



ChiME Music Therapy Program

Adaptive Instrument Instruction

This is a hypothetical scenario of what can be expected in Adaptive Instrument Instruction sessions at ChiME. All names and background stories in this description are fictional, but they provide a representation of the target audience and illustrate how ChiME music therapists work with children.

A music therapist is meeting with a private guitar student, James, for their fourth lesson together. James is 13, and was given an Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnosis when younger. While James participates in general education classrooms at school, he is provided several helpful accommodations, such as sensory breaks, a token reward system, and a trained tutor for difficult subjects. His parents recognized at a young age that James was drawn to music, most especially the guitar. After several disappointing experiences with general private guitar classes, James and his parents hoped that Adaptive Instrument Instruction might be a good fit.

James enters the room with his mother, who says hello to the music therapist and exits to the hallway, where she will remain for the duration of the 45 minute lesson. Given James's high functioning level and his age, all parties felt that having James participate in lessons independently would be the best option. One area of need that James's parents had identified on their assessment sheet was establishing self-confidence and autonomy. Based on other information from this assessment sheet, the music therapist's observations during the first few lessons, and input from James about his goals and preferences, the music therapist has established the following goals:

Musical Goals:

Goal 1) James will label and identify the parts of the guitar independently, including: body, neck, headstock, tuning pegs, fret board, frets, bridge, and strings by name (E, A, D, G, B, e) on 100% of opportunities presented.

Goal 2) James will maintain a steady beat with downstrokes on the guitar for a one-minute interval.

Goal 3) James will locate and play Em and C first-position chords independently without the help of visual aids 85% of opportunities presented.

Nonmusical Goals:

Goal 1) James will transition between activities with the help of a visual aid with minimal target behaviors on 60% of opportunities presented.

Goal 2) James will participate in non-preferred activities with minimal redirection from MT for 75% of activities presented.

Goal 3) James will demonstrate autonomy by completing assignments and bringing necessary materials to weekly lesson on 90% of opportunities presented.

After sitting down, James gets out his guitar folder from his backpack—eager to show the music therapist his completed assignment. Instead of taking the folder from James, however, the music therapist points to the first item on their schedule board, which reads “Instrument Jam”. James responds to the redirection appropriately by putting his folder back into his backpack and selecting his preferred non-pitched percussion instrument from the basket next to the music therapist. The music therapist is sure to make a “+” on her data sheet next to James’s Nonmusical Goal #1, indicating he appropriately transitioned activities. The instrument jam is only a few minutes long, during which the music therapist plays guitar at varying tempo and dynamics, while also stopping and starting sporadically. James smiles and laughs as he plays his preferred instrument, the cabasa, while following the music therapist’s nonverbal direction. After finishing the instrument jam, the MT praises James for his listening and following directions, and asks what is on the schedule next.

James grabs for his guitar, prompting the music therapist to point to “Singing Warm-Up”, the next item on the schedule. Singing is an activity James finds difficult and therefore tends to avoid. He begins to engage in one of his target behaviors, biting his left index finger. The music therapist begins her solfeggio song, accompanying her voice with the piano, and hoping James will redirect himself. After several moments of watching, James lowers his left hand and follows the music therapist’s vocal lead. They participate in several vocal sirens together—exploring the highs and lows of the voice while mimicking the movement with their arms. James requires no redirection from the therapist during this activity, and so she marks a “+” on her data sheet next to Nonmusical Goal #2, and also Nonmusical Goal #1, as he appropriately redirected himself to transition.

The music therapist points to the next item on the schedule, which says, “Guitar Review”. James then reaches for his folder—another “+” next to Nonmusical Goal #1—and together they go over his homework assignment from the past week. James has placed circular stickers on a drawing of the fretboard where his fingers should be for Em and C chords. All of the sheets are completed, and so the music therapist marks “+” next to Nonmusical Goal #3. After picking up their guitars and briefly reviewing the parts of the instrument—which James picked up very quickly in the first few weeks of lessons—the music therapist asks James to place his fingers in position for the Em chord. While he locates the correct strings and frets, the music therapist marks “+” next to Musical Goal #1, and makes a note to write a more advanced musical goal for the upcoming weeks.

