



Frequently Asked Questions for Help Points

This short guide should answer some of the questions you have about becoming a Help Point and some of the questions your service users might ask.

Visit our [eLearning and Help Point materials page](#) for further training and support resources.



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Benefits of playlists

Do playlists work for everyone living with dementia?

Research shows that for many people, listening to a playlist of personally meaningful music can improve the lives of people living with dementia. However, every person is different, and some people may find a playlist does not work for them. They may have an adverse reaction to music, they may find it overstimulating or they simply don't experience any benefit from it. This is fairly rare and sometimes people can take a while to respond to their playlist but if you think that music is causing someone distress then you should stop playing it and look for alternative interventions.

Why does the music have to be personally meaningful?

Music is special because it stimulates lots of parts of the brain at once. If dementia is damaging one part of the brain, music can still reach other parts. Music can activate parts of the brain responsible for memory, emotion, hearing, language, rhythm and physical coordination. There is mounting evidence which shows that listening to personally meaningful music – songs that give the listener 'that flashback feeling' when they hear them – work best to harness these effects.

Does each song choice have to have a memory attached, what if the person just likes a particular song?

Songs which have a memory attached do work best, not least because there is not very much to be said about songs which have no memory attached, apart from "you like that song, don't you?". Listening to songs which have a memory attached allow for more of a conversation to take place, and a chance to connect over the memory. However, there will be songs on people's playlists which they just really love and listened to a lot. Try to avoid putting full albums of one artist, just for the sake of adding songs. Instead pick out the top favourites. You will get much better results with a short playlist of meaningful music, than a long playlist of songs that don't mean that much to the listener.

Will a person living with dementia be able to recall memories or abilities?

Each person will respond to their personal playlist differently. We have often witnessed people being able to recall memories after listening to music, but this is not the case for everyone. There is no guarantee that listening to the music will bring back specific memories, but for most it will bring back the emotion attached to the song, and it can be comforting to them to hear something they recognise. You will know what counts as a meaningful reaction for yourself or someone you support.

The person I support doesn't really like music. Does this mean a playlist won't work for them?

No. Music is everywhere and follows us through every part of our lives. Even if listening to music has not been a big part of someone's life there will still be music that bring back a memory of an event or time in their life. Start by introducing music from TV shows, films or adverts that the person might be familiar with. You could also try introducing music that will remind them of important people in their life, like yourself or their parents. Listening to a personal playlist does not have the same effect on everyone living with dementia so if you find that the person really does not enjoy a playlist then explore other creative interventions.

How often do we need to listen to start seeing benefits?

Every person is different, for some there might be an immediate reaction, for others it has taken over a week to see any kind of reaction at all. We recommend that you listen every day, for around 30 minutes each session as a starting point. You may wish to have more than one listening session per day and how you use music is completely up to you.

I use a hearing aid; can I still listen to a playlist?

This depends on your situation. You can listen to a playlist through speakers or headphones depending on what works best for you. If using headphones, then large, over ear headphones will work best for people with hearing aids. There are some headphones specially designed for people with hearing impairments. Speak to your GP or audiologist for further advice on your hearing.

Supporting your community with music

What service do I need to provide at my Help Point?

We provide you with a range of free resources and guidance, but encourage each Help Point to develop your service to meet the needs of your own community and to be led by the wishes of the families living with dementia you work with. For some Help Points this will be displaying and sharing our resources, while others may want to make playlists for their service users or incorporate music into their existing activities. Whatever you choose to do will help raise awareness of the power of music and be a valuable support to your community!

If you are not able to make playlists for your service users to use at home that's ok. Giving them resources to use themselves and with family or helping them access music while they are using your service make a big impact on people's lives.

Do we need a license to play music to our group?

Playlist for Life are not experts on licensing. Many venues (libraries, church halls etc) may already have a licence in place which may cover your group so go and check with the relevant person at your organisation if this set up already. For further advice on a Music License go to the Performing Right Society (PRS) who will be able to guide you.

I'm worried about saying the right thing when speaking to someone with dementia

Speak slowly and clearly and try to avoid direct questions where possible, instead give people choices. If they are there with family/friends make sure you always include the person with dementia and don't just speak about them.

There is lots of information and in some cases training available from Alzheimer Scotland, Alzheimer Society, Age UK and Age Scotland. You can become a Dementia Friend via Alzheimer Society or Alzheimer Scotland.

