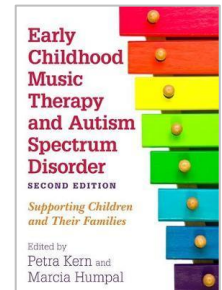


## BOOK REVIEW

# Early childhood music therapy and autism spectrum disorder: Supporting children and their families (2nd ed., Kern & Humpal, Eds.)

Reviewed by Emma Donnelly

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**Title:** Early childhood music therapy and autism spectrum disorder: Supporting children and their families **Editors:** Petra Kern and Marcia Humpal **Publication year:** 2019 **Publisher:** Jessica Kingsley Publishers **Pages:** 320 **ISBN:** 9781849056304

### REVIEWER BIOGRAPHY

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Editors Kern and Humpal introduce the book by stating “ASD is currently the most served population in music therapy practice worldwide” (p. 11). If we examine published material such as books and research in the area of music therapy with this client group, this would certainly seem the case. In addition, the theory and research surrounding Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is constantly advancing, and therefore it is important that music therapists who are working within this field receive the latest evidence-based research to inform their practice.

The book opens by giving a detailed summary of the latest diagnostic criteria of ASD according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (DSM V). This chapter is essential for informing any therapist working in the field of autism. It outlines the core features of ASD and clearly describes the new ‘Severity Levels’ one to three, which are now given at point of diagnosis (p. 15). These levels will inform music therapists about the degree of ASD the child is living with and determine the support needed. The dyad of impairment or diagnostic features are described in great detail and are also paired with an accompanying link to a bank of online video clips and professional trainings.

The authors promote the idea that evidence-based practice (EBP) in music therapy provides the practitioner with recent evidence-based practices which as stated are “the foundation for providing effective interventions to young children with ASD and their families” (p. 34). This chapter, together with the following two chapters, focus on this aspect of the work. They will especially appeal to the newly qualified music therapist as they clearly outline the importance of developing and implementing evidence-based practices in order to achieve the best clinical outcome for the client and their family.

Chapter 3 focuses on effective music therapy interventions that are heavily supported with scientific evidence. This chapter outlines and describes systematic reviews; independent studies and two meta-analyses prominent in the ASD related music therapy literature. The chapter concludes by urging the music therapy community to apply scientific rigour when conducting research in order to provide the best evidence-based service to their clients.

Chapter 4 moves onto assessment in music therapy. I had a particular personal interest in this chapter as it can be difficult to find one assessment tool which meets the multiple needs associated with ASD. Due to the diverse spectrum of autism, assessment tools often need to be adapted and individualised to meet the specific needs of each client such as ASD and severe learning difficulty, ASD and sensory processing disorder, and ASD and ADHD. As clinicians, we know that assessment is crucial if we are to determine eligibility for music therapy or to develop and identify SMART clinical goals. This chapter focuses on the importance of assessment. It lists clinical assessment tools in a clearly laid out table identifying the age group, population and purpose of each assessment. I found this table particularly useful and very user friendly. The chapter concludes with examples of how the Four-Step Assessment Model, the MT-MRB assessment and the SCERTS model can be used to determine eligibility, gather information and inform clinical goals.

Chapters 5 to 9 offer the reader a comprehensive insight into a variety of music therapy approaches, which may be applied within the music therapy intervention. These approaches range from a behavioural approach, instructional practices, Social Stories, Nordoff-Robbins approach and a Neurodevelopmental approach. Each approach is described in a detailed manner offering the reader very different evidence-based approaches which can be embedded into a therapists' clinical practice.

Chapter 10 is an excellent chapter and a much advised read. It addresses sensory processing in children with ASD, which is a core feature of autism. It is therefore important for a therapist to have a detailed understanding of sensory processing and how sensory issues may have an impact on the music therapy intervention. This section introduces the reader to the complexity of the sensory system. It outlines the seven senses and highlights the importance of having understanding around these systems in order to fully understand sensory features and their functions. Recent research talks of an eighth sense 'Interoception' (Hinton, 2019). Although this has not been discussed in this chapter it is important for therapists to consider. Interoception is a lesser-known sense, which refers to sensations within the body that help one understand and such sensations, e.g., hunger, pain, thirst. This may lead to difficulties in self-regulation therefore having a negative impact on the music therapy intervention. The chapter ends with suggestions for music therapy practice. It advocates working as part of a multi-disciplinary team with occupational therapists to use a variety of evidence-based interventions, which will be the most beneficial to children with ASD and complex sensory responses.

Chapter 11 is an informative chapter with a focus on communication development. It provides an overview on communication features in children with ASD. Like its previous chapter, it too has a focus on collaborative practices. It describes the intentional use of augmentative and alternative communication in clinical practice. This chapter also provides recent research snapshots related to music and communication development (pp. 217-218).

Inclusive practice and building capacity among families by empowering them to embed music therapy strategies into daily family routines and activities form the focus of chapters 12 and 13.

I found Chapter 13 particularly interesting and a worthwhile read. It highlights the importance of working together with parents as part of a team to empower them to include music in the home environment to support the core areas of development. Children with ASD often find transferring skills difficult as DeLoach (p. 247) explores in this chapter, emphasising the importance of practicing skills across multiple environments (e.g., home, school) in order for learning to occur. The chapter concludes by giving intervention ideas for parents around social communication, emotional regulation and transactional support.

Chapter 14 offers practical guidelines for advocacy for children with ASD and their families. It discusses challenges of advocacy and concludes with steps to effective advocacy. A reflective chapter to conclude the book follows this nicely. The journeys of four music therapists who have both a professional and personal perspective on working with and raising young children with ASD are described and captured in informal interviews. This chapter offers an insight into the unique challenges that face professionals who are also parents of children with ASD. It also gives an insight into the impact on family life for siblings and extended family members. There is a reoccurring message from each parent; “Use a strengths-based approach” and be a “tireless advocate” (p.288). This chapter offers many suggestions for the music therapist to inform their future practice.

This book will appeal to a broad spectrum of readers with an interest in ASD. I would especially recommend this book to newly qualified therapists or those beginning work within the field of autism.

## REFERENCES

- Hinton, C. N. (2019). *Improving attention regulation in children: An interoceptive awareness approach. An evidence-based capstone project in occupational therapy*. Doctoral thesis, Chatham University, Pittsburgh, PA, USA. Retrieved from <https://s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/chathamlibsp/gradcapstones/2019/HintonC.pdf>