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Coping Playlist Worksheet - Clinician Guide

Overview

This worksheet helps teens create personalized coping playlists using familiar music streaming platforms (Spotify or Apple Music). The activity combines creative expression through art, emotional vocabulary building, and practical coping skill development.

Session Setup & Introduction (5-10 minutes)

Introducing the Activity

- "Today we're going to create a personalized playlist that can help you cope with [specific emotion/situation we've been working on]"
- "This isn't just about listing songs. We're going to think about what music really does for you and how it can be a tool in your coping toolkit"

Normalize that all music preferences are valid, from pop to metal to country to indie to rap.

Choosing the Focus Emotion/Situation

Help the client identify what they want to address:

- For anxiety/overwhelm: "Songs that help me feel calm" or "My grounding playlist"
- For sadness/depression: "Songs that lift me up" or "My motivation playlist"
- For trauma processing: "Songs that understand my story" or "My validation playlist"
- For anger: "Songs that help me release anger safely" or "My cool-down playlist"

Worksheet Walkthrough

Step 1: Album Art Creation (10-15 minutes)

Instructions for client:

- "In this square, you're going to design the 'album cover' for your playlist"
- "Think about colors, shapes, words, or images that represent this feeling or what you want this playlist to do for you"
- "There's no right or wrong way. This is your creative space"

Clinical considerations:

- Don't interpret the art unless the client offers to share
- If client says "I can't draw," remind them it can be abstract, just colors, or even words
- Use this time for parallel processing. Teens often share more while their hands are busy

Step 2: Playlist Title (5 minutes)

Guiding questions:

- "If this playlist had a name that only you would understand, what would it be?"
- "What words capture what you want this music to do for you?"
- "How would you describe this feeling/goal in your own words?"

Examples of client-generated titles:

- "3am thoughts that don't scare me"
- "Songs for when my chest feels tight"
- "My comeback playlist"
- "Understanding my storm"

Step 3: Song Selection (15-20 minutes)

Approach this collaboratively:

- "Let's think of 6 songs that [match your emotion/help you cope/make you feel understood]"
- "These can be songs you already love or ones we discover together"

If client struggles to think of songs:

- "What's a song you've heard recently that stuck with you?"
- "Is there an artist whose music usually speaks to you?"
- "What about a song that makes you feel [target emotion]?"
- "Sometimes movie soundtracks or even instrumental music can be powerful"

Clinical Integration

Processing Questions

- "What do you notice about the songs you chose? Any themes?"
- "How do you think this playlist might help you when you're struggling?"
- "Which song on here feels most important to you right now?"
- "What was it like to create something that's totally yours?"

Connecting to Coping Skills

- "When might you use this playlist? What situations?"
- "How is listening to music a coping skill for you?"
- "What other coping tools could you pair with this playlist?"

Homework/Follow-up

Encourage Real-World Application

- "Your homework this week is to actually create this playlist in [Spotify/Apple Music]"
- "You can add the songs we wrote down, and feel free to add more if you discover them"
- "Bring your phone next week and we can listen to a song or two together if you want"

Adaptations

For Younger Teens (13-15)

- May need more guidance with emotional vocabulary
- Might prefer popular/mainstream music
- Could benefit from discussing lyrics and meaning

For Older Teens (16-17)

- Often have more sophisticated music taste and emotional awareness
- May want to discuss how music connects to their identity
- Might appreciate exploring different genres for different moods

For Trauma-Focused Work

- Be mindful that some songs may be triggering
- Discuss the difference between songs that validate pain vs. songs that increase distress
- Consider creating multiple playlists for different stages of healing

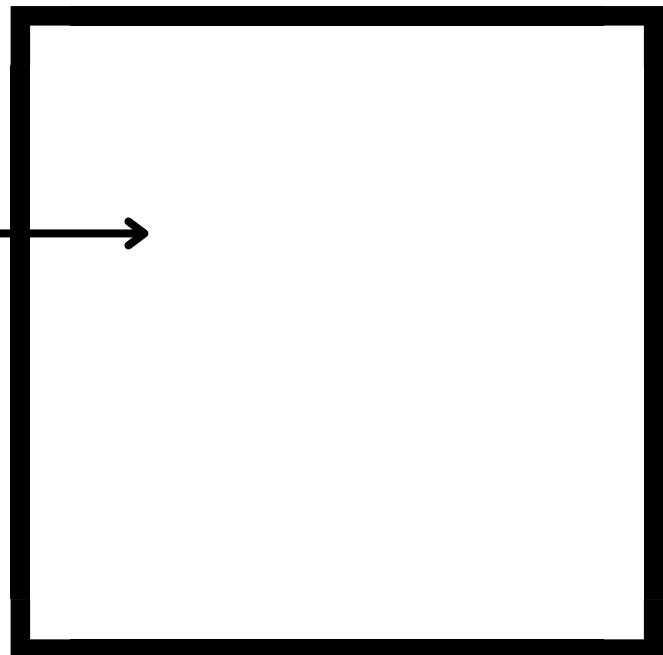
Common Challenges & Solutions

- "I don't really listen to music"
 - Explore what they do listen to (podcasts, YouTube, TikTok sounds)
 - Consider instrumental music, nature sounds, or spoken word
 - Frame it as "sounds that help you feel [target emotion]"
- "My music is too weird/inappropriate"
 - All music preferences are valid for coping
 - Focus on how the music makes them feel, not content judgment
 - If concerned about explicit content, discuss context and coping vs. harmful use
- "I can't think of any songs"
 - Start with how they want to feel, then work backward
 - Use music discovery together (appropriate streaming app browsing)
 - Ask about songs from movies, shows, or social media they enjoy

Follow-up Sessions

- Check in on whether they created the actual playlist
- Ask about their experience using it
- Consider creating additional playlists for different emotions/situations
- Explore how music fits into their broader coping strategy

Remember: This activity works because it meets teens in their world while building genuine coping skills. Trust the process and let their creativity guide the session.



Album Art (step 1)



Playlist Title (step 2)



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Song Selection

(step 3)

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