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## **What is Guided Imagery and Music?**

The Guided Imagery and Music system consists of four essential components: a therapist, a client, music, and imagery. The client rests in a relaxed state, while the therapist guides images into the client's mind through dialogue and music. This process evokes strong emotional responses to achieve positive change.

### **How did this method come about?**

The Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) process was developed by a musician psychotherapist, Dr. Helen L. Bonny, in the 1970s. At the time, she was working at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center where they were experimenting with the effects of intensive exposure to drugs, such as LSD; they wanted to find a viable treatment to help trauma clients with their recovery.

The work with these drugs was forbidden by the government a short time later. At that time, Dr. Bonny had an experience while playing her violin to some classical music in which she became one with the instrument known as "flow", when we totally merge in activity where we feel happy and enriched while time and space dissolve. She discovered through this experience that music had powerful healing qualities within itself and over the next few years developed the treatment process known as the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music. Over time GIM has evolved and spread worldwide.

Although the Bonny Method primarily uses classical music for its process, I believe that through a client's intake interview, other musical representations can also be used with guided imagery to effect meaningful life change.

### **How does it work?**

Each encounter consists of five stages:

- 1.) Music selection before the session: Client intake interview session and music selection is where the client and the therapist discuss possible goals of session, set the intention and focus of the imagery the client would like to explore. Then the appropriate music is selected for the session in accordance with the client's energy and mood level.
- 2.) Client relaxation: A deep relaxation induction is given to assist the client in accessing different levels of consciousness. As the music is phased in, the client is asked to engage in dialogue with the therapist to describe the images, sensations, and feelings of the experiences that are being stimulated by the music.
- 3.) Music imagery portion: During the music imagery portion of the session, the music acts as a co-partner of the therapist as it acts on the mind, body and spirit of the client. The client spontaneously creates images while listening to the music as the therapist is asking questions around the images the client is experiencing. Examples would be: What are you feeling? Where are you right now? What are you drawn to? What are you noticing? What does the music bring to you? What is

- it telling you? What feelings is it evoking? Where are you feeling that in your body? Let the music take you where you need to go.
- 4.) End of session/reintegration: After 25- 30 minutes the therapist assists the client in returning to an alert state. The client at this time is ready to be returned to the present, reintegrated with the world around them, and they can safely open their eyes.
  - 5.) The therapist and client engage in dialogue to discover any insights the client may have gained from the session. Also, the therapist seeks reflection from the client on how this session may relate to or improve their client's everyday life. The client then may be asked to draw a Mandala or utilize a sand tray to finish processing their experience.

### **What purpose does it serve? Are there any pitfalls?**

The guided imagery process helps the client transform and integrate their senses into the experience of change they desire through in the music they are hearing to assist in healing the hurt and pain around strong emotions they are currently holding. GIM can be used to help both adults and children. It is a form of problem-solving therapy that can be used to help a variety of personal or life challenges. In particular, common health issues it treats includes: anxiety, stress, grief, major life traumas, negative thinking, unresolved issues from the past, and even coping with long-term physical pain. However, it's important to note that GIM elicits powerful emotional responses and is not suggested for the treatment of serious mental disorders. In some cases, it can make them worse.

### **The Elaine Abbott study and its findings**

The Elaine Abbott qualitative study of BMGIM (Bonny Method of GIM) sought to find similarities among clients in the ways they responded to both positive and negative experiences with the music. Notably, the clients were easy and forthcoming when working through positive experiences, and required little intervention from the therapist. However, working through negative experiences with the music was often met with heavy resistance. Both the positive and negative experiences served different roles in the client's therapy. Both are necessary. The findings of the study reveal the negative experiences to be the more difficult side of the therapeutic work, but both are equally necessary to improving the client's life experience.

Video for presentation:

Guided Imagery for Stress Reduction with Belleruth Naparstek  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyyd4MOI\\_R8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyyd4MOI_R8)

## References

Elaine Abbot study:

[https://www.barcelonapublishers.com/resources/QIMTV2/QIMT20052\(2\)Abbott.pdf](https://www.barcelonapublishers.com/resources/QIMTV2/QIMT20052(2)Abbott.pdf)

<http://www.gim-trainings.com/about.html#history>