



The following is from *Incorporating Musical Strategies into Clinical Practice* by Jamie Marich, Ph.D., LPCC-S, REAT, RYT-500, RMT / Course 76823 / Approvals APA, NBCC, NAA DAC © 2023 NetCE

Identifying the role of music in a culture is important if a client identifies with that specific cultural heritage. (pg 24)

Music stimulates the reward pathway, which releases dopamine. (pg 25)

The word trauma is derived from the Greek work that means wound. (pg 25)

Complicated grief refers to the experience of maladaptive or problematic psychological symptoms that can be traced back to unresolved grief. As with unresolved trauma, music may help with coping, working through the complications, and helping the client to reintegrate when complicated grief prevents him or her from optimally functioning in life. (pg 26)

One of the first tasks of a therapist is to stabilize the client's symptoms. This can be done by developing a series of coping strategies (skills) that can be used for coping, stress tolerance, and affect regulation. Musical strategies can be worked into the arsenal of coping skills and techniques for stabilization. (pg 26)

Case study - A young woman presents for therapy after entering treatment for alcohol and opioid addiction. She is still struggling to manage her cravings in an effective manner. She was told she needs to identify an effective coping mechanism to deal with those cravings when they are stronger. She finds that playing a song in a steady loop seems to help the negativity pass. Sometimes she listens for 20 times or more. Sometimes she sings along, other times she listens and allows the words and melody to absorb her. This has helped her to manage triggers and thoughts of acting impulsively. (pg 27)

Using music in guided imagery. Not everyone is able to do guided imagery because not everyone is visually inclined. Guided imagery is often the first or preferred relaxation strategy. Music can be an alternate strategy. Play a song (therapist's choice or client's) and ask the client to listen. If his/her attention drifts, invite the client to refocus on the song. Invite the client to tell what might be coming up after listening – body sensations, feelings, thoughts, memories, etc. (pg 27)

Music and sleep – Study investigated two nonpharmacologic approaches to treatment for clients with PTSD – Progressive muscular relaxation and music relaxation. Music relaxation was found to significantly reduce depression and increase sleep efficiency. Sleep efficiency was highly correlated to reduction in depression scores. (pg 28)

Using music to build a vocabulary of feelings. Ask the client to describe what a certain song means to him or her. This can open up a whole new conversation about coping over the years and how certain songs make him or her feel, especially in relation to life experiences. Ask the client to describe feelings the song induces. Ask – what happens in your body when you listen to that song. Also, looking at song lyrics may provide insight into a client’s feelings. Invite the client to bring in their own songs or list of songs. (pg 29)

Using music in group settings – The facilitator has the ability to do a group “vocabulary of feelings” exercise by playing a song for the group and notice the reactions that come up in their bodies upon listening to the song. A group discussion can follow. This helps group members better relate to each other. Playing music in a group offers a way to normalize focus and attention and can lead to a feeling of harmony with the group. (pg 29)

The second stage of trauma treatment is called processing or reprocessing. Defined as a working through of the trauma, or using a therapeutic approach or series of approaches and other supportive strategies to process the traumatic memory and its impact, with the ultimate goal of resolution that leads to improved life functioning. It’s an assumption that working through the trauma must include talking about it. While clients may need to work through the trauma in a properly supportive context, talking about the trauma is not necessarily what needs to happen in order for processing to take place. The part of the brain responsible for talking and language is totally different from the part of the brain where traumatic memories are stored. Talking about the trauma needs to be combined with a physical or multisensory activity in order to be effective. This can include exercise, yoga, imagery, meditation, prayer/ art, drawing, journaling, creative writing, and so on. Musical strategies can be ideal for helping a person work through trauma or experiences either by listening or creating. (pg 30)

Music has the potential to unblock a client if he/she is stuck in a feeling loop. (pg 31)

Because music is stored in the brain in state specific forms, it makes sense that music can be used alone or coupled with other therapeutic techniques to elicit emotion. Before using music or any other technique, it is important that proper stabilization is in place. (pg 32)

Invite the client to do musical journaling. This is helpful because emotional material may arise between office sessions and the journal is an excellent place to record and to work through some of these new discoveries. (pg 32)

Using music in group settings. A focusing exercise with music can also be applied in a group setting. As the piece of music is played, encourage listening with nonjudgemental recognition of the body sensations, feelings, experiences, or memories that the music elicits. (pg 33)

Incorporating music-based strategies in the processing stage may not be for everyone. While incorporating these strategies into this stage may seem easier with a vast knowledge of music, musical competence or talent is not a prerequisite to use music at this point in the process. However, having a basic appreciation of music and its healing potential is an important component of using music at this stage of the therapy process. Even more than music appreciation is being willing and able to handle the intense level of emotion that may be elicited from incorporating music into working through trauma. (pg 33)

