

A music therapist saying, “that’s inappropriate” to a client’s song request is judgmental, dismissive, and oppressive and it shuts down expression. Here are some alternatives for when you don’t see a way around censoring.

Pick one from each column so that you can **validate**, **explain**, and provide a **way forward**.

Validate	Honest, nonjudgmental reasons	Ways forward
<p>“Thank you for sharing that song.”</p> <p>“Thank you for sharing something so important to you.”</p> <p>“Thank you for sharing about yourself through choosing this song.”</p> <p>Share something you like about the song (the production, a lyric, the bass line, etc.) or promise to listen to it on your own time.</p>	<p>“This song explores really important subjects but...”:</p> <p>“I’m not trained to support you in exploring them, so I’ll refer you to someone who can.”</p> <p>“Not everyone in the group is ready/able to face these issues right now.”</p> <p>“Some parts of it are outside of our facility rules, since not everyone is always safe to get into these topics.”</p>	<p>“Can we make up our own song that expresses the emotion or message that’s important to you in your requested song?”</p> <p>“Can we rewrite lyrics that would feel safe for most people, but still express what’s important to you?”</p> <p>“Can we listen to this 1 on 1 after the group?”</p> <p>“Can we find another song by the same artist that’s safer/within the rules, etc.”</p>

Alternatives to censoring: If the song is sexually explicit, use it as an opportunity to discuss sexual safety, relationships, and self esteem. If the song talks about violence, explore how the client relates to it and work on coping skills. Have they experienced violence? Do they feel unsafe? Do they feel violent urges or overwhelmed by their experiences? If the song talks about substance or alcohol use, explore the role of drugs and alcohol in the client’s life.