



HOW TO CREATE A PERSONALIZED MUSIC PLAYLIST FOR A LOVED ONE AT HOME



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide provides detailed instructions for creating a personalized music playlist for use in a home setting. For questions regarding this process, email

info@musicandmemory.org.

Our Story

Music & Memory trains healthcare professionals working in a wide range of healthcare organizations on how to create personalized music playlists for those in their care. We use digital music devices, such as iPods and other Mp3 players, to deliver the personalized music playlists. Musical favorites can provide relief in many different forms for residents participating in the program. For instance, music that is personal to an individual can help them access memories not lost to dementia, reawakening residents so they may communicate and feel like themselves again.

Our goal is to bring joy into the lives of people suffering from a wide range of cognitive and physical challenges. Through access and education, and creating a network of Music & Memory certified organizations, we aim to make this form of personalized therapeutic music a standard of care throughout the healthcare industry.

The Music-Brain Connection

As we all know, hearing the songs associated with a first love or a favorite movie causes a rush of emotions and memories. Music is profoundly linked to our personal history. In fact, our brains are hard-wired to connect music with long-term memory.

Even for persons with severe dementia, music can tap deep emotional recall. For individuals suffering from Alzheimer's or other related dementias, recent memory for names, places, and facts may be compromised, but memory from their teenage years is well-preserved.

Favorite music or songs associated with important personal events can trigger memories of lyrics and the experience connected to the music. Beloved music calms chaotic brain activity and enables the listener to focus on the present moment, regaining a connection to themselves and others.

How Personalized Music Can Transform Lives

Grounded in extensive neuroscience research, tested and proven in thousands of Music & memory certified organizations, our personalized music program has provided therapeutic benefits for thousands of individuals, clients and the staff who care for them. Again and again, health care professionals tell us our program is often life-changing for everyone involved:

- Finally, professional staff have a way to give pleasure to persons with advanced dementia—often the most difficult to reach.
- Personalized music offers an enjoyable, fulfilling activity for persons on dialysis, on ventilators or who are bed-bound.
- Listeners are more cooperative, attentive and willing to accept care; their brighter moods boost staff morale and enable staff to be more person- centered.
- Because individuals are calmer and less agitated, sundowning (confusion and restlessness) is often reduced or eliminated.
- Listeners are more engaged with those around them.
- Family and staff are able to connect in a more meaningful way with residents around music and memories.
- Personalized music provides a valuable tool for the effort to reduce reliance on antipsychotic medications.

In the words of Tony Lewis, President and CEO of Cobble Hill Health Care in Brooklyn, N.Y., *“Despite the enormous sums of money spent on mood- and behavior-altering medications that are often not particularly effective, nothing compares to these iPods when it comes to improving quality of life.”*

Getting Started

Armed with the facts about Music & Memory and how personalized music can make a positive impact, you’re now ready to get started creating a personalized music playlist!

One of the first things you’ll need to consider is how you plan to offer the music. Generally speaking, we recommend using a portable non-streaming music device and a set of comfortable headphones, but don’t let that limit you. If you wish to offer the music in a different way, such as streaming from a phone or tablet, that will also work, provided you are able to make a personalized playlist and the person in your care is comfortable using the equipment.

If you want to keep things simple, here’s an easy to use and cost-friendly setup:

- **A computer to host your music library.** We recommend a laptop for mobility during the music discovery process, but a desktop computer will work as well.
 - Windows: Use Windows Media Player to host music library.
 - Apple: Use iTunes to host music library.
- **A portable music player.** We’ve learned from experience with many elders that small digital music devices are the easiest to use and the most durable.
 - Windows: Use **SanDisk Clip Jam or Sport (bluetooth) MP3 Player**. \$30-50
 - Apple: Use refurbished **iPod Shuffle 4th Gen** (prices vary) or **SanDisk**

Clip Jam or Sport MP3 Player. \$30-50

- **A pair of lightweight, adjustable, over--the--ear headphones.** You can find good, reasonably priced equipment at Target, Best Buy, RadioShack or other stores that sell electronics, or order online from Amazon. Expect to spend about \$20.

