

## Using Music to Express Feelings

### Awareness of emotions in oneself

 Intervention

 n/a

 Client

 No

Emotional expression has been considered to be one of the most important criteria for the “perceived” aesthetic value of music (Juslin, 2013). Music has even been described as a “language of the emotions” by some authors (Cooke, 1959). Indeed, research findings confirm that listeners perceive music as being expressive of emotions (for a review, see Gabrielsson and Juslin, 2003). For example, in a survey study by Juslin and Laukka (2004), participants were asked what music expresses and were then required to select responses from a list of options. Results indicated that “emotions,” unlike any of the other options, was selected by all of the participants.

Music can be a powerful way of evoking complex emotions, creating mood states that may otherwise be difficult to categorize as either positive or negative. This makes music an interesting tool, because it allows to distil the multi-dimensional and complex nature of feelings to their core essence. This exercise introduces music as a way to facilitate a rich shared understanding between the client and practitioner with regards to the client’s present feelings and concerns.

### Goal

The goal of this intervention is to facilitate clients in communicating their feelings and concerns by using music as a medium to “translate” personal experiences. Because this intervention requires clients to identify and describe their own emotions, it may help to increase their emotional awareness. Emotional awareness has been argued to be the skill most fundamental to emotional intelligence (Lane, 2000).

### Advice

- The practitioner may introduce this exercise by playing a song that captures his current feelings or by playing a song that generates strong emotions in general. After playing the song, the practitioner may discuss his feelings and experiences when listening to the song. Although this requires some degree of vulnerability of the practitioner, it may pave the way for the client to share his own experiences with more ease.
- The practitioner may listen to the songs together with the client, and discuss for each song why the client chose this song, what the client feels, and how it is related to his/her current situation.
- It is important for practitioners to remember that a client can perceive any emotion in a piece of music. In other words, the emotional resonance of a song is a highly subjective matter and it is therefore inappropriate to claim that the listener is “wrong”. Whatever the client perceives in the music is what the music is expressing—for the client at least. Practitioner should therefore refrain from offering any review or critique of the music.
- For some clients, this exercise is perceived as a playful way to get more in touch with personal experiences. Searching for music can be both a joyful and interesting activity, and despite its playful character can yield interesting results. It can be a valuable tool for clients

who have a strong connection with music, taking advantage of their intrinsic interest in music.

- This can be a potentially helpful tool for clients who find verbal communication challenging or when multiple challenges present simultaneously.



### Suggested Readings

Cooke, D. (1959). *The Language of Music*. London. Oxford: University Press.

Gabrielsson, A., and Juslin, P. N. (2003). Emotional expression in music. In R. J. Davidson, K. R. Scherer, and H. H. Goldsmith (Eds.), *Handbook of Affective Sciences*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Juslin, P. N. (2001). Communicating emotion in music performance: a review and a theoretical framework. In P. N. Juslin and J. A. Sloboda (Eds.), *Music and Emotion: Theory and Research*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Juslin, P. N. (2013). From everyday emotions to aesthetic emotions: towards a unified theory of musical emotions. *Physics of life reviews*, 10, 235-266.

Juslin, P. N., & Laukka, P. (2004). Expression, perception, and induction of musical emotions: A review and a questionnaire study of everyday listening. *Journal of New Music Research*, 33, 217-238.

Lane, R. D. (2000). Levels of emotional awareness: Neurological, psychological and social perspectives. In R. Bar-On and J. D. A. Parker (Eds.), *Handbook of emotional intelligence*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

## Tool Description

### Instructions

At times, it is difficult to express what we feel in words only. In these cases, music seems to be expressing exactly how we are feeling.

This exercise is a homework assignment. Take the sheet below home with you and between now and the next time we meet, please find three songs. Try to find three songs that describe how you are feeling about your situation right now.

Please keep in mind that there are no right or wrong ways to choose a song, only what makes the most sense to you. After choosing your songs, please take a few moments to respond to the questions below. If possible please bring your worksheet and the songs to our next session for discussion.

#### *Song 1*

What is the title of this song?

When you hear this song, what comes to your mind?

How does this song make you feel?

Which part of the song is the most important to you?

*Song 2*

What is the title of this song?

When you hear this song, what comes to your mind?

How does this song make you feel?

Which part of the song is the most important to you?

### *Song 3*

What is the title of this song?

When you hear this song, what comes to your mind?

How does this song make you feel?

Which part of the song is the most important to you?