that can only produce a sound when a player vocalizes into it, which is adopted in music therapy to assist speech production of pre-verbal children and persons with brain injury.

The speech therapist first selects speech sound that

matches child's oral motor development. Then, the speech therapist demonstrates on using kazoo to make a sound, and helps the child to follow. The child gradually knows how to make some sound with successful experience in using Kazoo to make sounds.



Goal: Single word production

Activity: Fill-in-the-blank (Pang, 2017)

The speech therapist keeps singing the same song/line (eg. birthday song) that repeats certain words; he/she then stops and miss out the target word (eg. "you" as in the birthday song) for the child to sing. If the child fails to sing, therapist will provide assistance like showing the mouth shape or give tactile support. Then, the child's singing will be rewarded with stronger rhythm and therapist's facial expression. The child learns to produce single word in singing. With the speech therapist's gradual fading out of using music, the child will be able to gradually produce this word in daily life.

(iii) Area of communication focused: Pragmatics

Goal: Imitation of action

Activity: movement music (Pang, 2017)

The ability to follow others is the fundamental skills in language learning. The speech therapist selects songs with simple melody and strong rhythm.

The speech therapist repeats an action (like head padding) with the music. If child is unable to copy,

the speech therapist will help the child by moving his/her body parts or touching the body part. When the child copies the speech therapist's actions, the speech therapist will praise the child and give him a smile. The child gradually learns to follow others.



(III) Evaluation

In the process of implementation, the speech therapist keeps on monitoring the child's progress, and discusses with caregivers to determine how music will be used. When the child shows significant progress in language abilities, music may be used to help the child to familiarize with daily routines, stabilize the child's emotion, and to engage the child into activities when needed.

Family Support

The caregiver's effort in helping the child apply these skills in daily communication is an important factor for the treatment progress. The caregiver's support can be given the following ways:

1. provides information of child's interests in music and establish training goals jointly with the speech therapist
2. coaches parents how to adopt music therapy techniques at home
3. borrows instruments and DVDs to implement the training at home

Summary

The ways of incorporating music therapy techniques into speech therapy are discussed, which are basically including three processes: assessment, implementation and evaluation. The activities mentioned are only some of the examples of adopting this approach. This approach may be a key to unlock the communication potential of some children with autism.

References

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