



A composite of responses collected in our #Music Can campaign (2018)

Music for Self-Care

From playlists to singing, listening to the radio or sharing favourite songs with others, many people have found music has played an important part in helping them keep body and soul together through the challenges of the past year.



The Evidence

The idea that music is a good thing for people, is more than just a ‘feeling’. There’s actually a wealth of formal research and evidence out there which proves it! This include studies which have led us to be confident to say:



Music plays in a key role in people’s lives¹.



Our bodies respond to music in conscious and unconscious ways².



While we may take the influence of music for granted, there are complex interactions occurring in our brains and bodies that impact our physical movement, thoughts, and feelings³.



When we listen to music, our bodies respond automatically⁴.

¹ Sloboda et al. (2009)

² Clark et al. (2016)

³ Altenmüller & Schlaug (2012); Koelsch et al. (2006); Clark & Tamplin (2016)

⁴ Burger et al. (2013); Levitin & Tirovolas (2009); Zatorre et al. (2007)



So, it is unsurprising we all believe it can be a valuable tool for self-care.

By the way: For those of you interested in hard evidence – and it can be helpful for fundraising! – we have lots more evidence we can share with you in our Research Summary. [Email Elsa](#) for more information.

This resource focuses on how to think about using music for self-care. Whilst there may be ideas which inspire you to develop for people in your care, it is designed for you, as practitioners.

If you are considering exploring any self-care ideas with someone in your care, do bear in mind how subjective our experiences of music are: Your get up and dance track, might raise my heart rate in a way I find stressful. My soothe and relax playlist, might sound dreary and meaningless to you. Each one of us holds different views of what type of music is meaningful or how music impacts them. With this in mind, music for self-care has to be tailored to the individual.

Read on to find out about the different ways we might use music as a source of comfort, to change our mood or lift us, to unite us and/or to give us purpose.



Music for Comfort

How might we use music as a source of comfort?



Soothing music

Thought prompts What music really comforts you? Is comfort always about calming down? Do you choose slow, quiet, gentle music or can different music have a similar impact for you? What does listening to soothing music look like for different people?



Breathing exercises can help you re-centre your breath and feel grounded.

Activity idea Inhale and exhale deeply for 30 seconds, with your hand placed on your chest (or, better still, stomach). Feel your chest (or stomach) rise and fall. Ultimately aiming to breath out for longer than you breath in. Tip: *Counting helps you measure this and helps control the exhalation. Humming too controls your exhalation.*



Meditation is the activity of quietening the mind and getting to a state when you can allow your thoughts to come and go, without judgement, reaction or distraction. Some people may be familiar with it in relation to chanting, mantras (yoga), or mindfulness apps etc. but it can happen as a result of any of the ways we talk about using music for self-care.



Humming can build on breath work. You can breathe out for longer if you are humming, than if you simply exhale without any accompanying sound.

Activity idea Close your eyes and spend 30-45 seconds humming to yourself. It could simply be a few long sounds. Feel the vibrations in your face or chest as your breathing becomes more regular and focus increases. Tip: *Keep your tongue on the roof of your mouth to relax your jaw.*



Patting More than just random tapping... think about the musical component of rhythm: steadiness, control, repetition etc.

Activity idea Pat a steady rhythm on your thigh, tap your foot or clap your hands for 2-10 minutes to feel grounded and less frazzled. You might want to consider your heartbeat as your starting (or reference) point.

Activity idea Cross your arms with a hand on each shoulder. Tap alternating index fingers for 30 seconds to promote a reset of your nervous system to a more relaxed state.



Listening to music can

- **Help us focus** during stressful times.

Thought prompt Do you put music on when you have to get stuff done, or do you find it adds to the stress?

- Help us **control our emotions**.

Activity idea Calm your nerves by actively listening to music with a slower tempo. Try to find songs with a bpm (beats per minute) between 60-80 – the average resting heart rate. [Find the beats per minute of your song here¹](#).

- **Help us self-regulate** by choosing music which respond to the emotions we are feeling in the moment.

