

Title: Importance of Maintaining Positive Mental Health in Music

Courses: AMU10, AMU20, AMU3M, AMU3O, AMU4E

Note: This lesson is designed to be taught near the beginning of the semester. The assessment allows the students a chunk of the semester to explore, apply and reflect on positive mental health strategies.

Connection to a Culminating Activity:

This lesson will provide students with the understanding of the importance of maintaining positive mental health in music. The tools students learn here will help them in pre/post performances and how to manage music performance stress/anxiety as well as in other careers.

Overall Expectation: (C3)

Conventions and Responsible Practices: demonstrate an understanding of responsible practices and performance conventions relating to music.

Specific Expectation: (C3.1)

Identify and describe key physical and health considerations associated with practising, performing and listening to music.

Demonstrate an understanding of safe and healthy practices related to the field of music, with an emphasis on maintaining a healthy lifestyle and preventing performance-related (AMU4E Specific).

Learning Objectives:

Students will be able to identify key stressors within creative arts careers such as auditions, poor physical working conditions, impact on social/family life, work overload, etc.

Students will be able to apply healthy mental health practices into their pre/post performance regimes.

Success Criteria:

I know I've got it when I can apply positive mental health strategies into my practice regime.

Prior Student Knowledge Required

- An understanding that everyone has mental health (it is not a negative attribute)
- An understanding that mental health and physical health are connected
- Examined/general idea of professional music careers

Instruction #1 → Discussion (~10-15 min.)

As a class, have an open discussion about what mental health is. Ask students to jot down about 2-3 things they know about mental health and any questions they may have. This allows students time to process the topic at hand so that when the conversation starts up, more students will feel comfortable sharing. Use this discussion as a form of diagnostic assessment to see how well informed your class is on the topic of mental health. It is important to teach the distinction between mental health (which we all have) and mental illness (which we do not all have).

Key points to look out for:

- Everyone has mental health, just like everyone has physical health
- Mental health and physical health are connected
- Mental health is not a fixed occurrence. Rather, one's mental health fluctuates in positive and negative manners.
- Many factors play into one's mental health

Note: Mental health is important to discuss but be mindful that students in your class may currently be suffering from a mental health illness or have negative experiences in the past. Use your professional judgement moving forward.

Instruction #2 → Examining Mental Health in the Music Profession (~10-15 min.)

Using the charts on figure 1-2, explore with the class why these numbers are disproportionate with a Think/Pair/Share activity. **Table 1** is a survey done on Popular Musicians in the United Kingdom where individuals with high and medium psychological anxiety scores were compared to a normative sample.

Table 2 is a survey done in Norway comparing the mental health of musicians to the general workforce.

Teacher Prompt: "Think about the life of a professional musician. Why do you think these studies have found that professional musicians are at a higher risk for mental health issues? What Stressors do Professional Musicians endure?"

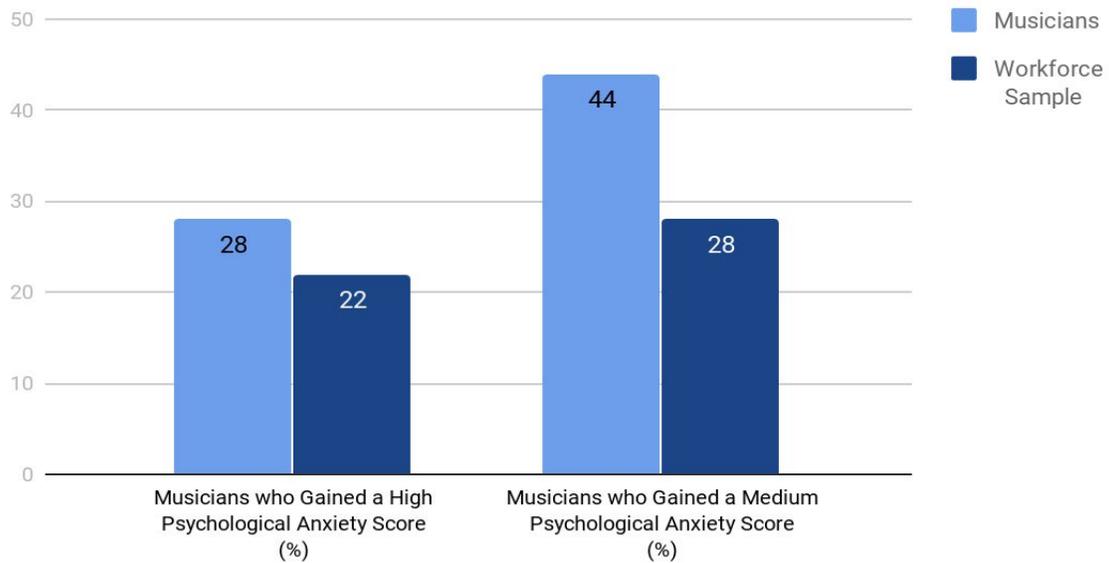
Possible answers:

- Loneliness/time away from family and friends due to traveling
- Poor work space (pit bands, cramped areas)
- Quick paced job forcing musicians to rely on sight reading abilities
- Performance anxiety or "stage-fright"

Note: We are not trying to scare students out of music. Rather, we are identifying areas that past and current professional musicians have identified as troublesome. The next activity addresses these issues.

