

# MUSIC CIRCLE GUIDEBOOK

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## THE *MUSIC CIRCLE* PROGRAM HISTORY

### **Recognizing the Need in the Community**

Music and music-making is fundamental to being human. Music builds community and contributes to a sense of well-being. However, for those with special needs, accessing music education or music performance opportunities can be challenging. The bright lights, loud sounds and crowds of the concert hall can be overwhelming for many. In addition to sensory barriers, many people with special needs require more in-depth learning opportunities to be able to comprehend the experience, and require specific preparations to make the most of any concert event. There is tremendous potential in utilizing music to improve the quality of life for those with special needs, but creative program development, support and appropriate adaptations are required.



Fundamentally, the goal of any music education or concert is enjoyment. To discover this joy, there needs to be exposure through opportunity, and these are available for typically-developing populations. The specific goal of the Music Circle program is to provide the same opportunity for the special needs community. The strengths-based and participant-led approach of the Music Circle program allows participants to have a positive experience through this exposure. Without programs adapted for their needs, many with special needs would not have the chance to explore music and perhaps spark a passion.



The Music Circle program was first explored in 2012 and came about as a serendipitous convergence of need and opportunity. The National Arts Centre (NAC) recognized both the need for adapted programming that would allow for truly accessible services, and that it had gaps in its programming for the special needs community. At the same time, the Lotus Centre for Special Music Education, an Ottawa-based charitable organization, was working on improving access to music education for the special needs community. They approached the music education department at the NAC with the possibility of collaborating. At the end of the preliminary discussions, both organizations realized the need for a multi-modal educational and concert experience that would make the participants comfortable, allow them to learn in a way that is accessible for them, and introduce them to orchestral instruments.

## Consultation and Program Development Process

Geneviève Cimon, director of music education at the NAC, and Dr. Erin Parkes, executive director of the Lotus Centre for Special Music Education conducted the initial program development. With very general program goals of welcoming the special needs community into the NAC and introducing them to orchestral instruments, they developed a program that included both educational elements and an adapted concert experience. They determined that focusing on one orchestral instrument family at a time (woodwinds, brass, percussion, strings) would best allow for focused learning.

Many people with special needs struggle with new environments and need time to become comfortable with new situations. They may also require an opportunity to develop an understanding of concepts through various modalities (e.g. aural, visual, kinaesthetic), and to be able to attach meaning to those experiences. The Music Circle workshops are designed so that participants have numerous opportunities to see, hear and play the instruments individually before the concert.

Once the basic design of the program was developed, the team was expanded to include the lead teaching artist, Elizabeth Simpson, french horn player in the NAC orchestra, with extensive music education experience. An occupational therapist and a behavioural therapist were also consulted to ensure that the program included all elements necessary to lead to the most successful music learning experience possible.

### Elements for Successful Learning

- ✓ Clear routine that remains the same for each workshop
- ✓ Use of a visual schedule
- ✓ Clearly defined space with quiet area for breaks
- ✓ Introduction to the concert musicians throughout the workshops
- ✓ Multi-modal instruction
- ✓ Opportunity for each participant to engage with the instrument in their own way
- ✓ Activities that are both calming and stimulating to support sensory regulation



## PROGRAM GOALS AND BENEFITS

The Music Circle program goals and benefits were identified during the consultation process. The program was then carefully designed to meet these goals and provide maximum benefit to participants in the following domains:



### **Engagement with Orchestral Instruments**

The primary goal of the program is simply to allow people with special needs the opportunity to engage with music and discover the instruments of the orchestra in a manner that is accessible for them and meets their learning, sensory and social needs. Each workshop allows the participants to touch, play and hear the instruments from that family. Participants develop a basic understanding of how the instruments work (within the selected instrument family), how they are different and similar. They then learn very simple technique to play the instrument. The concert allows the participants to gain a deeper understanding of how these instruments function together, and to hear the capabilities of the instruments when played by professional musicians across a variety of genres.

