

# WORKING FROM A NEURODIVERSITY-AFFIRMATIVE LENS



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Share your  
favorite song in  
the chat!

# A NOTE ABOUT THIS PRESENTATION...

Where are we coming from?



How does this apply to you?



# WHAT IS MUSIC THERAPY?

According to the American Music Therapy Association, Music Therapy is the clinical & evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program.

# WHAT DOES MUSIC THERAPY DO?

Music therapy interventions can address a variety of healthcare & educational goals:

- Promote Wellness
- Manage Stress
- Express Feelings
- Enhance Memory
- Improve Communication
- Promote Physical Rehabilitation
- Provide Leisure Skill Opportunities
- and more!

# WHAT HAPPENS IN MUSIC THERAPY?

We work towards our goals in music therapy by

- Active music making
- Lyric analysis
- Songwriting
- Music improvisation
- Receptive music listening
- Music and imagery
- Music performance
- Learning through music
- and more!

# WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY?

- Origins of the Neurodiversity movement
- Neurodiversity vs Neurodivergence
- Common misconceptions
- A note about language

# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE NEUROAFFIRMATIVE?

- Neurodiversity is a part of human diversity; Neurodivergent clients do not need fixing
- Learning from Neurodivergent voices
- Non-compliance/behavior-based therapy
- Strengths-based
- Modifying environments to set up for success
- Why do we choose to use this label?



WHAT SPARKED THE CHANGE?





# ORGANIZATION-WIDE CHANGE

- What we thought we knew came from other professionals, not from the Neurodivergent/Disabled community
- Kristin's journey as program manager
- Creating a shared understanding of neuroaffirmative therapy
- Ongoing process!

## REAL-TIME OBSERVATIONS

- Adapted lessons student struggling with self-made expectations
- Switched to a traditional music therapy session
- Transitioned back to adapted lesson, this time at the client's behest and lead
- Focus switched off of learning an instrument and turned to fostering a love of music

## GOAL WRITING - WHAT WE WILL NOT DO

- “Active” or “Whole Body Listening” including eye contact
- Spoken communication to the exclusion of other forms of communication
- Reduction of safe and healthy stimming behaviors
- Learning how to mask or act more neurotypical
- Neuronormative conversation and turn-taking

# GOAL WRITING - WHAT WE WILL DO

- Building healthy relationships
- Self-advocacy
- Self-expression
- Emotion regulation and coping skills
- Academic skills
- Fine and gross motor skills
- Understanding neurotypical behavior and communication, not for the sake of imitating or emulating, but as a way to understand society's expectations
- Music-related leisure skills

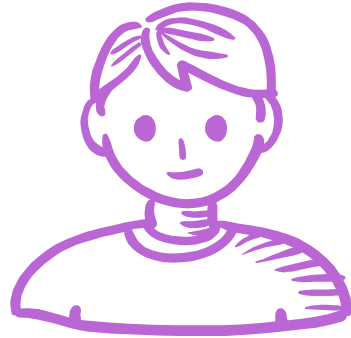
# "SOCIAL" GROUPS

Interoception

Sensory Recognition

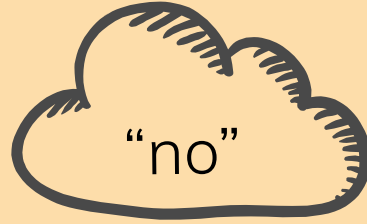
Consent

Acceptance

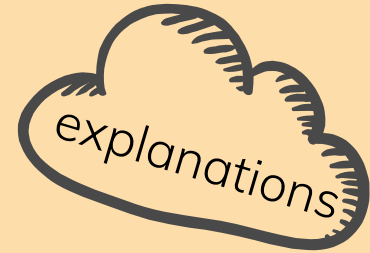




client-led



“no”



explanations

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN SESSIONS?



free movement



communication



perspective-taking

# CHALLENGES

- Societal expectations
- Working on IEP Goals
- Lack of Neuroaffirmative resources (assessment tools, documentation templates, etc.)
- Partnering with facilities who hold a different philosophy

# COMMUNICATION



## MUSIC WORKS NORTHWEST HOLDS A NEURODIVERSITY-AFFIRMATIVE APPROACH TO MUSIC THERAPY



### What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity can mean different things to different people. At Music Works Northwest, when we talk about Neurodivergence, we are talking about someone who thinks, learns, processes information or sees the world differently from what society views as typical. This may include Autism, ADHD, learning disabilities, sensory processing differences, Down Syndrome, PTSD, or anxiety, to name just a few.