We have a range of advice available in section 7 of our Help [Point Materials page](#).

Can Playlist for Life make the playlists for our service users?

No, Playlist for Life is an enabling organisation, meaning we train individuals and organisations who want to make playlists and provide resources to support them with this. We do, however, have a how to make a playlist webinar that people living with dementia and carers can join to find out more.

Our [Involving volunteers at your Help Point guide](#) gives advice on how your volunteers can help provide playlists for your members.

We want to deliver playlists to the people we support. How do we do this?

There are lots of ways for you to support your participants to listen to music and you should find the best option for each of them. Are you going to give them a physical playlist that they can listen to? If so, we have guidance on ways to get a person's playlist to them but remember that even just the act of building a list of meaningful music together can be a powerful experience and technology isn't always required for someone to get enjoyment out of their playlist.

Our [Make a Playlist Service guide](#) gives advice on the various steps of making playlists for your service users.

We want to help people make playlists but can't provide tech/devices for people to take away

The most important steps in making a playlist are helping people track down the music that is meaningful to them. You can use our printed resources to help you track down the tunes and give people the Soundtrack booklets or Conversation Starters away with them to use at home or with their family.

Can I purchase a copy of the 100 Years: A century of song book?

You can download copies of the decades from our [100 Years: A Century of Song](#) book online for free. If you would like to purchase the book you can buy copies online from our website shop at www.playlistforlife.org.uk/our-shop

Listening to a playlist

What technology do people need to listen to playlists?

You don't **need** to use any tech. Simply singing with someone can be a wonderful way to enjoy music. If you do want to listen to recorded music, we suggest that you use whatever technology or equipment you feel comfortable with. There is no one size fits all approach to helping people access music and we have information on our website about the tech options you can use.

What is Streaming?

'Streaming' gives you access to millions of tracks that you can listen to right away, provided you are connected to the internet. Streaming is a great option for listening to your playlist if you have internet access or use a smartphone.

Costs: You can stream music for free on most platforms. However, if you want to listen without adverts or store music on your device to listen when not connected to the internet you may have to pay a subscription fee.

Find out more about Streaming [here](#)

What is Downloading?

Downloading music means that you have access to your tunes without being connected to the internet. You make a one-off purchase of a song on an online music store and then you can put that song onto your phone or computer, and MP3 player or dementia friendly music player.

Costs:

- Our recommended MP3 players range from £15 - £50
- 1 track download – 99p
- Headphones – from £3

You might also want to buy a second set of headphones and a splitter cable so that 2 people can enjoy the music together. Click [here](#) to find our guidance on choosing an mp3 player and download music onto it.

Does Playlist for Life have a list/catalogue of songs I can access?

Playlist for Life has ready-made playlists on Spotify that you can view and listen to. We do not send out CDs, DVDs or ready-made playlists in any other form.

Does a playlist have to be on an MP3 player?

No, it doesn't, you can listen to music in whichever way works best for you. There are lots of benefits to having the songs on an MP3 player or similar device. It allows you to gather all the music from different times in your life in one playlist and is portable. We have a guide on some MP3 players which we tested in the resources section of our website.

However, please don't worry if there is no one who can help you to use an MP3 player, the main thing is that the person with dementia should have access to their music. In this instance ask them how they normally listen to their music and encourage them to keep listening in this way. If they normally listen to CDs or records, they should gather the CDs or records together, so they can listen to the songs with a memory attached. Even just singing the songs will still have a positive effect.

Where can I access music for free?

You can listen to music for free online through streaming services like YouTube or Spotify, but you will hear adverts in between the tunes. If you want to listen to music using Spotify or YouTube when you are not connected to the internet, you will need to pay a subscription fee to store the tunes in the app on your device (and if you stop paying your subscription the tunes will disappear from your app). If you want to download music onto an MP3 player then you will need to buy the music online first.

Can I download music from my YouTube/Spotify playlist onto an MP3 Player?

No, you can only listen to Spotify playlists on Spotify and YouTube playlists on YouTube. You will have to download music from an online music store, like Amazon, in order to download it onto an MP3 player.

Further support

If you have further questions, join our weekly Zoom drop ins, Fridays at 10-11am on Zoom, for the chance to chat to a Playlist for Life Team member.

Please contact communities@playlistforlife.org.uk to request the Zoom link.

This drop in is for Help Point staff and volunteers, please do not share the link with service users.