

Starting and maintaining good relationships in music

**Supporting the mental health
of everyone in music**

**Music
Minds
Matter**



Check Your Levels is a mental health resource for everyone in music. It offers space, tools and connections that help you:

**Turn up what's good
and turn down what's
hard about working
in music**

**Get help when you
need it**

**Support friends and
colleagues in music**

Check Your Levels is delivered by Music Minds Matter, a charity supporting the mental health of people in music, and the British Association for Performing Arts Medicine.

We bring together clinical expertise and lived experience of the music industry to provide safe support relevant to your work in music.

Check Your Levels content complements but does not replace medical and clinical advice.

You can use
Check Your Levels:

Whatever your role in music
and however long you have
worked in music

Whether you are struggling
or feeling fine at the moment
and whether you are living
with a mental health
condition or not

How are you doing today?

When our levels are good, we typically:

Cope ok with day to day stresses

Feel connected to others

Feel we have a contribution to make, at work and in personal lives

Feel life is moving forward and we're growing

As a result we can usually keep up healthy patterns in key areas like sleeping, eating, socializing and work balance.



Research shows there are many factors that can make working in music tough at times. Managing these and getting as many as possible into the best place as possible can help our wellbeing. But we can't do it alone.

Check Your Levels looks at:

Work

Work volume, hours, pace, content
Financial wellbeing
Skills development and future planning
Your work environment and tools

You

Performance pressure
Social media and personal brand
Physical wellbeing
Recognition and reward

Relationships

Family time and support

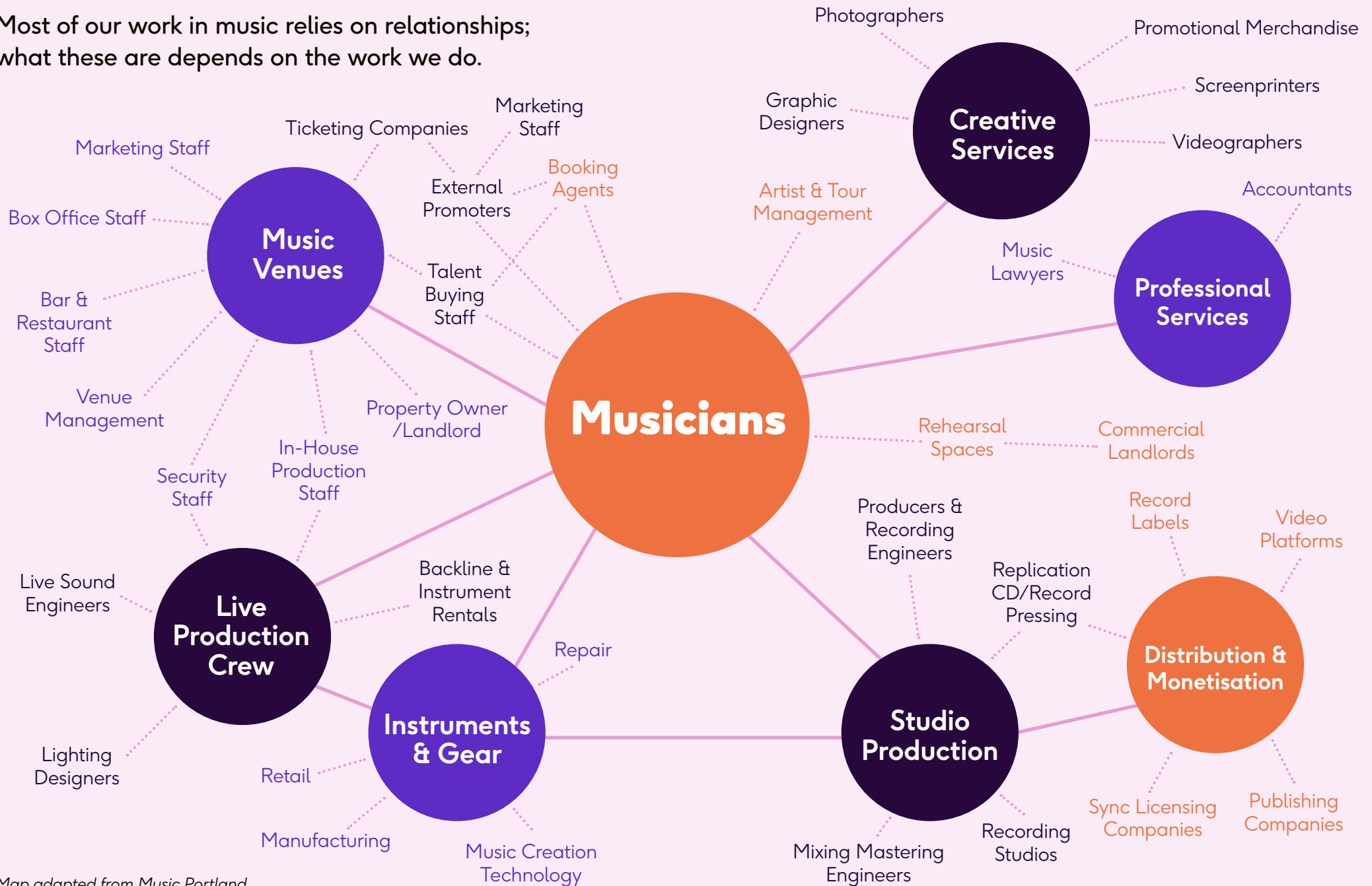
Working relationships and conflict

Unfair treatment at work

Types of relationships



Most of our work in music relies on relationships; what these are depends on the work we do.