### **Accessibility and Acceptance**

Families with special needs can feel isolated as they are often excluded from recreational and educational activities, especially those with severe sensory or behavioural challenges. Parents and caregivers report that they are reluctant to register for programs because of their fear of disrupting other participants and being asked to leave. This can be particularly true in a concert setting where certain behaviours common amongst people with special needs are not generally accepted, such as the need to move or make noise. The Music Circle program allows parents and caregivers to feel confident that the participants are accepted by the musicians, staff and other participants. As the program is designed entirely for people with special needs, it goes beyond accessibility to regular programs and allows for a deeper level of acceptance. Facilitating this acceptance and welcoming attitude is a vital component of the Music Circle program.



## Concert Preparation

Sensory-friendly concerts are a wonderful step towards accessibility, but they alone do not combat all barriers to traditional concert attendance. For many with special needs, anything unfamiliar is a challenge and it can take time to become accustomed to new people and activities. The Music Circle program is designed to



allow time throughout the workshops for participants to see the musicians, learn about each instrument and become comfortable with the teaching artist. Nothing new or unfamiliar is presented during the concert experience and this allows the participants to be comfortable and engage with the music itself. The Music Circle program also serves as a bridge to attend future concerts, both adapted and non-adapted. Many Music Circle participants have felt comfortable attending orchestral concerts in the concert hall after participating in the program.

The guidebook and **video series** are designed to be used in tandem to provide you with all the information needed to replicate this program within your organization.

## MUSIC CIRCLE PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The Music Circle program consists of the following components:

1. Three workshops introducing a family of musical instruments

Duration	Approx. 45 minutes
Participants	Maximum 15




2. A sensory-friendly chamber concert

Duration	Approx. 45 minutes (with 30 minutes of music)
Participants	Maximum 45 (can combine 2-3 groups of workshop participants)

The following pages provide practical guidance on how to prepare for and how to deliver the workshops and the concert:

- The *Preparing for the Music Circle Program* section will help you with the preparations: how to start, train the staff, select the space, what challenges to expect and how to address them.
- The *Music Circle Workshop Structure and Instructions* section introduces the activities in detail, and offers additional notes and suggestions on how to deal with challenging behaviours. In addition, the section includes links to our website that contains short video recordings of the workshops at the NAC. The videos help to explain some of the typical challenges and alternate teaching solutions.
- The *Sensory-friendly Concert Instructions* section helps prepare for the concert by advising about the space and the performance details.
- Finally, *Teaching Strategies* will help you understand the learning, behavioural and sensory needs of your participants, and how to adapt accordingly.

## MUSIC CIRCLE WORKSHOP COMPONENTS

Task Description and Duration	Notes and Additional Recommendations
<p><b>Welcoming the participants and caregivers before the workshop</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask participants to arrive a few minutes early so they can relax and become accustomed to the space</li> <li>• Discuss specifics with caregivers: special conditions or anything that might influence participation</li> <li>• Discuss caregivers' involvement</li> </ul>	<p>While the goal is to develop a relationship and direct communication between the teaching artist and the participants, it might be necessary to involve the caregivers in assisting with behavioural challenges (e.g. task refusal, aggression, self-stimulatory or sensory-seeking behaviour).</p> <p>Knowing the participants' special needs and discussing assistance with caregivers greatly assists in being prepared to offer alternate activities in flexible ways.</p>
<p><b>Opening activity and "hello" song</b></p> <p> 5 minutes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sing a welcoming song to help participants settle and feel comfortable</li> <li>2. Invite participants to sing with you, clap and move, or participate in any way</li> <li>3. Sing the participants' names to welcome them</li> </ol>	<p>If the space allows, display a visual schedule that is visually engaging (photos or drawings). Use the visual schedule throughout the workshop to show progress.</p>
<p><b>Introducing the instruments and the workshop</b></p> <p> 5 minutes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Give a brief description of the instruments</li> <li>2. Explain the objectives of the workshop:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. We are going to make sounds on each of these instruments</li> <li>b. After these workshops we will attend a concert to watch professional musicians play these instruments</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Pick up the instrument that will be the focus of this workshop (e.g. trumpet) and introduce the musician who will play this instrument at the concert</li> </ol>	<p>Display the instruments in the room, so the participants see them as they arrive.</p> <p>Make sure the instruments are located in a safe area and are supervised by an assistant.</p> <p>The description can include details such as: which instrument makes higher or lower sounds, how sound is made, the materials used to make the instruments, etc.</p>
<p><b>The instrument selected for the workshop is introduced by the musician who will play it at the concert</b></p> <p> 5 minutes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The concert musician introduces him/herself and the instrument</li> <li>• The musician plays a short tune</li> </ul>	<p>Invite the musician who will play at the final concert to attend the workshop and introduce their instrument.</p> <p>Alternatively you can record short (duration about one minute) videos with each musician who will play at the final concert. This gives the students a glimpse at the performing musicians' personalities and what they look like.</p> <p>Use a television or large monitor for the video (laptops, tablets or phones are too small).</p>