### What does it mean to have a Neurodiversity-Affirmative Approach?

We hold a Neurodiversity-Affirmative approach to music therapy. For us this means that:

1. We view Neurodiversity simply as a part of human diversity, not as a problem to be fixed.
2. As we continue our self-education as music therapists, we prioritize learning from Neurodivergent communities and Neurodivergent self-advocates, which informs our language, our goals and priorities in therapy, and everything about our practice. We prioritize and center Neurodivergent voices above Neurotypical voices as we work with this community.
3. We recognize that we will make mistakes as we do this work, and will strive to acknowledge them and fix them as we continue to learn.
4. We will not encourage individuals to try to fit into neurotypical norms (see more information about goals and objectives in therapy on reverse side).
5. We default to identity-first language (i.e. Autistic individual instead of individual with Autism) unless person-first language is preferred/requested by the individual or community that we're referring to.



Infographic for families and partners



Regular audits of materials



MT students, interns, and new hires

### What does a Neurodiversity-Affirmative Approach mean for the goals and objectives that we work toward in therapy?

We can address a wide range of goals in music therapy, guided by the client's and family's priorities (some examples in the left-hand column below). However, goals that come from a neuronormative lens and set of priorities are not a part of our work with clients (some examples in the right-hand column below).

### Examples of Goals That We Address in Music Therapy

- Building healthy relationships
- Self-advocacy
- Self-expression
- Learning, understanding and communicating one's own sensory, learning and access needs
- Emotional regulation and coping skills
- Academic skills
- Fine and gross motor skills
- Understanding neurotypical behavior and communication - not for the sake of imitating or emulating, but as a way to understand others who might think and act differently
- Music-related leisure skills
- And many others

### Examples of Goal Areas That We Will Not Address in Music Therapy

- Eye contact
- Spoken communication to the exclusion of other forms of communication
- Reduction of (safe and healthy) stimming behaviors
- "Active Listening" or "Whole Body Listening"
- Learning how to mask or act more neurotypical
- Neuronormative conversation and turn-taking

## ANTI-ABLEISM AND NEURODIVERSITY-AFFIRMATIVE RESOURCES

- Autism Inclusivity Facebook Group
- Reframing Autism | <https://www.facebook.com/reframingautism>
- Neurodivergent Rebel | <https://www.facebook.com/NeurodivergentRebel>
- The Arc of King County | <https://arcofkingcounty.org/>
- Not An Autism Mom | <https://www.facebook.com/notanautismmom>
- Kristy Forbes | <https://www.facebook.com/InTunePathways>
- Project LETS | <https://www.facebook.com/projectlets>
- Autism in Black | <https://www.facebook.com/autisminblk>

### Questions?

We understand that our approach is not universally accepted, and we warmly welcome your questions, concerns, observations and experiences. Please feel free to reach out to [kschneider@musicworksnw.org](mailto:kschneider@musicworksnw.org).





# Feedback from the Community



# NEXT STEPS

Neuroaffirmative  
Assessment Tool



Prioritize adding more  
Neurodivergent team  
members



Additional & Ongoing  
Neurodivergent-Led  
Training



Peer Supervision



Honor wider variety of  
communication  
preferences for families





“

Q & A

— • —



## Reflection Questions

1. Name 1-3 things that you are **currently doing** in your practice to encourage your clients/students/children to bring their full selves to your space.
2. Name 1-3 things you might **change** in your practice to encourage your clients/students/children to bring their full selves to your space.





## Reflection Questions

3. Name 1-3 things that you are **currently doing** in your practice to encourage your clients/students/children to practice self-advocacy and self-determination.
4. Name 1-3 things you might **change** in your practice to encourage your clients/students/children to practice self-advocacy and self-determination.





## Reflection Questions

5. What is **one big idea** that you are taking away from this presentation?
6. What is **one question** that you plan to follow up on later?



# RESOURCES

## Neurodivergent & Disabled Voices

- Yo Samdy Sam
- Autistically Minded
- Autistic, Typing
- Neuromess
- Crutches & Spice
- Harry Thompson
- Kristy Forbes
- Wheelchair Rapunzel
- Neurodivergent Rebel\*\*\*

## Facebook Groups

- Autism Inclusivity\*\*\*
- Neurodiversity Affirmative Therapists\*\*\*
- Autistic Allies

## Books

- Delahooke: *Beyond Behaviors*\*\*\*

## Neurodivergent & Neuroaffirmative Organizations & Professionals

- Autistic Girls Network
- The Children's Clinic, Ireland
- Foundations for Divergent Minds
- Autism Explained
- Autism Level UP
- Rachel Dorsey: Autistic SLP
- AUsome Training
- The Adult Autism Practice
- Reframing Autism
- Disability Justice Culture Club
- NeuroClastic
- Project LETS
- Sins Invalid
- Therapist Neurodiversity Collective
- Autism in Black



THANKS!

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