The next few minutes are spent locating the Em and C chords with the worksheets in front of James, while also practicing a steady downstroke on each. So far, James has been able to maintain a steady beat for 20 seconds before requiring redirection from the music therapist. Today, the music therapist has brought a metronome that also features a flashing light, hoping the visual cue might be engaging for James. With this aid, he is able to keep a steady downstroke on the Em chord for 35 seconds, which the music therapist praises and acknowledges. The music therapist notices James’s overall body language beginning to fatigue, demonstrated by slumped shoulders, a furrowed brow, and biting his lip. She points to the next item on the schedule, which James reads out, “Break Time!”

Break time for James consists of his favorite pretend play song, "Let's Go Swimming". The music therapist plays the song on guitar while she and James act out the lyrics of swimming, napping, and more. He sings every word with her, and it has immediately brightened his affect. The music therapist points to the next item on the schedule, which reads "More Guitar". Unwilling to transition from his favorite song, James begins to negotiate with the music therapist for more time with the song, while systematically biting his left index finger. Feeling that James will not redirect himself this time, the therapist points to the schedule item while singing, "It's time for more guitar, James, it's time for us to learn. We play some more guitar, James, and then a treat we've earned". The calm tempo and dynamic level of the music therapist's singing, combined with the reminder that they are working for more preferred time, helps James to regulate his behavior. Still lifting his hand to his mouth, but no longer verbalizing protests, the music therapist determines James is ready to focus. She marks "VP" next to Nonmusical Goal #1, indicating James needed a verbal prompt to transition.

During this last guitar activity for the day, the music therapist and James work on finding the correct finger placements for Em and C without the use of visual aids. James is able to locate Em independently 4 out of 6 opportunities presented, and the C chord on 3 of 6 opportunities presented. The music therapist marks this on her data sheet, and then commends James on his focus and hard work. He is rewarded with four minutes on the large group drum, to which the therapist provides improvised accompaniment on the piano while James leads the tempo and dynamics. Upon conclusion of this activity, James transitions appropriately to putting his things away and reviewing his assignment for this week— which is to practice feeling a steady beat on his legs while listening to preferred music. Together James and the music therapist sing their goodbye song, and James opens the door for his mom to enter. They all briefly review the highlights of the lesson, and after James and his mom have left, the music therapist writes a short summary and identifies needs for next week.

After three months of lessons, James is making steady progress on the guitar, and has adapted successfully to the lesson structure. He has completely surpassed his Musical Goals 1 and 2, and has almost mastered finding the Em and C chords without the help of visual aids. He can currently transition between the two chords with eight downstrokes on each approximately 75% of the time. This progress allows the music therapist to start singing "Beat It" by Michael Jackson very slowly on top of their practice, engaging James further and making him feel successful in playing a familiar song. James has been introduced to the D chord, which serves as a new Musical Goal for him. James continually meets his goal of bringing all materials and homework, but the music therapist keeps the goal as a reminder for James to do so. As for the other two nonmusical goals, James has met and surpassed both. He now transitions without displaying target behaviors on 85% of opportunities presented, and participates in non-preferred activities 78% of opportunities presented. The music therapist has recently written a new nonmusical goal for James, in which he will engage in target behaviors no more than twice per lesson. This will be a challenge for James, as he typically engages in his behavior almost every ten minutes. The music therapist feels this goal is appropriate, however, due to the amount of engagement James displays in lessons. Throughout the past three months, it has also become apparent that James's enjoyment of the lessons has increased. As he makes progress and successfully participates in something that previously seemed impossible, he begins to make more

jokes, try more difficult tasks, and maintain a positive affect after making mistakes. James's mom says this has transferred to regular school homework, activities with his siblings and friends, and his general demeanor in public. She even expressed that his teacher commented on his increased willingness to volunteer and answer questions in class. During their last lesson together, James shared with the music therapist that his friend is currently taking drum lessons, and that they are going to start practicing "Beat It" together as a band.