### Instrument Exploration Activity 1



The teaching artist plays the first featured instrument. It is important to take sensory considerations into account by first playing away from participants, then face toward them playing louder each time. (Perhaps a fanfare and then a simple tune.)

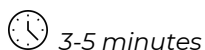
1. Invite the participants to clap or move to the tune while playing.
2. Model how to make a sound. Break down all the steps needed in playing the instrument so that it is very clear for participants.
3. Invite the participants one-by-one to try the instrument. Simply model and verbally prompt the participant to do what you demonstrated. When the participant successfully makes a sound, encourage all participants to clap for them. This shows support and makes them feel good that they have accomplished something.

Multi-modal communication is essential when working with special needs populations. Many participants will have deficits in their ability to communicate or understand communication, so it is important to use supports other than just language.

Do not take more than two minutes per participant in order to maintain the focus and attention of all participants. Involve the others by asking what they think about the sounds: "Wasn't this funny? Nice? Loud?"

When it is not possible for the students to make a sound, it is great to encourage them to do other things with the instruments. This can include pushing the valves and looking into the bell where they will see their reflection. They can even make verbal sounds into the bell which makes a wonderful echo. We then clap for them!

### Movement and Song Activity



An activity involving movement is a good idea at any point during the workshop if the participants either need grounding to help refocus, or need movement to release some energy.



As with the other activities, break down each component as much as possible. Demonstrate all parts before asking participants to attempt the activity, and continue to model as the participants join in. Also, ensure that movements are very simple and adapted for any participants with limited mobility.

Plan for alternate activities. For example, the movement activity could have two prepared formats: one that is stimulating and one that is calming. The teaching artist can use the activity that appears most needed by participants at the time, and there is no indication to participants that the routine has changed.

### Instrument Exploration Activity 2



Follow the same process as for Instrument exploration 1, this time with the second featured instrument.

<p><b>Prepare a piece to perform at the concert</b></p> <p> 3-5 minutes</p> <p>When possible, it is optimal to prepare a piece during the workshops that participants can perform during the concert. It gives the participants a huge amount of pride to perform for their family and their friends. They feel independent and accomplished playing in a concert, and it is such a special experience for them to perform alongside professional musicians.</p>	<p>The piece prepared must be extremely simple and achievable for all participants. It can be as simple as playing maracas along with the percussion ensemble. One of our favourite activities when exploring the brass instruments is “If You’re Happy and You Know It.” In this version, rather than “clap your hands”, participants “buzz your lips” on mouthpieces.</p>
<p><b>Good-Bye Song and Activity</b></p> <p> 1 minute</p> <p>The goodbye song concludes the workshop. Keep it short and simple, with perhaps a catch word or phrase that they can immediately sing.</p> <p>Tell the participants that you are looking forward to seeing them again the next time. Close the session by telling them what will be covered next time, and applaud each other for a fantastic and fun workshop.</p>	<p>If the workshop is held in the same facility as the concert, it is a good idea to tour the concert hall at the end of the last workshop. This helps with preparing the participants for the concert.</p>

## Workshop Elements: At a Glance

- ✓ Welcome
- ✓ Opening Activity & Hello Song
- ✓ Instrument and Workshop Introduction
- ✓ Musician Introduction
- ✓ Instrument Exploration Activity #1
- ✓ Movement/Song Activity
- ✓ Instrument Exploration Activity #2
- ✓ Concert Piece Preparation
- ✓ Ending Activity & Good-Bye Song

## SENSORY-FRIENDLY CONCERT INSTRUCTIONS

The audience is comprised of workshop participants, family and friends, support workers, parents, and teachers. It is a very relaxed and fun atmosphere. The participants have been prepared during the workshops to know what to expect from the concert environment, and have learned some concert etiquette. Because of their excitement, it is a fairly active environment with lots of noises and fidgeting. Clapping, moving, applauding, dancing, and jumping are all expected and acceptable behaviours. It is possible to combine participants from two or three workshops to attend a single concert. This can help to save on program costs, and also create a more energetic concert experience. Friends and family can also be included in the concert.

