

## Using music to aid your mental health during the COVID-19 crisis

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There are so many reasons why you might be individually and corporately stressed and anxious right now. Some of you might also be grieving a number of losses. Taken together, this might lead to unexpected mental health issues, currently and in the future. We are sensitive to this and want to give you some musical strategies for helping you to deal with these added pressures.

### 1. Reach out to a professional counsellor!

Whether you are a student or faculty, If you are currently experiencing mental health issues, please reach out to [Concordia](#), to community and public agencies such as the [Canadian Mental Health Association](#), and friends and family that are supportive for you.

### 2. Using music for relaxation

All of us use music actively and unintentionally or intentionally to serve as a companion to our daily activities (for example, the type of music that we listen to changes depending on the type of activity that we are planning...music for a Friday night outing is different than the type of music we listen to after a break-up). This doesn't stop, just because we are isolated at home. There are a number of things to consider when choosing music for relaxation purposes.

- a) What type of music do you enjoy most, that helps you relax?
- b) How does that type of music make you feel (upbeat, like moving physically, mirrors your depressed mood, or relaxed)? Choosing music that makes you want to dance probably isn't the type of music therapy you should be using to try and relax!
- c) Choose music that does not have a lot of "surprises". This means that it doesn't have a lot (a few is okay) of sudden or unexpected changes in volume (dynamics), intensity, and/or melody/instrumentation. (\*This can be very hard to do, if you listen closely enough).
- d) Choose an environment that is free of distractions for your relaxation. If possible, find a quiet space, turn off any lights and try to eliminate sources of external sounds, etc.
- e) DO NOT use music with lyrics, as lyrics = language! In addition to processing the elements of the music that you are using, your brain will be actively attempting to make sense of content of the lyrics too. A.k.a NOT relaxing!

If you don't feel comfortable planning this yourself, you may wish to visit the following URL to find a pre-recorded relaxation intervention using Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR), by a Canadian music therapist named Miya Adout - <https://bit.ly/3csBZez>

### 3. Past musical experiences/listening

I call this the “Pandemic Playlist” exercise. Fire up your favourite music app for listening to music such as *iTunes*. Select “New smart playlist”. Under the conditions of this new playlist choose “Last played”, “Not in the last” “72” “Months”. You will then get a list of songs that you haven’t listened to in the past six years. Then PLAY that list. You will probably find a number of gems, “blasts from the past” that will make you go, “Oh, I remember that one” and make you smile. Listening to music can release positive neurochemicals in your brain called “endorphins” and improve, positively, your overall mood.

**CAUTION:** Do not listen to the music from a particularly difficult period of your life (mental health, not feeling safe or secure of person, etc.) as this may trigger increased mental health distress and increased anxiety or depression.

In addition, there are some things that you can consider doing post-isolation or during extended isolation.

1. Remember the importance of the arts in your life and your mental health *during* this period. Make a commitment to attend more concerts, support arts organizations and arts festivals and individual artists and groups (this doesn’t only mean music, but can include other arts modalities such as art, dance, theatre, etc.)
2. **Consider registering** for the “Introduction to Music Therapy” course that has been scheduled in the Fall 2020 calendar. Obviously, you have to have a background and experience in music and play at least one musical instrument. That DOESN’T mean, however, that you need to be an expert player or professional concert pianist.

Music therapy has become a very diverse field of training and education. In addition to being a clinical music therapist, if you come from one of the following backgrounds, you might also wish to register for this course:

**Psychology** - many MTs provide counselling services and use psychotherapeutic techniques in their clinical work.

**Biology/Medical** - there are a number of research initiatives such as studying the influence of music upon the brain, biological interventions designed to lower blood pressure, heart rate, improve breathing and decrease pain perception that requires further research.

In addition, there are entire subspecialties within the field of music therapy that deal with physical and mental rehabilitation and/or working with premature infants in the NICU and child-life departments with hospitals.



**Education** - there are many strategies that you can use as a classroom teacher to assist students with special needs to achieve their maximum potential and/or assist the other students in adapting to and embracing the unique character and abilities of their classmate with special needs.

**Academics** - it is projected that there will be a shortage of trained and experienced educators to teach students enrolled in music therapy training programs in the near future. In addition, with programs going online, there is a need for the development of quality OER and course designers.

**Business** - as music therapists we are often in self-employment situations where we are the “owner, employee, accountant, driver, social media writer, tech consultant, etc.” These are areas that we may have little to no direct experience with. Your expertise in these fields may assist those starting out in unexpected and meaningful ways.

And finally,

**Music students** - as musicians yourself and individuals who already intuitively understand the impact(s) of music on your life and who may already be enrolled in a music degree track, you are poised to take full advantage of your interest in working with people with special needs, disability and societal rights, etc.

For more information about music therapy, please visit:

[Canadian Association of Music Therapists](#) (CAMT)

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