Using music in the reintegration stage (return to optimal functioning). The therapist assists the client to take the gains made during the stabilization and processing of trauma stages and apply them to their improvement of life functioning, social interactions, and personal well-being. Music can help with this process. (pg 33)

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Three Case Studies from Music for the Soul

Case Study – Vicky Didato, MA, LPC, LSW, DAPA

Trauma sessions are two hours. During the second hour of a session with a dissociative client one afternoon I put on the song *Shame Died*. This client, a woman, had been chained and trafficked as a child. She blamed herself and dealt with shame her entire life. The only way for her to survive was to create 'another' to handle the memories of torture so that she could go on with life

During one particular session she (one of her younger parts) had spent the first hour doing art to depict what her childhood was like. For her to step back and look at what her life looked like as a child as she looked at her drawing was deeply moving to her. As we prayed and the song played, she was visibly moved and began to cry.

Toward the end of the song the lyric says, *“Yesterday’s chains no longer hold me. The shadows can no longer do me harm. The fragments of my past are healing now at last and I realize that I’m a work of art. My shame died upon the cross. Broken things became whole.”*

When she heard these words, her face lit up and she described her adult self picking up and embracing her younger self. An integration occurred within her. I suspect that unless you work with individuals with the diagnosis of DID (Dissociative Identity Disorder) some of this may not make sense or even seem real. But I witnessed her transformation with my very eyes. I will never forget that moment.

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Case Study – Michael John Cusick

I’m a counselor in the Denver area. A few years back a couple came into my office and told me they wanted a divorce. They said they’d given it a lot of thought and they didn’t want me to try and talk them out of it. They said they were prepared to be amicable and just wanted me to guide them through the process. I said I would, but asked if I could play them one song first. I played *Fifty Years from Now*. When it was over, they were in tears and asked me if I’d help them try and save their marriage. They’re still together! A song saved that marriage!

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Case Study – Suzanne Foster, LMFT

A couple presented for counseling after she had had an abortion. The pregnancy was something that neither expected nor wanted at this stage in their lives. Both were young and she was finishing up a degree. Both were Christians. I played them several songs off the recording, *Mercy Great Enough*, for Abortion Recovery. The songs, *What Now*, *Another Mother’s Day*, and *You’ll Never Call*

Me Daddy were especially meaningful, and helped them open up and discuss their feelings towards each other and about the abortion in general. The song, *We Forgive You* brought tears to their eyes as both were concerned about how God felt about their decision. This couple was able to discuss their feelings more openly in additional sessions. *(See the Mercy Great Enough Therapy guide below)

NOTE: There are several applications for the *Mercy Great Enough* recording in the document below:

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Mercy Great Enough

A Guide of How to Use This Music Project with Clients

By Greg Hasek MA/MFT LMHC

Summary: Using music in counseling or any helping profession is like an art. It's not a science. In other words, you have to be somewhat intuitive to the client's need at the time, combined with listening to the gentle nudge of the Holy Spirit.

Music has the ability to touch the right brain where trauma is stored with much greater effectiveness than words alone. Words are usually processed in the left brain. So, if we as helpers only depend on talk with our clients, we are missing a huge opportunity to impact our clients where their trauma is stored.

Music and video are literally a door into the right brain of our clients. They help our clients move past their defenses and bring a form of integration through right and left-brain processing. Adding music and video to your work with clients can not only be powerful in terms of healing but can move a client forward much faster than talk alone will ever do.

I want to make some bullet point suggestions on how to use each song from the project *Mercy Great Enough* in counseling or in any setting where you are trying to help a man or women who has been hurt or experienced trauma due to an abortion decision. I will list each song below and then give a few bullet point suggestions of how to use these songs with clients.

The songs on *Mercy Great Enough* generally serve two purposes. The first is to validate your client for what they have experienced. Validation alone is very powerful. Secondly, the songs open the door, creating breakthrough moments to help your clients as they walk through the stages of healing from an abortion decision in their past.

Song # 1 Hidden Things

- This song offers the perfect opportunity to unpack the issue of shame with clients. Shame is different than guilt. Guilt is the feeling of you have done something wrong. Shame is a belief that you are a defective person and need to hide from others including God. Men and

women who have had an abortion often feel deep shame and may even not share this secret with their spouse. This song can be used to help validate what many feel and opens the door to talk about how to heal from the shame of abortion.

Song # 2 What Now?