Thought prompt Can you think of a song that they reliably turn to for its emotional punch?

[Bearing in mind this is utterly subjective, but to give you some ideas...Alexia's personal favourites include "I hate you so much right now!" by Kelis (fury), "Foundations" by Kate Nash (frustration), "Here comes the Sun" by the



Beatles or “Lovely Day” by Bill Withers (bravery), “Fix You” by Coldplay (to cry to), “Something Good” by Alt-J (everything’s ok)...]

- **Curated playlists** can mean we have music ready for different needs in our life when we need it.

Thought prompts What would be on your playlist of music to relax or meditate to? What music which has significant and positive association for you? Could you make a playlist to reminisce about people, places or events?

Linked Online Resources

- With thanks to Belltree Music Therapy: Find online activities to introduce you to a variety of ways to explore music for self-care with respect to **meditation, breathing, mindfulness, singing** (for self-care) [hereⁱⁱ](#) and [hereⁱⁱⁱ](#)
- This [Cove app^{iv}](#) is a **Musical journal for relaxation/anxiety relief**, endorsed by the NHS.
- You can find **songs linked to emotional states** by the fantastic Scottish music for wellbeing charity Fischy Music [here^v](#)



Music for Awakening

Music has the power to change our mood and to lift us. When you think about the music that changes your mood, how would you describe it? Does it “cheer you up”, “energise you”, “remind you of a happy memory”?



Taking the music that comforts us we can use it as a springboard to focus our feelings and change our mood, such as starting with something calming and moving towards something more upbeat. Or listening to something that harnesses our stress and move towards something more steady.

Thought prompts Do you do this already, consciously or subconsciously? Are you someone who chooses “cheering up” music to change your mood, or do you start with comfort and work towards a gradual shift of mood?



Curated playlists can mean we have music ready for different needs in our life when we need it.

Thought prompts What would be on your playlist of music to run to or dance to? What tracks would make a good playlist to guide you from comfort to energised?



Making music is a wonderful way for musicians of any level of ability to process and express emotions. Making music with another person/people can really focus us away from what is occupying our minds and help change our mood. But not all music-making needs an audience or anyone else. Making music, singing or messing about with sound can be cathartic fun when you’re on your own. There are loads of online opportunities to learn or improve your musical skills and lots of apps to make music digitally, if you’re not sure about singing or musical instruments.

Remember Making music is also accessible to those of us who don’t consider ourselves musical! Belting out a favourite tune in the shower or the car is a great way to release tension or energise oneself for the day ahead.

Linked Online Resources

- **Online learning opportunities for musical instruments and singing**
 - [Cheryl Porter Vocal Method^{vi}](#) - fun and high energy course from an American vocal coach with a wide range of style experience



- [LEARN TO SING with Dr Dan's Singing Lessons^{vii}](#) - a more laid-back approach from an Australian with a performing arts doctorate
- [Justin Guitar^{viii}](#) - Brilliant free resource for learning guitar from scratch, with some ukulele resources too
- [Music Teachers UK^{ix}](#) - Find a teacher for your instrument of choice
- [Piano Video Lessons Courses^x](#) - Comprehensive video piano lessons from beginner to intermediate stages
- **Apps for digital music-making and DJ-ing**
 - [Launchpad: Make & Remix Music on the App Store^{xi}](#) iOS only app for creating your own beats and loops.
 - [e-DJing^{xii}](#) DJ app. Try your hand at mixing your favourite songs!
 - [Apps by Brian Eno and Peter Chilvers^{xiii}](#) Various apps to create your own ambient music at a touch - I recommend Bloom.
- **Online choirs**
 - [The Sofa Singers^{xiv}](#) Larger scale choir from vocal leader James Sills. Free with optional membership.
- **In-person choirs**
 - [Nordoff Robbins Choir^{xv}](#) Open to all free weekly community choir based in North London, from the UK's largest music therapy charity.



