

New intervention helps teens deal with their emotions through music

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(Medical Xpress)—Using music to engage with and educate young people about their emotions, and how to tolerate and regulate their strong emotional states, is the focus of a new intervention developed by University of Queensland clinical psychologist Dr Genevieve Dingle.

As a former manager of a hospital drug and alcohol program that included group therapy five days a week, Dr Dingle from UQ's School of Psychology found it often difficult to engage the younger substance-users into the group.

"They would sit outside the group, playing with their phones and listening to music on their MP3s. So I thought we should try music as a way to engage them into the group discussion," Dr Dingle said.

After making contact with Associate Professor Felicity Baker and Libby Gleadhill from UQ's School of Music, Dr Dingle trialled an afternoon of music therapy once a week and found that the youths responded well to sharing their music, performing rap, drumming, and other musical activities.

Since returning to academia, Dr Dingle has explored the links between music and emotion in more depth in laboratory studies, survey studies and a choir study.

"Music psychology, and the field of music and emotions in particular, is a rapidly expanding area of research internationally and it's a very exciting time," Dr Dingle said.

Research shows that [young people](#) (aged 15–25 years) experience intense emotional highs and lows, yet their capacity for emotion regulation is not fully developed until adulthood. This is a peak age group for onset of [mental health problems](#) and suicide.

"The best practice [psychological intervention](#) for emotional problems in young people is [cognitive behaviour therapy](#) – however it has been criticised for not addressing [emotional regulation](#) skills enough," Dr Dingle said.

"I have developed an intervention called Tuned In, which uses a two dimensional model of emotion and three types of emotional enhancing activities during music listening as a way of exploring and managing emotions," she said.

Tuned In is based on simple concepts that are easy to teach, given music listening is something that most young people have access to.

Dr Dingle said she would like to see Tuned In available to young Australians through secondary schools as a preventive measure.

"Hopefully this would give young people some strategies for understanding and regulating their emotional states before associated problems like substance abuse, self harm, or suicidal thoughts occur," she said.

Together with doctoral student Carly Fay, the program has been trialled with 60 university students and has shown that participants improved their emotional clarity and strategies for managing emotions compared to students in the wait-list control condition. Tuned In was rated as highly effective and engaging, and there was a 98 per cent attendance rate across the trial.

Dr Dingle plans to conduct a clinical trial of Tuned In and is discussing possibilities with various clinical services at present. It has also been modified for sportspeople and there are plans to test it with a clinical group of young people as well.

Dr Dingle is also working on aspects of emotional regulation with Associate Professor Julie Henry in the School of Psychology, and they plan to use

experimental and brain-imaging methodologies to discover more about [emotion regulation](#), and the use of [music](#) to evoke and regulate emotional states.

Provided by University of Queensland

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