- When a man and woman find themselves in a crisis pregnancy, they are often both in a state of shock. They are not often thinking rationally. Their decisions are being driven by their right brain and not their left brain. In other words, they are having more of a fight or flight response, rather than responding from left brain logic. They are visiting all the reasons why it's not a good time to have a child. When they finally make the decision, their left brain comes back online and they experience regret. They may wonder why nobody told them they would feel that way. This song can be used as both validation of how difficult the decision was under the crisis they were in and opens the door to begin to talk about the forgiveness process for themselves in the future.

Song # 3 I Wasn't Thinking

- Even though this isn't a song, it's a powerful verbalization of what a man or women goes through when they find themselves in a crisis pregnancy. Just like the previous song, I mentioned that the left brain goes offline, and they are often not thinking rationally. When working with clients, this can be played and then the client can process what that was like for them when they were in that crisis. Its another opportunity to validate while also allowing the client to begin to work through the process that led to the choice they made. Due to the intensity of this spoken word, I would recommend caution, only using this piece when the client is ready so it doesn't increase the possible PTSD symptoms they might be experiencing.

Song # 4 Stain Upon my Heart

- This is such a powerful song to validate a client's experience. It also offers hope that God can heal. The beginning of this song is the perfect description of what it's like for a man or women to be experiencing trauma and possible PTSD as the result of the abortion decision. The person finds themselves in a state of desperation. It's also a powerful description of depression. When working with clients, I would recommend the use of this song when they are not suicidal or in severe depression. It may be too much validation at first and they then won't be able to hear the message of hope. As you work with your client through recovery from PTSD/Depression, there will be a time they are ready to be validated and then able to hear the hope that God brings offering forgiveness and healing for a stained heart. This is the time you can assess both the client's level of PTSD and depression and then move them into being open to the possibility of hope in healing from a place of darkness into light.

Song # 5 Another Mother's Day

- Holidays and anniversary dates of the abortion are hard for moms. Mother's Day is particularly hard. Moms are supposed to be happy and be celebrated. Moms who have lost a child due to an abortion decision will often find themselves in state of grieving especially those first years after the abortion. They might look around at other moms and feel regret as

they imagine what their child would've been like. Because the abortion loss is often hidden and not talked about, this grief goes underground. A mom may find herself putting on a fake smile that day for others to see. The grief is so disenfranchised. When working with mothers I love to use this song as a way of facilitating the normalcy of the ongoing grief process on Mother's Day and other holidays. We can not only help prepare them for that difficult day but teach them healthy ways of grieving when those special days come each year.

Song # 6 You'll Never Call Me Daddy

- Men don't often connect with the word abortion because the abortion didn't happen to their body. What they connect to the most is the loss of the role of being a dad. This is how men are wired. Think about two men walking down the golf course together. They connect through the doing of things together experientially. When a man who has lost a child due to an abortion decision, connects to the reality of the loss of that role, that is usually when they start the grief process, and the loss of the child becomes more real. In fact, I always say "You have to make it real to feel." This is also when a man might begin to feel the effect of that loss. In counseling I use this song with men as an opportunity to help them move beyond their defense mechanisms in order to begin to process the loss in a healthy way. Often times with my addict clients, they have suppressed the past abortion and the unresolved grief and shame. This, later fuels the addiction. I recommend playing this song for a man who seems stuck in his defenses. Allow him to just hear the words and let him process his thoughts and feelings afterwards. I usually use this song as a first step for that man in his healing process of making the loss real to heal.

Song # 7 I Wasn't There

- This is one of the most powerful and touching songs to be played for a man. It addresses so many issues a man goes through, all in one song. Men are wired to provide and protect for both their partner and their child. When a woman has an abortion, a man sees himself as a failure at both. In fact, at the abortion clinic, they become stuck on their inability to provide in both ways, and it does severe damage to the man at that point. It goes against how God has wired him to be. Even male animals have this wiring to protect their young. I call this a double moral failure for the man. No matter how the choice was made, the man often feels overwhelming responsibility for that loss. As a therapist I use this song at the right time not only to validate what that man feels in having not "been there," but to begin the process of healing from the shame of the double moral failure he feels. I then begin to walk with my client through everything that led up to the decision of not being there so that he can begin to have grace for himself, not shame and condemnation. Taking the man through his past may include childhood abuse or a father that wasn't there. It helps the man to first be validated for his feelings of not being there, then to have a better understanding of why he wasn't there, and later to begin to experience grace and forgiveness rather than shame.

Song # 8 Listen with Love

- Often the church hasn't been a safe place to talk about abortion. Counselors have an opportunity to offer their clients what they often have not experienced in the church. You play a critical role as you listen with love. In other words when a client comes to your office

and has chosen you of all people with whom to share their abortion story, you should count it a huge honor. They have trusted that you will not judge them for the decision they made. You have a chance to represent the unconditional love that God has given you so they can experience your office as a safe where grace is present. I would recommend using this song for validating a client when they haven't experienced the church as safe to share, offering the hope that it can be. The most important way to use this song is for you as a counselor to be reminded of the role you represent in your client's healing process. When you listen with love and not judgement God will open your eyes to new things you can share with your clients that will aid in their healing process. I encourage you to give this a try, you will be amazed how the Holy Spirit may lead you and share with your client exactly what they needed to hear.

