

# Potential Benefits of Music and Movement

While the Music & Movement program was started because of an expressed need for physical activities for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), the potential benefits do not stop there.

- **Increased physical activity-** Participation in a typical 1-hour group can keep an individual's heart rate elevated for at least 30-45 minutes, which can increase endurance overtime. Individuals who are less likely to be active in other settings are motivated to participate because of the music component of the group. Additionally, there are not there negative connotations some people associate with the word "exercise."
- **Appropriate release of excess energy-** Because of the level and duration of the group, individuals have the opportunity to use energy that might otherwise result in behavior issues.
- **Appropriate social interactions-** Group participants are encouraged to interact with one another on a variety of levels in the group. In past groups, children have made connections that have moved beyond the meeting time and into lasting friendships.
- **Increased communication skills-** Through singing, chanting, and opportunities for leading the group, participants have the opportunity to work on turn taking skills important to conversation and also receptive and expressive language skills in a non-threatening environment. There are means of compensation for lack of spoken language through alternative modes communication such as gesture, mime, or icon communication boards.
- **Decision-making skills-** Participants are provided multiple opportunities to make choices about the direction the group will take, by choosing activities, choosing peers (who's turn is next?), and choosing equipment (which color, which instrument, etc.).
- **Increased time on task-** While each activity may take only a few minutes, there is room to increase the time if the group appears to be enjoying the activity. Plus, participating in a one-hour group, even if it has many breaks and transitions, may be a big accomplishment for an individual who typically will not stay in the same room for more than a few minutes.
- **Increased self-esteem-** Group members are routinely given opportunities to take leadership roles or to be in the spotlight. There is no wrong way of performing an activity, as long as the effort is made, and with the right encouragement from the instructor and peers, each individual can leave feeling just a little bit more proud.
- **Increased ability to follow directions-** Because of the structured nature of the group, there are many opportunities to work on following directions, either through the schedule or the instructor's cues. At times, there may be "follow-the-leader" style activities where the participants will take turns in both the role of follower and of leader.
- **Increased understanding of relaxation techniques-** The group is ended with a cool down technique that is meant to bring the heart rate back down and calm the senses after a full hour of movement. For some, the guided cool down can be relaxing, and may translate into a technique that can be used outside of the group setting.

- ***Appropriate use of out-of-school time***- Parents often comment that there are limited after- school options for children with ASD, so participation in the group can provide meaningful activities and a safe place to fill those after school hours.
- ***Increased cooperation with peers***- Sharing materials, taking turns, and encouraging one another are important components of the group format.
- ***Expands areas of interest***- Repetition can be an effective learning tool for an individual with ASD. However, because the participants are likely to learn at a different pace, and may lose interest repeating the whole schedule every week, it is important to find a balance between routine activities and new ones. Often the routine activities will set a foundation to build on each week as the participants develop their skills.
- ***Decreased stereotyped and repetitive motor mannerisms***- Children with ASD often have restrictive motor movements, such as hand or finger flapping or twisting, or complex whole-body movements. Engaging in bilateral hand purposeful activities, in activities like hand holding, dancing with partners, holding a parachute, etc. decreases the opportunity for such movements.
- ***Increased appropriate play***- The group offers a great opportunity for make-believe play or social imitative play appropriate to developmental level which is often lacking for children with ASD.

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