Streaming vs Non-Streaming: If you're wondering whether or not to offer streaming music, here are some things to consider. Music streaming, which is essentially songs stored *online* that you access from a web-enabled music player, is now a very popular means for enjoying music for a number of reasons. Since songs are stored online by streaming providers, there's no need for purchasing songs or downloading them to your computer to create your own music library - *it's all there for you to curate online*, and this is an enormous time saver since purchasing songs individually and amassing a library on your computer is one of the most time consuming aspects of offering music by means of a non-streaming music player, such as an iPod or MP3 player.

But the convenience of streaming also comes with additional cost; all streaming providers charge a monthly fee for their services, which you would need to carry for as long as you wish to provide music. Streaming music players also tend to be more expensive since they need to have enough functionality to run a streaming app, and to run an app you need a device with an actual operating system, like a phone or tablet. To put this price difference in context, a non-streaming iPod Shuffle or MP3 player can cost as little as \$30, while a streaming iPhone or iTouch costs anywhere from \$300-700.

Whichever equipment option you choose, we're here to answer any questions you have about our process, please feel free to contact us: info@musicandmemory.org.

Find Your Loved One's Favorite Music

Once you have your equipment together, you're ready to start discovering the music that is most meaningful to the person in your care. This is a process we call *Becoming a Music Detective*, and it is at the heart of the Music & Memory program.

So what's your favorite music? Seems like a simple enough question. But when working with someone living with Alzheimer's and dementia, or some other cognitive condition, the answers aren't always obvious, and sometimes they're downright hard to get,

especially when the person you're asking cannot articulate—or if they simply have trouble explaining what they're remembering.

This is the time for you to become a music detective, working one-to-one with the listener to discover their musical preferences, favorite pieces and performing artists.

Start Slow

Take your time with this process - start a conversation about musical preferences and spend about 30 minutes to an hour recording responses. What you're looking for is the listener's absolute favorite music from their formative years, ages 10 to 25.

Here are some questions to get the conversation started:

- What music did you listen to when you were in school?
- Did you sing at religious services? What were your favorite hymns or other religious music?
- Did you enjoy going to Broadway shows or musicals? Which ones?
- Do you still have any records or tapes that were favorites? What are they? Where can I find them?
- Who was your favorite performer, group, band or orchestra?
- Who was your favorite classical composer?
- Can you hum any of your favorites?
- What songs did you dance to at your wedding? high school prom?
- Were you in the army?

Perhaps you've already got a sense for their favorite music. If that's the case, you can also start the process by playing songs from within their favorite genres. To be clear, a genre-based playlist is not a substitute for a personalized playlist, but they do make for a solid starting point and something to build from during the music discovery process. Use them as conversation starters to maximize results!

To download any of our free sample playlists, visit musicandmemory.org.

Keep the Conversation Going

As you hone in on musical favorites, keep sampling music and asking questions, and

note the listener's reaction. Responses can be immediate and may include tapping fingers, making eye contact, talking and laughing.

For the uncommunicative, your best bet is to observe their body language as you sample songs, and find out as much as you can from other sources, particularly family and friends. In addition to age, find out where they were born, where they lived over the course of their life, and their first language.

You may be able to find out about favorite hobbies, sports and other pastimes that could suggest a starting point. What radio station do family members recall them listening to? What TV shows? Were they musical? Did they play an instrument or sing in a choir? All of this information can help you solve the musical favorites mystery.

Being a successful music detective requires patience and persistence, as well as some intuition and luck. But the journey is deeply rewarding.

You will learn more about the person in your care, and seeing that face light up when you uncover the right music makes all that effort worthwhile.

Create a Playlist

Ultimately, your goal is to create a 20-40 song playlist, but focus on quality over quantity, in the same way we select music for ourselves.

Aim for 5-7 songs from each artist in your music library, and include the best three to four songs from that artist on the listener's playlist. Remember, it's important to avoid "filler" music, and only include songs that are the most popular or requested.

Most music devices have plenty of storage, so you can expand your range of selections as you develop various additional playlists over time. One thing you might consider is creating two playlists - one that is upbeat for daytime, and one that includes quieter music for nighttime listening. This will give you (and the listener) more options for enjoying the right music at the right time. Our experience is that a nighttime playlist can really help someone transition to sleep.

