Developing an Interactive Music-Based Social Intervention for Social-Skill Development in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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This model-development article introduces the Interactive Music-Based Social Intervention (IMSI), a structured educational program designed to support the social development of primary-school-aged children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Music has long been used in work with autistic children, but many school-based approaches remain broadly described, only loosely connected to observable social behaviors, and difficult to reproduce across settings. IMSI was developed to address these limitations by bringing together developmental theory, evidence-based autism practices, research in music education and music therapy, guidance on complex interventions, and the TIDieR reporting framework. These 4 music education activities (call and response singing, structured musical games, interactive instrument play and music-and-movement activities) are organized in a 12-week model. The goals for the children are joint attention, social responsiveness, turn-taking, cooperation, initiation and expression of emotions. Each of the 12 sessions follows a 6-step routine. In the sessions flexible prompts are used, the activities are individually adapted and the model is monitored for fidelity. As the article is concerned with developing and describing the intervention rather than testing its outcomes, it explains the program's underlying logic, intended social targets, materials, provider requirements, implementation procedures, and priorities for future research. At this stage, IMSI should be viewed as a carefully developed intervention framework that offers a clear basis for practice and further study, but still requires systematic evaluation of its feasibility, acceptability, fidelity, and effectiveness in special education classrooms, autism intervention centers, and other supported group settings.

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