



## Comments on Music Therapy Eligibility Assessments

Music therapy is the prescribed use (by a board-certified music therapist) of music and music therapy strategies to assist and/or motivate a person to achieve non-musical goals. Music therapy is a related service as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and can, therefore, be included in a student's individual education program (IEP).

The test for whether a service is in fact a "related" service that must be included on the IEP and provided at no expense to the parents is whether the service is indeed necessary to enable that student to benefit from special education programming. A music therapy eligibility assessment, then, is the process by which a board-certified music therapist determines whether music therapy is a necessary related service for that student. In order for music therapy to be recommended as a related service, it must be shown that the student receives a unique assist and/or motivation from the music therapy strategies in performing IEP goal-related behavior.

A music therapy assessment includes the following steps:

1. Initial explanation of the music therapy assessment process to district personnel and parents.
2. Review of the student's IEP and selection of specific IEP objectives on which the music therapy assessment will be based. Objectives chosen need to be ones that can reasonably be addressed with music therapy strategies, and also that reflect areas of learning that pose particular challenges to the student.
3. Observations of the student working on these designated IEP objectives in a nonmusical setting. i.e., learning and working on the skills in the manner regularly employed by the teacher and/or speech therapist. Observations are made in real time, usually through notes taken by the assessing music therapist and occasionally through audio or videotape, if necessary. This step is often not necessary and information can be gathered largely through the next step.
4. Interviews of the district personnel, parents, and other IEP team members.
5. The major part of the evaluation is an assessment session in which music therapy strategies, addressing the student's targeted IEP goals and objectives, are presented to the student. The assessment session is structured similarly to most music therapy sessions, and would include opening and closing music, a variety of music therapy strategies and smooth transitions. A comparison is then made between the student's behavior/skills in non-musical and music therapy-structured situations. In this way, a determination can be made as to the significance of music therapy's assistance in the student's ability to learn.
6. Also during the assessment session the music therapist / evaluator can assess areas, other than those targeted specifically in IEP objectives, in which music therapy strategies can assist the student.
7. Finally, a written report is prepared and submitted to the district special education



representatives and/or parents.

**Note:** A degreed, board-certified music therapist is the only person qualified to perform a music therapy assessment.

There often can be some misconceptions about the related service of music therapy as it pertains to the public school system:

1. Sometimes parents and/or professionals think that a student is entitled to a particular related service if he or she can benefit in any way from it. Prior to a music therapy assessment being requested, parents and/or school personnel may have read one of the many articles or books published about the benefits of music therapy for students with particular disabilities. These materials do stress the improvements that music therapy may bring about in learning and/or behavioral skills for a given student. What makes it confusing is that such information applies to children with disabilities on a very broad basis; while eligibility for music therapy service in the public school system is restricted to those students who demonstrate that music therapy is a necessary intervention for them to benefit from special education programming. In other words, eligibility for services such as music therapy varies from setting to setting. Eligibility in the hospital or private setting does not imply eligibility for services in the school setting.

2. Another misconception is to think that music therapy is provided to nurture musical ability demonstrated by the student. This, in fact, is music enrichment and can usually be provided through existing music education classes in the school system or by private lessons (even adapted music lessons performed by a music therapist) provided by the parent as an extra-curricular activity. Music therapy, on the other hand, is a related service designed to address non-musical IEP skills.

3. Occasionally, parents and/or professionals are hopeful that if a particular related service were added to the student's educational program, there would be a sudden improvement in the student's overall functioning level or perhaps in a particular skill area. However, students with neurological impairment and developmental disabilities tend to learn slowly, and with much structure and repetition. When related (support) services such as music therapy, occupational therapy, etc. are necessary, they can support what goes on in the classroom, and act as a resource for the teacher. However, related services do not replace the need for an appropriate, well-structured classroom situation. This is why services such as music therapy, occupational therapy, etc. are known as "related" services—they must "relate" to the main setting where education is to take place---and that is the classroom.

**Purpose of an Eligibility Assessment:** To determine if direct music therapy services would be required to assist a student in benefiting from his/her educational program.