Don't forget, you'll need to update the listener's playlists from time to time. This is an important part of keeping the music fresh and engaging for them, which will yield the best results. Try to make changes quarterly or as requested.

Help Them Use the Device

Once you have a playlist, you're ready to start offering music! But you may find it necessary to first help the listener to use the music device. If this is the case, tailor your approach to accommodate their ability. For example, if she or he can use a TV remote, then chances are they will be able to use a music player independently. We've found, however, that many elders need partial or total assistance. Be patient. Expect the process to take time and repetition as you introduce the device and teach how to operate it.

First, plug in the headphones and adjust them to a comfortable position. Set the volume on low and test the headphones yourself to make sure the volume is appropriate. Carefully place the headphones on the listener's head, making sure to note any reaction. Be sure to place the headphones so L is on the left ear and R is on the right to ensure that they are comfortable and the listener can hear the music properly.

If the person uses hearing aids, test the headphones to see if they fit easily over the hearing aids. We've found that it may take some experimentation to see if the listener is comfortable listening through the combination of hearing aids and headphones. If there is any concern about their ability to do this, consult with an audiologist.

Once the headphones are in place, ask if the music is loud enough, making changes as requested. Practice placing the headphones a few times, so the listener gains confidence and you're sure they understand what to do. If possible, teach how to skip to the next song, so that he or she will have more control over choices.

Depending on the device, you can set the music to run through the playlist in the order that the songs were loaded or to automatically shuffle the songs to vary the listening experience. Experiment with the listener to see which they prefer.

Storing the Equipment

It's important to keep the music device charged so it can be ready to offer when needed or requested, and so that the battery never runs out in the middle of a session. Store the device in an easy to remember location, and make sure to keep it charging when not in use. Most portable devices will last a few hours between charges - some

more than others - but you will invariably be glad of the habit once established. One of the most common complaints we hear is 'the device doesn't work,' but this is often due to a drained battery when the person falls asleep listening to the music.

If there are other caregivers involved, be sure to set up a plan for continued use of the equipment. You may want to set a schedule, such as three 30-minute listening sessions -- morning, afternoon and evening. Having everyone aware of the device requirements will help keep things running smoothly, especially in the beginning.

Personalized Playlist and Alzheimer's

For those living with Alzheimer's, personalized music can be particularly beneficial if applied correctly. Here are a few pointers to keep in mind:

- Timing is very important, so think proactively. Personalized music activates cognition and can, for a short period of time, allow the person to be themselves again. Try offering the music thirty minutes before a family event or medical visit.
- The listener will likely be more alert, engaged and talkative if they listen to their personalized playlist regularly, week after week, and month after month.
- Listening to favorite music will help the listener feel better, be more social and cooperative, giving you and other caregivers much needed respite.

A few more things to remember: Everyone is different. While there is no guarantee that personalized music will work for every individual, we know that it will help to improve quality of life for most. Best of all, there are no adverse affects - so there is no downside to trying and everything to gain.

Taking the Music with You

If the person in your care needs to move into long term care, we encourage you to make arrangements so that their music device travels with them. Musical favorites can be a comforting presence in the midst of what is often a challenging and stressful transition. Work with the staff to explain your loved one's personalized music setup and listening schedule, and involve them in helping to manage the device.

Creating a personalized playlist for a loved one or person in your care is a musical journey for both of you. The listener will gain a wonderful new way to relax, remember

and find enjoyment - especially if music has played an important role in his or her life. And you will get to know each other in wonderful ways as you share music favorites and the memories that go with them. Both of you will gain quality peaceful moments together.

Personalized music is a gift that keeps on giving, in a way that few other gifts can, at this stage in a person's life. Congratulations on taking this important step towards providing comfort and joy.

A Special Note for You

On behalf of all of us at Music & Memory, thank you for everything that you're doing to keep people living with Alzheimer's and dementia, and other cognitive conditions connected to the joy of favorite music. All of our success is due to passionate individuals like you who believe wholeheartedly in the power of music to help others. Thank you for helping to make a difference.

We look forward to hearing from you and helping you to succeed. Please [contact us](#) through our website if you have questions.

Thanks again for your help, and good luck!