The goal of the concert is to provide pure enjoyment for the participants. They love the music and their reactions are their natural way of showing this. These chamber concerts are successful as long as the performing musicians understand that these reactions show joy and enthusiasm from the participants. Performing musicians should also understand that any signs of distress from participants is not a reflection of their enjoyment of the concert, but there could be many factors (excitement, hunger, over-stimulation, etc.). Training musicians in what to expect is vital for a successful experience for all involved.

Elements	Details
<b>Audience Participation</b>	At the beginning of the concert, the teaching artist welcomes the participants, parents and caregivers and introduces the musicians, reminding the participants that they already met during the workshops (videos or in person). At the appropriate time, the teaching artist then invites the participants to perform the piece they practiced during the workshops.
<b>Concert program</b>	Comprise the concert of short pieces, 2-3 minutes in length, with varied tempos and styles. Include some familiar melodies. Approximately 30 minutes of music should be prepared for the 45-minute concert. Any longer than that can lead to challenges with focus and sensory over-stimulation for the participants. It is great when the leader of the chamber ensemble acts as host. This creates a smoothly run and cohesive performance. The host introduces the pieces and musicians and interacts with the audience. It is effective to have all the members of the ensemble speak and introduce their instruments as well. The participants really enjoy their unique personalities and the sounds of beautifully played instruments.
<b>Post-Concert Activity</b>	The instrument “petting zoo” is a special event after the concert. It gives the participants and their siblings or friends the chance to play the instruments again and now with guidance from the performing musicians. It is a special treat and a fun way to end this unique and inspiring musical experience.

## PREPARING FOR THE *MUSIC CIRCLE* PROGRAM

### Objectives

Each instrument family contains at least four instruments to be explored throughout the workshops. (Note that the percussion family may require more thought and organization, because there are many instruments to cover.) It will be up to the teaching artist and team involved to determine which instruments to include and in which order. The specific objectives of the workshop are as follows:

- Touch, play and hear instruments from a family of instruments
- Use music playing and listening to meet sensory needs without over-stimulating
- Develop or enhance social skills such as listening, turn taking, reciprocity and etiquette
- Develop a basic understanding of how musical instruments work
- Experience how instruments work together in a chamber concert
- Develop comfort and confidence in attending musical events

### Enlisting Special Needs Professionals

It is highly recommended that any organization without a solid background in providing accessible programs partner with community professionals who can guide the process. Professionals could include special educators, music therapists, behavioural therapists, speech-language pathologists, psychologists or physicians with knowledge of adapting learning environments for special needs populations. A professional will be able to provide invaluable assistance in several areas:

- Assessing available space and creating an appropriate environment
- Training staff and musicians
- Consulting on repertoire and lesson planning
- Preparing for different populations and their needs
- Providing guidance on specific challenges that may arise during the program
- Giving feedback on program success

Ongoing relationships and communication with special needs professionals will ensure that the program is tailored to meet the needs of each and every participant.

### Workshop Location

Choosing appropriate space for the workshops and concerts is essential for creating a comfortable and enjoyable experience for participants. An important decision is whether to hold the workshops in the same location as the concert, for example at a performing centre. Alternatively, the workshops could be delivered in special education classrooms, therapy centres, etc. and the concert in a performing centre.

### Workshop Location Criteria

- ✓ Comfortable, wheelchair accessible space for sitting in a circle for up to 15 participants (without too much extra space as that can be less comfortable for those with sensory issues)
- ✓ Sitting area for parents and caregivers
- ✓ Low ceilings and carpeted floors, if possible
- ✓ Adjacent space that can serve as a quiet area for participants who need breaks
- ✓ Safe area for displaying the instruments
- ✓ Projector or television to play the videos
- ✓ Display a visual schedule

### Chamber Concert Location

It is preferable to hold the concert in a separate space that is designed for performance events. Offering the concert at a performing centre is important, as the ultimate goal of these workshops is to prepare participants for a real concert experience. The chamber ensemble sets up on the same level (not on a raised stage) as the audience, creating a friendly atmosphere.