Map adapted from Music Portland

There are different types of relationships in music, which we can broadly group as:

Financial

Creative

Promotional

Any relationship can be **formal** (with contracts and agreements) or **informal** – e.g. many of us work with friends without proper contracts in place or have support from family.

REFLECTION

In each area, what are your most important relationships at the moment, and how formal or informal are they?

Boundaries are the limits we put around ourselves that define what we will and won't give to others.

Boundaries matter in all relationships because they:

- Improve communication
- Clarify expectations
- Encourage respectful treatment of each other

This makes relationships more comfortable for everyone, prevents problems and makes it easier to take action on any problems that do come up.

Boundaries are a form of **self-care**. They're a way of taking care of your mental health and ensuring that your well-being is respected.



Blurred boundaries

Some common examples we hear about in music include:

When your night out becomes professional promotion

When your manager is your friend

REFLECTION

What are some of the ways you have experienced or seen boundaries become blurred in your music work?

Think about a professional relationship in your life that feels positive, supported and safe:

- What do you do in the relationship?
- What does the other person do?
- How do these behaviors contribute to a sense of safety?

Some signs you have healthy boundaries in working relationships:

- Clear and regular communication
- Clarity of roles and expectations
- Actions show trust and respect
- Willingness to understand each other's position
- Following-through on actions and agreements
- Openness to addressing difficulties together



Some signs you may need to set boundaries in working relationships:

- Feeling resentful about work
- Saying yes when you want to say no
- Avoiding specific people or situations
- Worried about having an argument
- Interactions leave you feeling drained

REFLECTION

Are you aware of any relationships where any of these apply and where boundaries may need to be re-established?

To have healthy relationships in music:

**Set expectations
at the start**

**Identify and
manage conflict**

**Get outside support when
things are complex**

Setting expectations at the start

Whatever the nature of the working relationship, agree expectations up front. **A written agreement** is useful in all relationships. Ideally you won't refer to this much, but it will be vital if things go wrong.

A written agreement:

- Enhances Communication
- Builds Trust
- Promotes Efficiency
- Supports Conflict Resolution
- Encourages Continuous Improvement

In informal relationships with limited financial and career risk, this can be as simple as a conversation confirmed in email.

However, wherever there is financial or career risk for you, a written agreement is recommended, even if you have another type of informal relationship with the person involved (e.g. friends).

Your written agreement should include:

- Purpose of working together ('the why')
- Who is involved in working together
- What you are going to do together
- By when
- Any fees, payment or exchanges there will be
- Which aspects fall under whose responsibility



Identify and manage conflict

REFLECTION

Think about a time when someone overstepped a boundary in a professional relationship, what kinds of feelings did this bring up for you?

Do you generally deal with problems in working relationships when they **show up** or when they **blow up**?

Conflict will come up in relationships where your needs or expectations are not being met and your boundaries are not being respected.

For more information see [Better Health](#) guidance on boundaries and the [Psychology Tools](#) worksheet on [monitoring boundaries](#)

Different approaches to conflict are:

Competing:
Only one of us
can win and it
better be me!

Collaborating:
I think we can
both get what
we need...

Compromising:
Can we meet in
the middle?

Avoiding:
Let's talk about
this another time...

Accommodating:
Fine, we'll do it
your way!

You may find a different approach is needed for different situations based on the nature of the relationship.

*Based on the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Model,
Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Killman, 1974*

REFLECTION

What approaches to managing conflict have you tried – and how did these work for you?

In our relationships in music we often have overlapping roles, such as bandmates/friends; or artist and manager/friends.

Roles usually come with different expectations e.g. many people might expect their boss to treat them differently to their best friend!

Being aware of the different roles we share with people, and being **intentional** about what role is most relevant in any given situation with them can help prevent conflict.

REFLECTION

Consider someone important to you in your music work – what different roles do they have for you? e.g. friend, mentor, colleague



Tips on managing conflict in a relationship

- The sooner addressed the better
- Have a gentle start-up to the discussion
- Take ownership for your part in things
- Listen actively
- Focus on next steps

These approaches show you care about the other person's feelings and needs too and that you respect their boundaries.

A gentle start-up to raising a conflict could include:

- Referring back to the positive reasons you started working together
- Making statements that start with “I”
- Using specific examples
- Avoiding generalising (“you always...”, “you never...”)
- Owning your feelings - “when XXX happened, it made me feel YYY”
- Describing what you want, not only what you don't want.