Music for Purpose

Music has the power to unite us (sharing, doing together, being part of something larger)



Making music with others

- Drum circle
- Choir
- Orchestra
- Duets
- Song-writing



Listening to or sharing music with others

- Desert Island Discs
- Musical Conversations *Talking about our musical interests with others/sharing music (find out how Nordoff Robbins describe this [here^{xvi}](#))*



And to give ourselves purpose when we're on our own:

- **Listening to music** (could be background music to improve a task, but consider focused listening. Role of doodling or colouring to enable this)
- **Creating Playlists** (for reasons described under COMFORT and AWAKENING)
- **Song-writing** (can also be done with others)
- **Learning an instrument**
- **Performing/playing music yourself**
- **Finding new music to play or listen to**

Linked Online Resources

- **Podcasts** for people who like sharing musical interests and hearing others talk about powerful musical experiences
 - [Strong Songs Podcast^{xvii}](#) - *Brilliantly delivered analysis of popular songs. Great for informing your understanding of why great songs work;*
 - [Song Exploder^{xviii}](#) (also recently a Netflix show) - *Bands and artists discuss how they wrote their most popular songs).*



– **Ideas for Group Music Experiences**

- Mixtape club *Arrange to meet – a one-off social event or regularly – for a music sharing group.*
 - *Take it in turns to share an album you love*
 - *Have a collaborative playlist on Spotify or YouTube that everyone adds a song to*
 - *Taking turns to share a song that is meaningful to you and listen together*

– Places to find and explore **new music**

- [Everynoise^{xxix}](#) *An ambitious project to categorise all genres of music! Have a scroll and see what catches your eye. Click to hear an example of the genre, and explore their playlists to hear more.*
- [Radio Garden^{xx}](#) *listen in to radio stations playing worldwide!*
- [Spotify^{xxi}](#) *Free to sign up or £9.99/month to listen without adverts. Their curated playlists are sorted by genre and mood and can be a brilliant way of discovering new sounds. Also look for the “Artist Radio” or “Song Radio” feature which will play similar music to something you already like. The more you listen, the more the algorithm will understand what you like, and this is the basis for the algorithmic playlists such as Discover Weekly and Daily Mix - regularly updated playlists tailored to your taste.*
- [Last.fm^{xxii}](#) *Brilliant music discovery tool providing a rabbit hole of genre exploration.*

– Places to **rediscover familiar music** and find playlist inspiration

- [Playlist for Life^{xxiii}](#) *has compiled lists of the top 100 songs from every decade from 1910s to 2010s.*

Linked Learning Opportunities

- [Music for Wellness course^{xxiv}](#) *Free online course from Berklee Online*
- [How Music Can Change Your Life course^{xxv}](#) *Free online course from the University of Melbourne*



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ⁱ <https://songbpm.com/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.belltree.org.uk/belltree-online/music-for-mental-health/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://player.vimeo.com/video/466123658>

^{iv} <http://www.cove-app.com/>

^v <https://www.fischytunes.com/>

^{vi} <https://cherylportermethod.com/>

^{vii} <https://www.djarts.com.au/>

^{viii} <https://www.justinguitar.com/>

^{ix} <https://www.musicteachers.co.uk/>

^x <https://courses.pianovideolessons.com/>

^{xi} <https://apps.apple.com/app/apple-store/id584362474>

^{xii} <https://www.edjing.com/>

^{xiii} <http://www.generativemusic.com/index.html>

^{xiv} <https://www.thesofasingers.com/>

^{xv} <https://www.nordoff-robbins.org.uk/community-choir/>

^{xvi} <https://www.nordoff-robbins.org.uk/music-therapy/musical-conversations/>

^{xvii} <https://strongsongsodcast.com/>

^{xviii} <https://songexploder.net/>

^{xix} <http://everynoise.com/>

^{xx} <http://radio.garden/visit/london/0eZoYyEW>

^{xxi} <https://www.spotify.com/uk/>

^{xxii} <https://www.last.fm/>

^{xxiii} <https://www.playlistforlife.org.uk/the-100-years-book/>

^{xxiv} <https://www.coursera.org/learn/music-for-wellness>

^{xxv} <https://www.coursera.org/learn/music-life>