



Meaningful music for Adults with Learning Disabilities: Making the most of your Instruments

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Cabasa

- This instrument is quite heavy, but very tactile and visual, offering strong sensory input.
- Shake or twizzle the handle between your hands for a continuous metallic sound.
- Place one hand gently on the beads, then use the other hand to twist the handle back and forth for a more rhythmic effect.
- Place the beads on someone else's hand, arm or leg and twist the handle so they can feel the vibrations which create the sound.
- A great choice for joining in with recordings of familiar songs as you can choose a mixture of long and short sounds to create rhythms.



Chime row

- Visually striking and easy to play independently using hands or beaters – but tricky to control!
- The stand is fully height adjustable and the angle can be changed. Try to position it so that people can reach it when they choose to. Placing it between two people allows them to interact by sharing it.
- Stroke the bars from left to right, or right to left – long to short sounds low to high, short to long sounds high to low.
- Focus on smaller ranges of bars for more localised sparkly sounds.
- Play with subtle or dramatic gestures – this instrument is highly responsive so can feel very expressive.
- Hold onto the bars to stop them sounding, or let them resonate until they gradually stop swinging – they are quite mesmerising to watch and the sound can last for ages!



Circular chimes

- A highly portable cluster of chimes which can be used in a variety of ways.
- Suspend them within someone's reach by hooking your finger through the ring at the top – they can push, grab or run their fingers through the bars.
- Shake or twist to make the bars clang together.
- Good for using to brush along someone's arm or leg.
- Try stirring the bars with the end of a beater.
- Strong sensory profile – they catch the light, they jangle, they feel cold to touch.



Cymbal

- Can be played gently or dramatically! Huge dynamic range, from very quiet to extremely loud!
- Adjust the stand (height and angle) to suit the player.
- Obvious visual connection between gesture and sound created – helps people to anticipate the sound about to happen.
- Use one beater to create single sounds – the further away you start and the faster you move towards the cymbal then bounce off, the louder the crash will be.
- Use two beaters alternating quickly to roll a continuous sound – can you make it get louder and then softer again?
- Softer beaters create a sound with a softer edge. Harder beaters (or even just using the stick end) create a sound with a ping at the start.
- Let the sound gradually fade by leaving the cymbal vibrating, or damp the edge between thumb and forefinger to stop the sound instantly.



Double guiro

- This can be played resting on somebody's lap/tray, but will make a louder sound if held using the handle.
- Hit the ridged tubes with the round end of the beater for short sounds, or scrape the stick along them for something longer.
- The longer tube makes a lower sound, the shorter one is higher – this creates a “tick-tock” effect if you hit them alternately.
- Great to use when listening along to favourite tracks – see if you can hear the pulse of the music and try counting along to identify how it is grouped (hint: it's likely to be 1,2,3,4 / 1,2,3,4 etc!). Join in by playing along, highlighting the 1s (e.g. HIGH, low, low, low / HIGH, low, low, low – or the other way around!).
- Once you've found the pulse, try adding extra rhythms and varying the patterns you play.



Guitar – developing skills

- Learning some basic chords will enable you to support group music-making. Standard tuning is E A D G B E (from low to high):
 - 1) Alternating C major / A minor – fits well with metallophone.
 - 2) Four chord pattern (used in lots of pop songs): I V vi IV
EITHER C major / G major / A minor / F major
OR G major / D major / E minor / C major
 - 3) A minor / D minor / E major ñ gives an edgier feel.
- You can use a capo, clipped onto the neck of the guitar, to shift these patterns up and down, too.
- Sequences based on groups of 3 and 4 (e.g. 3 x C major; 3 x G major; 3 x A minor; 3 x F major) are a good way to create a framework for group improvisation. Find your own favourite patterns!
- Why not try creating your own songs? Make up some lyrics, choose a repeating chord pattern and experiment with singing the words over the top, until you find something you like!
- Experiment with alternative tunings, for different moods and easy chord progressions ñ here are a few to get you started (all from the bottom up):
 - 1) D A D G A D
 - 2) D A D F# A D
 - 3) E A E A C E