### Concert Location Considerations

- ✓ Choose a space that is intimate and carpeted to create a feeling of ease.
- ✓ Use soft lighting to avoid creating discomfort in those with light sensitivities.
- ✓ It should be a space that is wheelchair accessible and is not in a busy area.
- ✓ There should also be sufficient space for an instrument “petting zoo”, which immediately follows the concert.
- ✓ Add floor mats for younger children, and chairs for teachers, family, and friends.



## Program Participants

The workshop is adaptable to participants of all ages and abilities, understanding that most participants might be sufficiently impaired and not able to participate in activities that are not carefully designed to meet their needs. Participants might range from severely to mildly impaired, and including those with autism spectrum

disorder, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, learning disabilities, global developmental delay, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, fragile X syndrome, and more.



### Keep in Mind...

Each workshop will look different depending on the profiles of the participants. This training manual aims to provide a general guide and instructions on how to adapt the program and make it accessible for all audiences.

## Understanding the Participants

The *Music Circle* program allows parents and caregivers to feel confident that the participants will be accepted by the musicians, staff and other participants. As the program is designed entirely for people with special needs, it goes beyond accessibility to regular programs and allows for a deeper level of acceptance.

It is important to understand the participants' special needs and make adequate preparations:

- Consider the appropriate number of participants given the specifics of the applicants
  - For instance, 15 participants may be too many in some cases
- Learn about specific conditions, diagnoses, and needs
- Evaluate the need for additional support
  - For example, additional support from caregivers, the provision of noise cancelling headphones, fidgets, etc..

### Communication is Key

Program preparation should include communication with caregivers. It is vital that the caregivers are prepared and informed as they can play a vital role in contributing to the success of this program

**Tip:** Discuss the workshop structure with the caregivers and the role they might need to play in support. For example, sitting in the audience or with the participant, modelling, taking part in the activities, etc..

## Training Staff and Musicians

It is likely that the staff and artists enlisted to deliver this workshop will not have extensive experience with special needs populations, particularly those with severely impaired functioning. This can be daunting and intimidating for the staff and musicians, even if they feel highly motivated to deliver this workshop. Therefore it is advisable to enlist an external professional to provide training for the staff and the musicians working on this project.

### Staff and Musician Training Considerations

#### Teaching Artist

- the importance of student-led learning
- how to balance structure and flexibility
- behavioural challenges that may arise and strategies to deal with them
- how to adapt to participants with various needs (e.g. autism, physical handicaps, non-verbal, etc.)
- how to break down instruction so that it is appropriate for participants with mixed cognitive abilities
- health and safety concerns

#### Administrative Staff

- training on special needs culture in your community
- understanding what information to collect from parents and caregivers during registration
- being able to provide adequate information about workshop details, objectives, expectations, participation to parents and caregivers
- being able to respond to specific needs, questions
- health and safety concerns

#### Performing Musicians

- what to expect from the audience in terms of behaviour and engagement
- how to plan repertoire that is sensory-friendly
- health and safety concerns

## Partnering with Community Organizations

Rather than recruit participants from the general population, it can be helpful to connect with existing organizations or groups. This can include group homes, therapy centre, special education classrooms, social skills groups, and more. Connecting with a community organization can have several benefits:

- Reduce the participant recruitment process
- Ensure trained support staff will be on hand to assist participants
- Participants will already be familiar with each other
- Serve as training for the partnering organization on how to use music with their clients

When approaching community organizations to explore a partnership, it can be helpful to ask questions of the organization program leaders to help tailor the series to the needs of that group of participants.

Questions to ask can include: do the participants have any experience with musical activities? Have you noticed an interest in any particular area of music? What adaptations will be required for your group to succeed? Engaging with your community partners can lead to a richer and more successful experience for all involved.

## **Health and Safety**

There are specific health and safety concerns when working with special needs populations. It is not uncommon to host participants that may be flight risks, who can become verbally or physically aggressive, or who may approach the musicians during a concert. Musicians often feel vulnerable when they are performing, as they may be sitting and holding or playing their instruments. They may not feel prepared to address a situation that could result in damage to their instruments or to themselves. Professionals who work with special needs communities have specific training in de-escalation techniques to use in potentially volatile situations.