Example formats to use in your gentle-start up

I feel
about
and I need

When you
it makes me feel
I need you to

Ways to take ownership in conflict include:

1. Openly acknowledge the part you have played in the conflict – this could include not stating your expectations at the start
2. Acknowledge and apologise for any of your actions that have made the situation worse
3. Share what you think you can do differently next time
4. Check if the other party accepts your apology
5. Ask if there is anything else they would appreciate you doing differently next time
6. If this is possible for you to do, or attempt to do, acknowledge you will incorporate this.

Some **active listening** approaches that could help in a conflict include:

1. Give your full attention to the other person and their message – not overlaying what you think they mean
2. Refrain from quick judgments and jumping in to respond or defend
3. Reflect back to them what you have heard in your own words and as needed, clarify that your understanding is correct
4. Validate their position if its truthful for you to do so: “It makes sense to me why you saw it this way.”
5. Maintain focus if they introduce topics that feel off topic for you, as they might be relevant to them
6. Listen fully before responding, and take time to reflect and digest before responding if you need to

Assertiveness is needed to raise and manage conflict. You may find it hard to be assertive with some people. Exploring why, or even getting some outside support to manage the relationship or remove barriers to speaking up for yourself might be useful.

- **Passive:** Puts other's needs ahead of your own so yours are not met
- **Assertive:** Respects your needs and the needs of others
- **Aggressive:** Put your needs above others so theirs are not met

REFLECTION

What type of assertiveness is your default?

Based on the CCI Assertiveness Modules



Types of Assertive Statement To Try

Basic: an “I” statement that clearly states your needs, wants, beliefs, opinions or feelings

Empathetic: recognising the other person’s feelings, needs or wants, as well as stating your own

Discrepancy: you highlight that what was previously agreed is different from what is actually happening

Negative Feelings: drawing attention calmly to the undesirable affect another person’s behaviour is having on you “when you miss a deadline it causes me to work long hours over the weekend”

Broken Record: prepare what you want to say and repeat it calmly

Consequence: inform the other person of the consequences for them of not changing their behavior

Note: ‘Consequence’ should only be used as a last resort and if you have a sanction you are prepared to use. It can appear aggressive but positive non-verbal communication and reassurance that “you would prefer not to” can help soften.

It’s never too late to set boundaries in relationships, even if it’s well developed.

Consider:

- Take action as soon as you can when you realise boundaries are needed
- Use the approaches to managing conflict set out here, but consider beforehand what you want the outcome to be, and be honest and open about that e.g.:
- *To clarify expectations between us*
- *To ensure the other party gets the support they need (if an emotional dependence has developed, for example)*
- *To update our contract to reflect the current value of this partnership*
- *To put in place a contract to reflect how the relationship has developed*
- Emphasise your commitment to the needs and interests of both parties

Checking in

Open communication at the right frequency is critical for maintaining good relationships.

- Frequency of both depends on the nature of the relationship: value (financial and otherwise) and complexity and intensity of joint work
- Regular communication provides a non-contentious space to bring up issues when they 'show up'- and can help keep a relationship on track
- Meetings should involve a check-in on progress towards agreed purpose of the relationship; discussion of any performance metrics; discussion on budget if relevant; chance to raise queries, risks and issues
- Using a standing agenda which includes space to discuss queries and issues can be a gentle and structured way to make open communication part of the relationship and can avoid the need to add 'pointed' agenda items
- As a minimum, a formal relationship with a contract should ideally have quarterly meetings (in person, instead of online, can be worth the effort if there are concerns or issues to raise)

Emotional support with relationships in music

Conflict can be stressful; especially when factors like your financial security are affected.

- Call Music Minds Matter 24/7 free confidential helpline for in the moment support
- Speak to family and friends outside of the situation
- Seek guidance from others who might have been in the same situation – you can do this anonymously
- Connect with others who understand the pressures of music through a peer group – see Tonic Rider
- Consider counselling if the situation is affecting your day to day life, sleep and general wellbeing

Other support with relationships in music

If a relationship has significant financial or legal implications for you, seek outside help at the earliest stage. This could involve some regular relationship 'housekeeping' e.g. checking for relationships that have grown in financial value over time and which you are not now adequately protected in.

Two routes for support could be:

- Mediation
- Legal advice

REFLECTION

Are there any working relationships you think you could benefit from third party advice on?

The British Association of Performing Arts

Medicine (BAPAM) is a unique medical charity enabling people working and studying in the performing arts, throughout the UK, to achieve and maintain optimal health for their work, creative development and cultural participation.

BAPAM is the Clinical Partner to
Music Minds Matter.

www.bapam.org.uk

About Music Minds Matter

Working in music is exciting, but it can also be challenging.

Fast paced and demanding, irregular and long hours, financial instability and a competitive environment, they can all take a toll on your mental health.

That's where we come in. Music Minds Matter is a charity helping anyone working in music to find the right mental health support to keep them well.

Call 0808 802 8008
musicmindsmatter.org.uk

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