Song # 9 Hope Will Rise Again

- There are millions of men and women who have lost a child due to an abortion decision who remain silent, hidden in their shame. As a counselor I may be the first person they have ever told. What a blessing to be in that role. I use this song as a first step for clients to be able to begin the journey of healing We can never discount the power of sharing one's story for the first time. As the client begins to share their story, God can begin to heal what was previously in kept secret and in the dark. There is so much hope as the client opens up, bringing their story into the light. You can encourage your client that they have begun a huge step in their journey of healing.

Song # 10 Broken into Beautiful

- This song gives a message of hope even when a woman is in a place of despair. Despite how she may feel today there is hope that God can turn someone so broken into someone beautiful. I use this song at the right time when a woman needs to be able to have hope that things can be different in the future. I also like to use this song as an opportunity for my clients to explore the lies they believe about themselves due to the abortion decision. Moving from a place of lies to truths about themselves can be a major goal in the counseling process. There is so much to use in this song for months of counseling. I think it's a wonderful template to be used as a guide in the healing process and a way to measure change in the client. Moving from a broken client who enters into counseling to a beautiful client when they leave. It is so powerful and such an honor and blessing to walk with a client through this process.

Song # 11 The Days Still Yet to Come

- Men often hide in boxes because of the trauma they have experienced. They have walls to protect themselves. As a result, men rarely seek help for an abortion decision in their past. They keep it hidden and think they can handle it themselves. The unfortunate part is the pain they have not dealt with comes out in symptoms. These symptoms can be addictions, anger, inability to attach to their partner, etc. Until they deal with the box, the symptoms will continue. I use this song to show the man how he has developed his own box of self-

protection secrecy and shame. Often no one has ever asked them the question about a past abortion. Just doing this is very validating. It gives him an opportunity that society and culture often times doesn't. I allow the man to begin to share his story in counseling. This is where the man begins to take one brick off the wall and may begin to experience some emotions and begin the grieving process. In the end of counseling, I give the man an opportunity to honor their child's life. This can include some form of memorial. This can be a powerful piece in the last stages of the counseling process with a man.

Song # 12 We Forgive You

- Toward the end of the healing process in counseling, the topic of forgiveness is often talked about. For some clients knowing their children are in heaven with God is very important. As a therapist I often have the client write letters to people in their life that they need to forgive. Sometimes they client will then reads a letter to an empty chair, as if the person is there. This can be very powerful. They often will write a letter of forgiveness to themselves. I use this song after they have done this forgiveness work. Then they are ready to experience not only God's forgiveness, but the idea that their child in heaven forgives them too. This can be a very emotional session and you need wisdom as to the timing of when to play this song and at what stage of the healing process.

Song # 13 I Lay it Down

- This is a powerful song that I use with couples who have experienced an abortion together. Based on statistics, not many couples stay together after an abortion. There are many reasons why and they often include shame and blame, or just the trauma. In addition, couples often have a hard time bonding or attaching after the abortion. This song is wonderful, sung as a duet which symbolizes a man and a woman who were involved in the abortion decision. It shows how powerful the healing process can be for couples if they walk through it together. As a therapist I have an extensive healing program based on attachment that I take couples through. It lasts up to a year. I use this song toward the end when they have gone through a grieving process and are ready to start to reattach and forgive each other. This provides a touching moment where I have couples holding each other's hands and often closing their eyes as they listen.

Song # 14 New Dawn Rising

- This speaks to the depths of despair, trauma and depression that men and women may go through after an abortion decision. What helps people get out of the hole of despair is to know that there is hope that life can be different. Darkness can move to light. Depression can move to hope. I use this with clients as a visual where they close their eyes and imagine the dawn at the beach and what that hope of a new day brings - how there is hope in the healing process even though they still might be in a dark place.

Song # 15 Your Life Has Made a Difference

- I love to use this song at the end of the counseling process. Many clients find it healing to name their child who is in heaven and do some form of memorial. At this stage of the healing process the client is beginning to have existential thinking as to meaning and

purpose. They begin to see that their child's life made a difference. They begin to get in touch with how God can use what they have been through to help others. This is sometimes what motivates people to get into prolife work. I love to use this song almost as a "What next?" for the client. How can God use this terrible thing that happened as a witness to others through the healing process? They now can use their testimony as opportunity to be God's hands in the world to help others who have experienced similar trauma and pain due to an abortion decision.