Guitar – starting points

- Guitars are great instruments for sharing – you don't need to have any prior experience.
- Try placing the guitar on someone's lap – when the strings are strummed, they will feel the vibrations.
- Explore high and low sounds and watch for reactions.
- The body of the guitar makes a brilliant drum – try tapping in different places and listening to how the sound changes.
- Try making a pattern of 4 notes, or a rhythm which fits across 4 beats (you can count along) – repeat it, leave space in between for responses.
- Pressing firmly on the strings between the frets over the black fingerboard allows you to make different notes.
- If something is stopping the string from vibrating freely, it won't make such a satisfying sound.
- Standard tuning is (from the lowest string up) E A D G B E. You can check this with an app or online. But the strings don't need to be in tune for you to have fun exploring and experimenting!



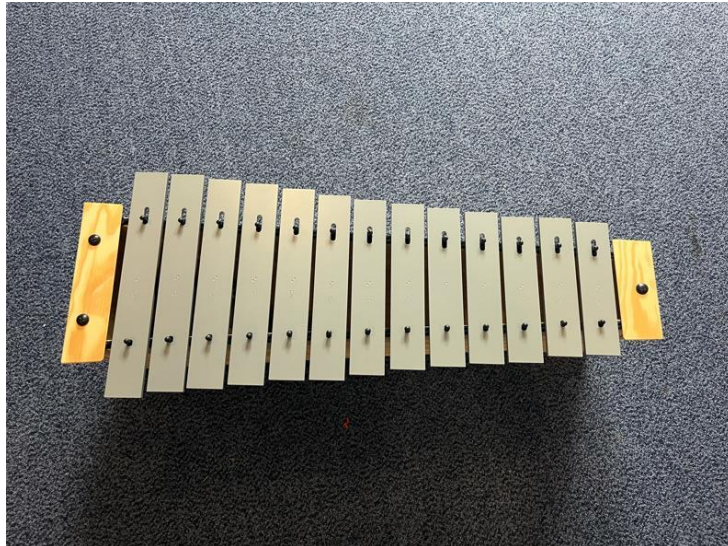
Hand bells

- Light, easy to hold and manipulate – several different designs, to accommodate most natural grips.
- Shake continuously for long sounds or tap against free hand, or another suitable surface, for short sounds.
- Try creating musical action games based on opposites: shake and stop; up and down; fast and slow; big and small shakes. Take turns to choose the action and copy the leader.
- Bells feature in lots of Christmas songs (Jingle Bells, Sleigh Ride, Carol of the Bells) – play along!



Marching drum

- You can lie this drum flat and play the top surface, stand it on its side to play both skins at once, or hang it around your neck and march with it.
- Play with beaters or your hands. How many different kinds of sound can you make using your hands? Try finger tips, scraping, tapping, thrumming, flat of your hand, heel of your palm. Try bouncing off or resting on the drum skin.
- Create a steady pulse for others to join in with. Think in groups of three or four at first: e.g. count 1 2 3 4 / 1 2 3 4, making the 1s slightly louder to reinforce the pattern. Add in rhythmic interest once it is established.
- Will the rest of the group follow your lead if you speed up or slow down, gradually or suddenly? Will they copy if you play more quietly or loudly?
- Can you create signals which the group can follow for starting and stopping? If you stop suddenly, how long does it take them to stop too? Can you make a game out of this? Take turns to lead from the drum.



