

Before you get started... Six tips for inclusive music-making

Here are a few practical tips that the OrchLab team have found can make a big difference to participant engagement and enjoyment during our music-making sessions. It's important to consider who is participating in the group, the ways they communicate, how they might use an instrument and how they process information. If you work in a care setting and want to set up a music group – this guide is for you.

1. Patience is a virtue!

It's always tempting to fill gaps and silences, but our advice is to embrace the awkwardness! A participant might be making you wait before they play, or they might be building up to a dramatic musical response, even though they appear to be completely ignoring what is happening in the session. Our advice is:

- Give plenty of time for musical responses. Silence can be a choice too!
- Everyone processes information differently. Try not to rush people by moving their hand, but instead try to tune into each participant's communication style

In Action: During the Orchlab Hello Song, the music leader sings "Hello Michael, great to see you" to Michael, but he doesn't respond on his xylophone immediately. Instead of moving Michael's beater for him to fill the silence, the music leader leaves a pause, and Michael plays his xylophone when he's ready.

2. Fit the instrument to the musician, not the musician to the instrument

Instead of focusing on the 'right' way to play a musical instrument, offer options that will unlock the creative musicality of each participant.

This might include:

- Positioning an instrument, whether it's a drum, an iPad, or a marimba, so that it can be played as comfortably and expressively as possible (even if that's with the chin or the elbow!)
- Ensuring the particular sound and volume of the instrument is desirable to the musician

In Action: Amisha wants to play the acoustic guitar but due to limited mobility in her arms and hands, finds it difficult to hold a guitar. The music leader sets up Thumbjam on an iPad with an acoustic guitar sound. Working together, they set up the iPad so Amisha can play it in her preferred style, which is with her elbow.

3. Be open to new ways of communicating

It's important to always be on the lookout for alternative methods of communication, as some of our participants don't communicate verbally.

This might include:

- Taking time to learn how each participant communicates and makes choices. This could be through eye movements, small hand gestures, or many other methods. If in doubt, ask someone who works with the participant closely or knows them well
- Giving plenty of time for participants to respond to any questions or requests
- Offering a variety of communication methods, such as Makaton, communication switches, and choosing cards

In Action: During a music session, the music leader hands out instruments, asking each participant what they would like to play. Anna doesn't seem to respond when asked, but a member of staff points out that although Anna is non-verbal, she indicates 'Yes' or 'No' by looking left or right. Once the music leader knows this, they are able to ask 'Would you like to play the ukulele?' or other yes/no choices, meaning Anna can choose which instrument she would like to play.

4. Check in with your senses

As well as ensuring that the sound levels in the room are pleasant and balanced, it's also important to check in with your other senses:

- Make sure the room is a good temperature. It may seem obvious, but if the room is too stuffy or too cold, it could have a big impact on the general engagement and enjoyment of the participants
- Ensure the lighting isn't too bright or too dark
- Remove any clutter from the room that be distracting, and ensure there's enough room for everyone to move and play freely

In Action: A music leader is asked to use a large hall to run music sessions involving participants with sensory-processing differences. The hall is large with boomy acoustics and features strip lighting which quietly hums. In addition, other people use the hall as a cut-through to other rooms and kitchen staff prepare lunch in the adjoining room. Some of the participants become distracted by these unintended disruptions and after a few weeks of trying to make it work, the music leader requests a new space with natural light and/or standing lamps, in a quieter part of the building.

5. Get Involved!

One thing we've noticed during OrchLab sessions is that all the participants have a much more positive experience when the staff in the room get stuck in. The relationships between the staff and the participants are often very close, so if a participant sees a member of staff playing music and having fun, they're much more

likely to do the same – so enjoy your own music-making in the session as well! We've found that this fosters a really strong sense of group identity too.

In Action: During a music session, Sarah is hesitant to play along with 'Mama Don't Allow' on her chime bars. The music leader notices that some of the staff members aren't joining in either, and encourages them to choose some chime bars to play along with. When Sarah sees the staff members playing along with the song, she feels more relaxed and confident, and joins in too!

6. Expect the unexpected

You will sometimes find that activities don't go according to plan! That's absolutely fine – expect the unexpected and embrace everyone's contribution no matter if it might not have been anticipated! If something you were organising isn't working, laugh together about it, move on, try again, or try something completely different. Build your own music sessions and see what works for you!

In Action: Joe has decided to run a music session using some of the activities from the Orchlab website. It goes well but at the end of the session the participants request a Goodbye Song, which Joe isn't prepared for. He knows that the group enjoy the 'Here Comes the Sun' activity, so Joe uses this song, working with the group to change the lyrics from 'Here comes the Sun' to 'Let's say Goodbye'.