Music & Memory

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Frequently Asked Questions

How does Music & Memory work?

Music & Memory trains care staff to work with people living with Alzheimer's and

dementia to discover their favorite songs from when they were a teenager. These songs are then compiled to create a 20-40 song personalized music playlist, which is then offered to the individual with comfortable headphones as needed, usually for 30-minutes at a time, and used proactively such as before medical or family visits. The results of this simple process can be astounding.

What are some of the benefits of personalized music?

Each year, we learn more and more about the therapeutic uses of personalized music. Here are some examples:

Nutritional and Hydration Issues

- Because music activates cognition and speech, it helps residents recognize food, follow cues, chew and swallow.
- Calming music can relieve anxiety generated by the eating experience.

Agitation and Anxiety

- Music focuses a person's attention on something recognizable, which reduces the feeling of being overwhelmed and confused.
- It connects the person with positive memories, which has a soothing effect.
- Music stimulates movement, a positive outlet for restlessness.

NOTE: the improved cognition and mood continue after the person stops listening to music.

Pain Relief

- Music brings pleasure, releasing opioids in the brain.
- Happy memories distract from the pain.
- Recipients move to the music. This relieves pain from stiffness and tightened muscles.

NOTE: Pain is a common reason for rejection of care and having music relieve or distract from pain can help residents be receptive to care.

Rejection of Care

- Helps people relax, experience pleasure, connect to positive memories, improve their cognition and communication.
- Music improves the duration and intensity of concentration.
- People are better able to follow cues, understand what is happening, relate to their care-giver, and feel safe.

Sleep

- Music helps relax tense muscles
- It tunes one's mind to positive memories and emotions providing soothing comfort
- Decreases production of cortisol
- Reduces sympathetic nervous system activity, decreases anxiety, blood pressure, heart and respiratory rate

Mood and Depression

- Neurologist Oliver Sacks said that, "Music evokes emotion, and emotion can bring with it memory... it brings back the feeling of life when nothing else can."
- Music is pleasurable
- It brings warm memories and connections, and self-efficacy.
- It generates movement, engagement, cognition, and awareness.

Occupational, Speech and Physical Therapy

- Music before a therapy session activates cognition, communication, and auditory and visual perception, making it easier to follow cues and engage in therapy activities.
- Singing uses consonants and vowels, activating speech.
- Musical rhythm generates body movement, reduces muscle tension and improves coordination.

Active Dying

- Hearing remains during active dying.
- Music connects people to their identity, emotions, auditory and visual perception.
- Music is a help to families as well.

Is there research around how personalized music helps participants and their caregivers?

Studies have shown that listening to pleasurable music can help reduce pain by more than 20 percent. Listening to music often results in decreases in agitation, anxiety, sleeplessness and depression. Personalized music can prevent distress, aid in the reduction of antipsychotic medications and even improve swallowing. Caregivers and family members enjoy more meaningful relationships with those in their care and use the music as a tool to ease transitions, avoid challenging behaviors and save time.

How does personalized music help memory loss? What does it mean for my loved one who suffers from Alzheimer's or other types of dementia?

The part of the brain that processes music and memory is the last part of the brain to be affected by Alzheimer's, which is why people with this disease are unable to recollect what happened in the last hour but can remember the words to their favorite songs from childhood.

In fact, the part of the brain that holds memories of familiar music is co-located with the part of the brain that stores autobiographical memory. So playing familiar music will spark those associated memories, "awakening" the individual, even if it's for a short moment. Research indicates that although this is no cure for Alzheimer's, regular listeners of personalized music will be more alert, engaged and conversant. Personalized music offers many benefits for its listeners.

Does this always work?

Personalized music does not always generate these results, but it does work most of the time. Success depends on identifying someone's favorite music from their youth. It's also worth trying at different times of day or week and around different activities.

How much does a music device, headphones and music usually cost?

The average cost of an MP3 Player is \$49, and the average cost of music is .99 cents a song or \$10 for a whole CD. Headphones vary in price but some models can be as little as \$2.99.

How else can I help?

Please visit the Music & Memory website www.musicandmemory.org for more information on how you can support efforts to make access to personalized music a standard of health care.