



music as therapy  
international

# ALD: Adapting Musical Activities When Working Alongside COVID-19

To be used alongside your [Musical Activities Resources Pack for Adults with Learning Disabilities](#)



## Adapting musical activities when working alongside COVID-19

You will have your own local guidance with respect to minimising risk to the people you work with and this should be your primary guidance when running music sessions. However, to further prevent the risk of spreading the virus we would advise you to think carefully about if and how you use musical instruments and other props (e.g. puppets, picture cards, scarves or fabric etc.) which your session participants share, pass between them, or may take from one another. Despite these new considerations, many of the activities you would usually use can be adapted so you can continue to use them safely.

Even if you're avoiding musical instruments, you and your session participants have a personal orchestra to draw on: Consider the different ways you can use your voice and your body!

Remember it's not just what you do, but how you do it.

Explore different speeds, volumes and rhythms with your body sounds!

### Vocal sounds:

*Shrieks*  
*Squeaks*  
*Pops*  
*Roars*  
*Animal noises*  
*High sounds*  
*Low sounds*  
*Wiggly sounds (move your tongue around your mouth)*  
*Quiet sounds*  
*Loud sounds*  
*Short sounds*  
*Long sounds (take a deep breath first!)*

### Body movements:

*Wiggles*  
*Jumps*  
*Stretches*  
*Dances*  
*Use one or both arms/hands/legs*  
*Tiny movements (fingers, feet and facial expressions)*  
*Expansive movements (both arms)*  
*Imitate how different animals move*

### Body percussion:

*Clapping: straight fingers, clasped hands*  
*Stamping (one foot or two)*  
*Tapping our feet on the ground*  
*Tapping the fingers of one hand against the other palm*  
*Patting our heads, or knees or other parts of our body*  
*Finger clicking*  
*Clicking our heels together, or clapping with the soles of our shoes*  
*Sweeping the palm of one hand with the palm of the other*

Now you've thought about the resources you have to use in your activities, think again about activities you like and how you can adapt them to use vocal sounds, body percussion and movement



in place of musical instruments and other props. You might find it helpful to consider the questions overleaf.

**Can you use the same tune, but substitute words referring to using an instrument to words encouraging an action from your session participant?** For example, “Jump in the air right now!” or “Stamp with both feet right now!”

*Tip:* Model what you expect from them and when with your own actions.

**Can you offer a choice of two body percussion contributions, when you might otherwise have offered a choice of two instruments?** For example, using the same tune and the same offer, invite the session participants to supply the body percussion sound you request from them – such as a stamp or a clap - or match the one you model.

*Tip:* Keep one on each side of your body, for clarity (e.g. clap out to the left, stamp with your right foot).

**Can you substitute actions for instrumental play?** Your session participants might be able to think of these themselves, or could copy yours. For example, a short action (e.g. wiggling one arm out to the side) or a vocal sound (e.g. “Pop! Pop! Pop!”).

*Tip:* Use a stop and start structure to invite each session participant to contribute their sound/action.

**How might you support your session participants’ contributions if you can’t use musical instruments to do this?** For example, you could use your own body percussion, movement or voice alongside your session participants’ free use of their own movement or voices for improvised self-expression.

*Tip:* You could pat your knees and attune with what they are doing using your voice (e.g. humming, or singing a description of what they are doing) or your own movement (e.g. nodding, speed of knee patting etc).

**If you can’t allow your session participants to choose musical instruments freely, how else can you give them opportunities to make choices?** For example, can your session participants choose:

- Which activity will happen and when?
- Who will take the next turn?
- Who will be your partner?
- What action will everyone do?
- What sound will everyone make?

**Would you use signs to replace objects of reference/props in your activities?** For example, if you’ve been using puppet or animals, consider using Makaton signs (see [here](#)) or your group could make up their own gestures.

*Tip:* If you’ve been using props as visual cues, you could substitute these for pictures held up by the session leader

**If you can’t pass instruments around the group, what else could you pass within activities which are familiar to your session participants?** For example, so many different vocal and body percussion sounds can be passed around a group (copied from one person to the next), performed in turn (the leader in the centre can point to the person whose sound they want to hear, moving between different group members quickly or slowly like a Conductor).

*Tip:* Get creative – your session participants will!

Do tell us what works for you and we’ll share it with other practitioners in our network.  
Run into difficulties? Ask [freyagibbs@musicastherapy.org](mailto:freyagibbs@musicastherapy.org) and we’ll do what we can to help.

Good Luck!