

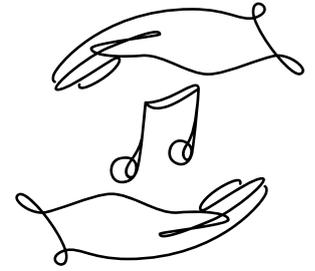
**NORDOFF & ROBBINS
MUSIC THERAPY**

Using music to support someone living with dementia

**– tips and activities from Nordoff and
Robbins music therapists**

Music can be a powerful tool for people living with dementia. It can help them to unlock memories and keep hold of their personal identity. Making music together can build connections with your loved one as well as being a pleasurable activity that supports their wellbeing.

Here are some tips from Nordoff and Robbins music therapists for using music to support someone living with dementia:



- 1 Together, choose a musical genre** to explore, one that you can listen to, sing-along to or play. Some examples of genres include popular songs from a particular decade, musicals, folk music etc.
- 2 Make a playlist together** you can sing-along or listen to. Don't make assumptions around what music someone else might like - be led by them where possible. We recommend using **Playlist for Life** (www.playlistforlife.org.uk) to help you build the playlist.
- 3** When enjoying music with a loved one, familiar music can be a great starting point. But this doesn't mean you have to know every song from start to finish. Try to resist reaching for your phone to look up the lyrics as it will shift your attention away from them. It's more important to **maintain a connection** with your loved one in the moment. **Repeating a catchy chorus** and even making up words inspired by what's going on around you can be great options to keep the music going.
- 4** Give your loved one the opportunity to **take the lead** by following their speed while singing, dancing or making music together.
- 5 Be mindful of what pitch** is most comfortable for the person you're supporting to sing in (e.g. higher or lower) and try to match that. This may be higher or lower than the original song or how you would normally sing.
- 6** If your loved one struggles with verbal communication, **try singing the beginning of a phrase** and let them finish the line. For example, **You:** "I'm singing in the..." **Them:** "...rain!"

- 7 Don't be afraid to drop the words altogether. **Making music without words** can be just as effective in **maintaining a connection** with someone, whether through humming, singing "la", or even just by tapping along to the music.
- 8 Be playful with it! Scatting, in other words, **singing nonsense syllables instead of words**, can be a great way to make instant music without lyrics. Instruments can be re-imagined as objects, for example the beaters of a xylophone can be two legs dancing.
- 9 If they are playing an instrument and playing it in a way that is unusual, let them carry on and explore. You can help someone who is frail by gently supporting their hand from underneath, although be careful not to force them into playing.
- 10 **Moving to music** can be a powerful **way to connect** with someone who lives with dementia. This doesn't necessarily mean you need to get up and dance together. **Just joining in with the small movements** that your loved one might make while they're listening to music can show that you're there with them and enjoying the music together.
- 11 **Singing to someone** who is living with more advanced dementia when supporting them in activities such as dressing, brushing hair, washing or even walking, can **help give structure to the activity**. This can help your loved one understand what is happening and help them **feel calmer** and more prepared to engage in the activity.
- 12 **Sometimes people aren't in the mood** to make music or sing a song. **And that's okay!** It's important to respect this and listen to what they are telling, or showing, you. You can always offer the opportunity to make music at another time.

Activities to try with your loved one



- **Find out what music** they would like to listen to.
- **Talk to them** about which musicians they love and why.
- **Try playing a track**, listening to it together and talking about the memories it raises.
- **Make up a song with them.** Try taking inspiration from the weather, what you can see in the room or outside the window, or their favourite food.
- **Help them use their hands** or movements to play an instrument.
- **Support them in attending** a public performance or concert.
- **Sing to them** – either a song you know or make something up.
- **Sing in time with their walking**, moving or breathing.



Building a playlist



Making a playlist together is a way to understand what music your loved one would enjoy. We recommend using **Playlist for Life** (www.playlistforlife.org.uk) to help you build the playlist. To help inspire you about the type of songs you may want to include, here are some suggested genres to explore:

- **Music from their cultural background**
- **Music from their religion or faith**
- **Popular songs from when they were in their teens and twenties**
- **Songs from film soundtracks**
- **Songs from musicals**

Playlist for Life also have a number of playlists you can access:
<https://open.spotify.com/user/playlistdementia>



Music services you can access



- **Nordoff and Robbins music therapy:**
www.nordoff-robbins.org.uk/applying-for-music-therapy/
- **Find a music therapist through BAMT:**
www.bamt.org/resources/find-a-therapist
- **Alzheimer's Society Singing for the Brain groups:**
www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/your-dementia-support-services/singing-for-the-brain
- **Age UK:**
www.ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area/
- **Arts for Dementia:**
www.artsfordementia.org/events/

Find details of more services on the Nordoff and Robbins website:
www.nordoff-robbins.org.uk/dementia-information-hub