Metallophone – starting points

- This is your chance to create amazing melodies! The notes are the same as the white notes on a piano/keyboard. Can be played on the floor, on a table, or balanced on a lap (but is quite heavy!). Experiment with hard and soft beaters to find the sound you like.
- Pick a low note to play (the longer bars). With the other beater, travel up another 7 bars (you should land on a shorter bar with the same letter name). Keeping the low note going, move up and down with the second beater, making patterns in between.
- Try the same thing in reverse (i.e. start with a high note/short bar and travel between that and the low note/long bar with the same letter name).
- Listen to the different moods that different letter names of notes create in this activity: e.g. G to G sounds ‘happier’ than A to A.
- Try playing two notes at once, missing one out in between (e.g. C and E; F and A). This is called a third and always sounds sweet! Play sequences of thirds, moving up and down the metallophone in steps or leaps.
- Try working out familiar tunes. You may need to experiment with which note to start on. e.g. Twinkle Twinkle Little Star will work if you start on C, but will sound sad if you start on A!



Metallophone – more ideas

- Removing some of the bars can make it even easier to create music with other instruments. Try lifting out the Fs and the B (as in the picture) – this creates a pentatonic scale (5-note pattern) which it is easy to match with a harmonic instrument, like the guitar.
- Work with a guitarist to choose a repeating chord pattern together. See the 'guitar – developing skills' sheet for hints and tips! Once the pattern is established, play freely on the metallophone to create an improvised piece together.
- Create several sections to your piece, using different chord sequences. Maybe you could record it on an iPad? Perhaps it will develop into a song? Would you like to involve other people, perhaps adding percussion instruments? Anything goes!



Ocean drum

- A brilliant instrument for those with high sensory needs and for incorporating into stories about the sea or stormy weather.
- The rough side is very responsive when scratched with fingers.
- The clear side has strong visual impact, as the ball-bearings roll around.
- It can be very loud! It is also quite tricky to control...
- Try holding it together and gently tipping back and forth – you could sing about what you are doing or just choose a familiar song and match the beat.
- If you give it a vigorous shake, it will sound like thunder!



Skin drum

- This simple drum is light and really easy to hold by the rim or balance on a lap/tray. It works well when played with fingers/hand and is quite loud with a beater!
- Great for musical conversations: in a pair, choose another instrument and take turns to play something and respond to each other. Start by trying to copy what the other person has done, which promotes a sense of togetherness. Then vary your responses, as if they have asked a question and you are giving an answer.
- Works well as the lead instrument in a group call-and-response game: the leader plays a short rhythm on the drum and everyone else echoes it back. Have a few turns, then pass the drum round the circle to let someone else be the leader.
- Try beating along with favourite tracks. Count along, playing every beat at first – this is likely to be in groups of 4: 1,2,3,4 / 1,2,3,4 etc.
- Keep counting, but only **play** on 1 and 3: 1,(2),3,(4) / 1,(2),3,(4)
- To create more 'swing', keep counting but only **play** on 2 and 4: (1),2,(3),4 / (1),2,(3),4

Top tips for making music meaningful!

- Don't worry if you've not had formal musical training: the verb that goes with music is "to play" – and everyone knows how to play! Enjoy it and the person you are supporting will enjoy it too!
- The person you're supporting might not want to explore an instrument immediately – that's OK! Try bringing it close to their hands and showing them what is possible – but then wait. Hold it nearby and see if they look or reach for it by themselves.
- Try to offer choices – this is where creative agency begins!
- Watch the person you are supporting closely – can you find and match their rhythms? This could be a sound, a movement or even just their breathing – join in at their pace, so they feel heard.
- Musical patterns can be like a conversation – try taking turns. Can you copy? Can you respond? What happens if you do something different? See where the patterns take you...
- Look for signs of enjoyment – if something is going well, repeat it or extend it!
- Be alert to signs of distress – take a break or try something different!
- Make sure that volume (in live or recorded music) is at a level which allows everyone to hear the contribution they are making.
- Dare to sing – your voice is the most personal instrument you've got! If the person you're supporting vocalises, show them that you're listening by joining in.
- You don't have to start from silence – if you're stuck for ideas, why not just pop on a favourite track and get involved by adding percussion, clapping to the beat or swaying along?