While it is not necessary for the teaching artist or musicians to have this training, they should be aware of the potential for challenging behaviours. It is advisable to have trained personnel on hand who are comfortable addressing any potential issues. This can be support staff of partnering organizations (this is ideal as they will be very familiar with the participants), parents, or professionals from the community. Your organization may choose to make it mandatory for parents or caregivers to attend the program with the participants. While it is important that participants are able to enjoy the experience in a way that is meaningful for them, it is essential that the health and safety of all is protected.

## **Program Evaluation**

The Music Circle program is designed to have three workshops followed by a chamber concert. It is recommended to evaluate each workshop in order to make small modifications and adjustments if necessary, depending on participant specifics. It is important to collect feedback from participants, caregivers and teaching staff. This process is vital to ensure continued quality engagement as the needs of each group of participants will vary. We suggest that the evaluation process includes all staff involved in administering the workshop, as well as the special needs consultant.

## Key Questions for Program Evaluation

Did the instructor feel comfortable leading the session? Is more training and mentorship needed?

Did the physical space work well for the participants?

Was the number of participants appropriate?

Was the length of the workshops appropriate?

Were the participants engaged and at ease throughout the workshops?

Did the workshops help to prepare the participants for the concert?

Are any additional supports required for future sessions (e.g. noise cancelling headphones, fidgets, etc.)?

## TEACHING STRATEGIES

It is important when working with special needs populations to have strategies in place that will allow them to reach their full learning potential. The strategies presented here can be used across all activities to help create the best possible learning environment.

### **Balancing Flexibility and Structure**

It is a part of many special needs to lack the ability to structure time and space, and to be able to make sense of changes in the world around them. For this reason, predictability and structure are very important. It allows participants to feel at ease because they know what is coming and what will be expected of them. This is especially true of participants with autism spectrum disorder, for whom routine can be vital to a successful experience. However, flexibility is essential, and this balance can be challenging to achieve. It is important to let the participants guide the experience and for the teaching artist to be open to following the lead of the participants as this can provide opportunities for incredible learning and expansion; but it is equally important to maintain the structure of the activity so that participants feel safe and stable. It can be very distressing for participants if the expected routine changes or certain activities are not completed, or are completed out of order.

#### Guidelines for Achieving a Balanced Program

- ✓ Have a visual schedule that is clear, yet vague enough to allow for some flexibility. For example, headings may be simply “hello song”, “explore the trumpet”, etc. Use icons for participants that are non-verbal.
- ✓ Have a time frame in mind for each activity to ensure that every item on the checklist will be completed by the end.
- ✓ Plan for alternate activities. For example, “movement activity” could have two prepared activities: one that is stimulating and one that is calming. The teaching artist can use the activity that appears most needed by participants at the time, and there is no indication to participants that the routine has changed.
- ✓ Approach the workshops with a spirit of collaboration—the teaching artist is facilitating the experience, but the participants have agency in the direction that the experience will take. This requires the teaching artist to pay close attention to how participants are responding and be ready to adapt quickly as needed.



## Prompting and Modeling

Multi-modal communication is essential when working with special needs populations. Many participants will have deficits in their ability to communicate or understand communication, so it is important to use supports other than just language. In fact, it is best to use language as little as possible as it can cause confusion. The primary mode of communicating what you want participants to do is through modeling—simply show them. After that, the level of support needed will vary from one participant to the next. Follow these levels of support as needed to help the participant achieve the desired action, increasing from one level to the next if there is not the desired response:

1. Simply model and verbally prompt the participant to do what you demonstrated.
2. Break down what you are modeling. Have the participant look at each part of the action and practice each in turn.
3. Use a partial physical prompt by, for example, putting a participant's hands on an instrument, and then verbally prompt and/or model.
4. Use a full physical support or hand-over-hand, where you take the participant's hands and fully guide them through the action.

MODEL & VERBAL PROMPT



"BREAK DOWN" MODELLING



PARTIAL PHYSICAL PROMPT



FULL PHYSICAL PROMPT

Be prepared to provide any and all levels of support, particularly when working with a group of mixed abilities. Remember to move through the levels of support in sequence to encourage independence as much as possible.

