

Why Hand Drumming Not Stick Drumming

There is a significant body of research supporting both hand-drumming and stick drumming as therapeutic applications, but although some of the benefits are similar there are also significant differences.

In Rhythm2Recovery we focus on hand drumming over the use of stick drumming for three primary reasons:

SAFETY

Many therapeutic practitioners, as well as teachers and music educators, utilise the Rhythm2Recovery model of social & emotional learning to support 'at risk' populations. For some of the members of these groups emotional regulation is a constant challenge that presents as impulsive, intense, unpredictable, or inappropriate reactions to environmental demands or stressors. In these situations, sticks can be weaponised and present as a threat to other group members, the facilitators as well as the dysregulated individuals themselves. I have witnessed this on several occasions and found it prudent to remove sticks from my group drumming practice.

TACTILE GROUNDING

There is a significant difference in the tactile experience between hand drumming with its direct contact with the skin of the drum, and stick drumming that replaces that direct somatic experience with a tool. For people who have histories of traumatic experiences and those who experience anxiety the direct tactile experience of hand contact with the drum provides a conduit that anchors the steady Bass rhythm to the body, engaging the parasympathetic nervous system, calming both mind & body and reducing stress. For children with sensory challenges this same tactile feedback can assist them manage their sensory processing issues.

CATHARTIC RELEASE OF FEELINGS

One of the primary uses of therapeutic hand-drumming is to support the healthy release of feelings in people who struggle to release them in constructive ways or hold onto them internally, causing stress, anxiety & depression. Many people do not have the vocabulary to discuss their feelings and words often fall short – the hand-drum is a safe vehicle for this expression. The release of feelings through the hands provides a direct channel for this transfer of emotional energy that is diluted, and somewhat disconnected when using an intermediary tool.