Figure 1.

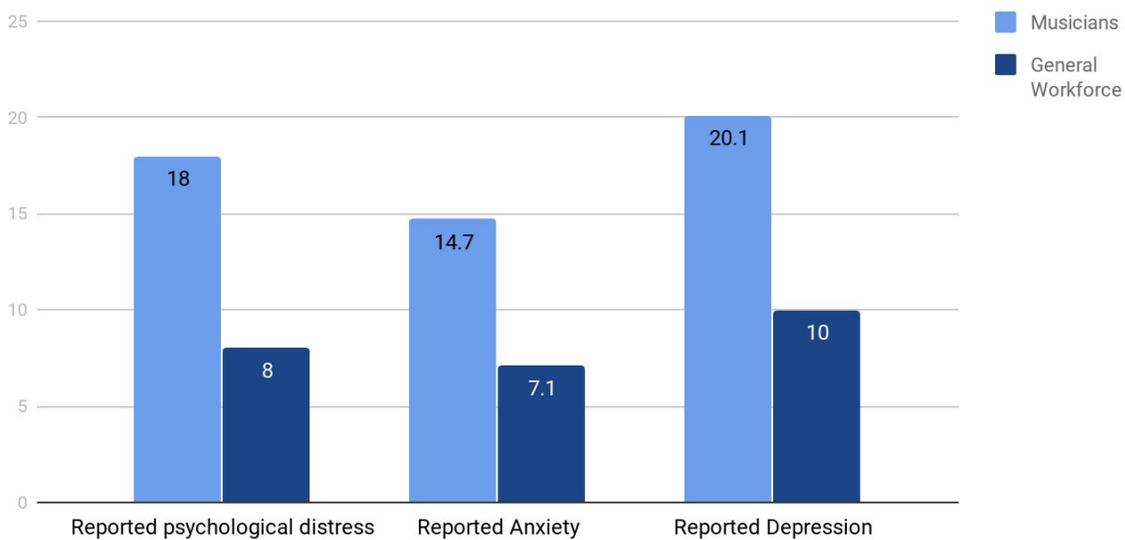
Psychological Stress of Professional Musicians Compared to the Normative Sample Work Force



(Wills, G. & Cooper, C., 1987)

Figure 2.

Reported Anxiety & Depression in Musicians Compared to the General Workforce



(Vaag, J., Bjørngaard, J., & Bjerkeset, O., 2014)

Instruction #3 → Brainstorming Session (~8-10 min.)

At this point in the lesson, remind the students that there are strategies (in all career paths) to help people avoid negative mental health. The strategies we explore here are applicable in many (if not all) careers in life.

The mental health PDF poster has an open section where students can list healthy mental health practices. The poster can be shared as a cumulative class resource. Put the poster on an editable Google Slide, embed it on your web based learning platform (like Brightspace or Google Classroom) or print it and put it up in your classroom. Ask students to brainstorm on positive ways of maintaining mental health and add the ideas onto the poster.

Possible responses:

- Positive self recognition
- Talk to loved ones
- Meditate
- Deep breathing
- Exercise
- Going for a walk
- Take a time out

Instruction #4 → Inquire with Community and/or Parent(s) (Homework)

To include parental/community engagement, invite students to ask their loved ones (or significant community members) in their life how they best manage stress in a healthy manner before/after major events. The student handout has a questionnaire to help guide the questions students would ask.

In the next class (before starting a different lesson), ask the students if they would like to share any new strategies that came up while asking their parent(s) and/or significant community member(s). Incorporate these ideas onto the mental health PDF poster as well (~5-10 min.).

Note: The in-class portion of this lesson plan is complete.

Instruction #5 → Applying the New Strategy (Throughout the remainder of the semester)

Students now are required to try the positive mental health strategy a minimum of three times throughout the semester. This allows students to be more conscientious of the effects of the strategy over a period of time.

Students must log music events (such as playing tests, music showcases and competitions) or non-music events (such as presentations in other classes, other extra curricular performances and interviews) that they practiced their strategy with.

Page two of the student handout provided by Bandology contains a practice log for mental health strategies. Additionally, students are provided a few questions to answer after completing the strategy a minimum of three times.

Note: The lesson plan comes with an optional rubric. As the class discussions evolve, you may find that the rubric provided does not suit your class. Feel free to create your own to accommodate the needs of your class.

Reference list:

Wills, G., Cooper, C., & Wills, G. (1987). Stress and professional popular musicians. *Stress Medicine*, 3(4), 267–275. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/14910514/>

Vaag, J., Bjørngaard, J., & Bjerkeset, O. (2016). Symptoms of anxiety and depression among Norwegian musicians compared to the general workforce. *Psychology of Music*, 44(2), 234–248. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735614564910>