## Behavioural Challenges

The potential for maladaptive behaviours can be a concern for many considering beginning a program for special needs populations. It is important to be prepared for common behavioural challenges and have strategies in place to deal with them as they arise. With all behaviours, it is imperative to approach them with a spirit of understanding and to remain calm. Behaviours are communication—try to discern what the participant is trying to communicate through that behaviour and adjust to meet that need. This is where having a special needs professional on hand during programming can be extremely valuable. Here is a list of some common behavioural issues, but it is by no means exhaustive.

Behaviour	Strategies
Task refusal	Offer alternative ways to participate; increase levels of support (see above); move on and offer an opportunity to participate when the participant is ready
Repetitive vocal patterns and scripting	Allow the participant to continue; realize that the participant is likely not trying to communicate with you, no need to reply; carry on with the lesson.
Self-stimulatory or sensory-seeking behaviour	Try to redirect the need for sensory stimulation to the task at hand; provide sensory input in a positive way eg. incorporate movement or allow participant to hold a heavy instrument; not necessary to interfere if behaviour is not disruptive
Physical or verbal aggression	Do not engage and stay calm; have participant take a break in quiet place with a trained professional or parent until they are calm and ready to participate in a safe manner.

### Understanding Sensory Needs

Many people with special needs have hyper- or hypo-sensitivities to various sensory stimuli. This means that they can be more or less sensitive than others in any of the senses. Being hyper-sensitive can lead to defensive behaviours (eg. trying to escape; agitation), while being hypo-sensitive can lead to sensory-seeking behaviour (eg. motor excesses; making sounds; seeking physical sensory input). The first step to supporting sensory needs is to create an environment and develop a lesson plan that supports those needs. Still, with such a variety of profiles among participants, there will likely be some adjustments that need to be made during programming. Here are some tips:

- Have sensory supports on hand, like noise-cancelling headphones and fidgets.
- Have a flexible lesson plan that allows shifts to meet sensory needs eg. plan alternate versions of the hello song that have students seated and calm, or include movement.
- Be observant. Take note of what sensory stimulation the participant is seeking or escaping, and adjust the environment and activity to meet that need if possible.
- Have an alternate space that allows participants to regulate if they are not able to do that in the workshop or concert space.

## **Social Skills Development**

Challenges with social skills are part of many diagnoses, particularly autism spectrum disorder. Parents and caregivers are often in search of any opportunity to develop those skills, and particularly for opportunities that their children will genuinely enjoy. Embedded within the Music Circle program are opportunities to develop social skills in several areas.

The Music Circle program is designed to develop the following social skills in particular:

<b>Joint attention</b>	The shared focus of two individuals on an object. It is achieved when one individual alerts another to an object by means of eye-gazing, pointing or other verbal or non-verbal indications. Using an object, in this case a musical instrument, has been shown to increase joint attention.
<b>Turn taking</b>	An important element of socialization, it involves an understanding of the needs of others and the ability to wait until others have had their needs met before having one's own needs met. For example, waiting for your turn to play or touch an instrument while others have their turn.
<b>Reciprocity</b>	It is how the behaviour of one person influences and is influenced by the behaviour of another person and vice versa.
<b>Etiquette</b>	It is a code of behaviour that delineates expectations for social behaviour according to contemporary conventional norms. In music performance, this includes listening quietly and applauding after a performance.

## QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK

In the years since the program was first offered, Music Circle program team members, caregivers, and participants have reported that it has been a tremendously rewarding experience. Creating a successful program for people with special needs takes careful and thoughtful planning, creativity, and ongoing assessment. Most of all, it takes a belief that all people have the right to experience music and a commitment to helping all people reach their full potential. Through this commitment, a truly special and unique experience can be created for all involved.



Our hope in sharing information about the Music Circle program through this guidebook is that more arts organizations will implement the program and create opportunities for those with special needs. We are happy to assist in this process through consultation, or answer any questions you may have about the program. We would also love to hear about your experiences as you work through implementation. Please contact Dr. Erin Parkes at [erin@lotuscentre.net](mailto:erin@lotuscentre.net), or the music education department at the National Arts Centre at [mused@nac-cna.ca](mailto:mused@nac-cna.ca).

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