

Sensory Friendly Concerts for your School

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Clinic Synopsis:

“Sensory Friendly” Concert Series have proven successful in creating a space where people with special needs can experience a concert in a way that best meets their needs. Oftentimes, the traditional concert setting can be unsettling for people with disabilities. The sensory overload of new place, loud sounds, velvet chairs, light changes, etc. can be a challenge for making people with special needs feel included in our concert offerings, but *all* students deserve the benefits of emotional connection through music especially as we emerge from the pandemic. Visit this session to discover simple steps to implement a Sensory Friendly Concert Series in your school or community! There will be applications for all disciplines!

Presentation Format:

The presentation will be given in a panel style with perspectives from band (Caroline Hand), orchestra (Douglas Droste), and music education (Amy Hourigan). There will be accompanying presentation slides showcasing text, photos, and video.

Outline:

I. Introduction

- a. *Sensory Friendly Concert Series at Ball State University*
 - i. Series overview in a short video clip
- b. *Why is this important?*
 - i. Promote acceptance of diverse ways of experiencing a concert
 - ii. Access to enjoy live music and an emotional connection to live music
 - iii. Finding human connection through emotional learning (greatly needed coming out of the pandemic)
- c. *What is a Sensory Friendly Concert?*
 - i. A live concert put on specifically for people with diverse sensory needs
 1. Sound – such as accommodations for loud noises
 2. Visual – such as lighting
 3. Touch – such as movement, expression needs
 - ii. Welcoming concert environment for our community members/students with special needs
 - iii. Understanding and inclusive of additional needs
 1. Restroom needs
 2. Accessibility needs

- a. Showcase photo of chair removal in concert hall - students using wheelchairs can sit with their class rather than in the back of the hall
 - 3. Are there students who can only attend virtually due to health concerns?
- d. *Why is this important to us?*
 - i. Personal stories of our intersection with disability and the arts

II. **Setting up the event**

- a. Take as many or as few of these ideas to adapt them for your school and students' needs
- b. *Establishing relationships*
 - i. If not already established, start a conversation to begin a relationship with your special education department and teachers
 - 1. They likely know what Sensory Friendly events are
 - 2. Gauge their interest bringing their students to a Sensory Friendly Concert
 - 3. Get their input and ideas about such a concert
- c. *Programming*
 - i. You don't need to alter planned programming for this concert!
 - ii. Loud piece? Encourage audience members to hold their ears if needed before the piece begins
 - 1. Or give advance notice so students can bring ear protection
 - 2. Provide ear protection if needed
 - iii. Program length
 - 1. Shorter movements or pieces are optimal
 - 2. Long piece? You'll be surprised the attention that live music elicits!
 - 3. Consider length of ENTIRE concert in programming – 30 minutes is a good maximum
 - iv. Filling gaps
 - 1. Intersperse solo and ensemble pieces with full ensemble pieces
 - 2. Intersperse pieces with very clear instrument demonstrations
 - v. Pieces with a story will help coordinate with visual media
- d. *Scheduling*
 - i. Schedule the date
 - 1. What works for special education classes/community partners and your ensemble
 - 2. What is the best time of day?
 - ii. Schedule the facility
 - 1. Is it accessible?
 - 2. Gym, auditorium, concert hall, classroom, etc.
 - 3. Will you go to them, or will they come to you?
- e. *Invitations*: Who will join you for the concert?

- i. Special education classes from your school
 - ii. Special education classes from the entire district
 - iii. Reverse Inclusion
 - 1. Invite other students and people from the community so that they can experience the inclusion of people with disabilities in a way that's friendly to the people with disabilities
 - iv. Families of your students
 - v. Families of students in special education
 - 1. This could also be their first introduction to live music
 - vi. Other community groups that serve people with disabilities and special needs
- f. Find out particular *needs* of those attending the concert
 - i. Get help and input from the special education teachers who will bring students to your concert! What are their students' needs?
 - ii. Will virtual learners need access to a live stream or video?
- g. Arranging *transportation* if necessary
 - i. Can students simply walk from their classrooms?
 - ii. Schedule district bus transportation to the venue
 - iii. Are accessible buses available?
 - iv. When are buses available? This can influence event scheduling
 - v. Provide a parking map or guide for buses and other guests
 - vi. Arranging transportation for your students to the facility if it is off campus
- h. *Pre-visit stories*
 - i. You could prepare the special education teacher with what to expect so they can pass that information to their students in the way they know if will be receive the best
 - ii. Your students can visit special education classes to describe what the concert will be like
 - iii. You and your students can prepare visual materials that help students in special education classes know what to expect
 - iv. Content to consider as part of a pre-visit story
 - 1. Will there be COVID mitigation measures in place? What can be expected from those?
 - 2. How will performance space be accessed?
 - 3. Who is around to help?
 - 4. What is the seating like?
 - 5. What is the lighting like?
 - 6. What will they see?
 - 7. What will they hear?
 - 8. What are the expectations for behavior?
 - 9. Instruct teachers for emergency exit
 - v. Visual examples from the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts
- i. Create *an accessible program* for your concert

- i. Provide visual examples showcasing images along with typical program information
- j. *Additional media*
 - i. Prepare slides to go along with your performance that can provide additional engagement with the music
 - ii. Provide images of slides used to indicate title of pieces and composer, slides used to accompany music, and slides to indicate when to applaud
- k. *Educate performers* on what to expect
 - i. Invite special education teachers in to present this information to your students
 - ii. Extra noise from audience
 - iii. Volunteer or expected interactions with audience
 - 1. Instrument petting zoo (accompanying photo)
 - 2. Instrument demonstrations
 - a. From stage
 - b. In audience (accompanying photo)
 - 3. Greeting/welcoming; ushers
 - 4. Speaking from the stage
 - iv. Attire
 - 1. School clothes (casual, welcoming)
 - 2. Regular concert attire (formal, “special”)

III. Executing the Concert

- a. With proper planning above, executing the concert day of should run smoothly
- b. Have students and other helpers in place to ensure all of your prep work is carried out!
 - i. Ensuring all media is set up
 - ii. Set out programs or station ushers/greeters
 - iii. Keep lights up
 - iv. Set up planned interactions
 - v. Instrument petting zoo
- c. Verbal preparation from the stage during the concert
 - i. Instrument demos
 - ii. What to expect from each piece

IV. Implications for Inclusion and Impact

- a. Inclusion
 - i. Sensory Friendly Concerts could be essentially segregated events
 - ii. Our goal should be to create better inclusion (not segregation) in society for people with disabilities
 - iii. For some people with disabilities it is not possible to participate in some aspects of society
 - iv. These concerts are an important way of bringing something to people with disabilities and respecting diverse needs so that they can experience live music

- v. Reverse inclusion can ensure this is an inclusive event for all students
 - vi. These concerts can provide an entry point for your students and their parents on interacting with people with disabilities
 - vii. These concerts can also provide an entry point for students in special education, their teachers, and their parents into the arts
- b. Impact - Student and teacher video testimonials (performers and audience members)

V. Questions