

Does a song conjure painful memories? Try to rehabilitate it, say scientists

Level 1: Elementary

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the questions.

1. Which songs can you really remember from when you were young?
2. Which of those songs brings you happy memories? Which one brings sad or painful memories?
3. What do you do now when you hear a song that brings a painful memory?

2 Key words

a. Match the correct word to each definition. Then find them in the article to read them in context.

emotions

affair

associations

caused

avoids

1. stays away from something because they don't like it or don't want it _____
2. a romantic relationship between two people, often when one or both already have a partner

3. strong feelings such as happiness, sadness, fear or anger _____
4. mental connections between one thing and another _____
5. made something happen _____

engage

linked

evicted

rehabilitate

event

6. forced someone to leave their home _____
7. to help someone return to a normal, healthy or useful life _____
8. something that happens, often important _____
9. to take part in something or get involved _____
10. connected people, things or ideas _____

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b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You might have to change the form of the word.

1. The owner of the house might _____ the students because they play very loud music.
2. She has to _____ chocolate because it makes her feel sick.
3. He didn't tell his family about his _____ with a woman from his office.
4. Music can bring up many _____, and people react in different ways.
5. What you eat can _____ directly to your health and how you feel.
6. The school concert was a big _____ for the students.
7. He needed help to _____ after such a long illness.
8. The smell of bread has many happy _____ because my grandma made bread every day.
9. The singer tried to _____ the audience by asking them to clap in time to the music.
10. What could _____ the stereo to stop playing music?

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The urge to avoid music that brings up trauma from the past is powerful, but it may be better to 'actively engage'

Nicola Davis

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- 1 When Bonnie hears the beginning of the song Bitter Sweet Symphony by The Verve, she remembers 1997. But it is not a happy memory. She thinks of the day she came home from school and saw the sheriff changing the lock on her house.
- 2 Bonnie was a teenager then. Her family was about to be evicted from their home. At that time, the song was very popular and played everywhere. "It was a big hit, and I just couldn't escape it," she says.
- 3 Now Bonnie is 46 and lives in Canberra, Australia. She still avoids the song. If it plays on the radio, she changes the station or leaves the place.
- 4 For Matt, an engineer from the north of England, Neil Diamond's songs bring back pain. He and his former partner used to enjoy music together at home, often dancing in the kitchen. His partner loved Neil Diamond and went to many concerts, including some with her boss.
- 5 After three years with Matt, she told him she had had an affair with her boss in the past. Since then, Matt cannot listen to Neil Diamond. He leaves when he hears the music play in a pub.
- 6 Researchers explain why music is so powerful. Ilja Salakka, from the University of Helsinki, says music and memories are strongly linked to emotions. When music creates strong feelings, it makes memories stronger.

- 7 Dr. Stephanie Leal, from UCLA, says that sometimes it is hard to know if the emotion comes from the song or from the event. In her study, people remembered the main idea of an event better when the music caused very strong or very weak emotions. They remembered small details better when the music caused more moderate emotions.
- 8 Salakka adds that music from teenage years or early adulthood is most powerful. Positive music memories are usually more general, while negative ones connect to specific events.
- 9 But emotions can change. A song that once felt good may later feel painful, as in Matt's case. Leal suggests that people may try to "retrain" their brain by listening to painful songs during happy times. This could "rehabilitate" the song by creating new associations.
- 10 Professor Renee Timmers from the University of Sheffield offers another idea. Instead of avoiding the music, people can engage with it. For example, they can hum along or even change the melody to make it feel different.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Are these sentences True (T) or False (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Bonnie associates the song Bitter Sweet Symphony with a happy childhood memory. T / F
2. Even today, Bonnie avoids listening to Bitter Sweet Symphony. T / F
3. Matt cannot listen to Neil Diamond's music because it reminds him of the affair that his former partner had. T / F
4. According to Dr. Stephanie Leal, people always remember small details best when they listen to music that creates very strong emotions. T / F
5. Salakka says that the strongest music for making memories comes from their teenage years or early adulthood. T / F
6. Professor Renee Timmers suggests that avoiding painful music is the best way to change the association they have. T / F

4 Key language

a. Match the halves of zero conditionals from the article.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. If it plays on the radio, | a. it makes memories stronger. |
| 2. He leaves | b. if the emotion comes from the song or from the event. |
| 3. When music creates strong feelings, | c. she changes the station or leaves the place. |
| 4. It is hard to know | d. when he hears the music play in a pub. |

b. Complete the sentences in zero conditional.

1. When she sings, everyone just _____ (stop) what they are doing.
2. The radio has a camera and if people walk past, loud music _____ (start) playing. It's hilarious!

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3. There are musicians who, if they see the notes on paper, _____ (hear) the music in their head.
4. My dad _____ (relax) when he listens to slow songs.
5. The band play for longer when they _____ (play) in their hometown.
6. If she hears a song by Oasis, she _____ (remember) her friends from university.

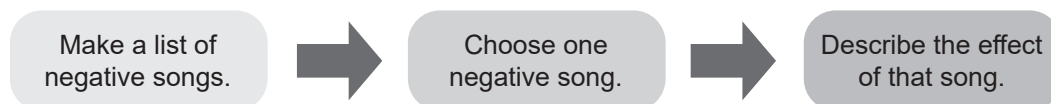
5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- Music from your past is more important for you than music from now.
- You can never learn to like a song that gives you bad memories.

6 In your own words

- a. In pairs or small groups, create a flowchart that describes step by step what to do to change the way you feel about a song.
- b. Present your flow chart to the class. Include zero conditionals in your description. Here is an example.



If you want to change a song with negative memories into something positive, make a list of songs that you associate negative memories with. Pick the song with very strong negative associations. Describe what happens when you hear the song in public.