

## Connecting Music to the GEMS™ Model of Brain Change

by Mary Sue Wilkinson,  
Founder – *Singing Heart to Heart*

### **Emeralds - Green and On the Go with a Purpose - Naturally Flawed**

Language becomes more difficult for Emerald, who often fear being perceived as incompetent. Singing familiar songs is a great way for them to feel competent and successful. Dancing and marching help their need to be “on the go.” Because of the balance shifts required, dancing might help Emeralds maintain equilibrium and reduce the risk of falling. A special song or piece of music may help remind them of transitions and personal care needed. Emeralds are still good at filling in the blank when given a song line or an expression, such as “shave and a haircut—two bits.”

### **An “Emerald” Music Moment with Mary Sue**

Right in front of me sits a woman with a round, soft face, tight curly hair, and the bluest eyes you can imagine. She is short and her feet barely touch the ground. She is wearing blue pants with tights underneath, and ankle socks that she frequently reaches down to pull up from her white tennis shoes.

She swings her feet and taps her toes to the music, often sitting on her hands like a small child might. She wears the biggest smile ever. When I arrive, she squeals, “I love you!” as she bounces up and down in her chair. Her voice is quivery, but she sings every song with gusto, often clapping along. Her delight in the music is contagious and spills over to those around her.

For 45 minutes we sing together while she bounces in her seat, claps along and often interrupts with expressions of love. How does it end? “Shave and a haircut – two bits.”

### **How might this understanding impact your use of music in care**

- Think about the person you are caring for: *What do you see that makes you think they are an Emerald?*
- Describe a situation where using music will help either you or the person you care for or both.
- Think about what your goal is for that situation: *Here are some ideas: Soothe, Energize, Connect, Entertain, Move from point A to point B, Distract and Redirect, Other?*
- Think about how you will use music: *What song(s) and/or movement might you use? (refer to the songs in the guide for examples. Don't have the guide? Get it [here](#).)*

Think about when and where you will try this: *Get specific about the time, place, and location.*

*The above narrative and Music Moment are excerpts from “Songs You Know By Heart: A Simple Guide for Using Music in Dementia Care.” Their purpose is to help you gain a deeper understanding of characteristics associated with a GEMS stage and to paint the picture of a brief moment in a music session. Keep in mind that the progression of dementia rarely follows a straight line. You may have experience with only one or with many of the GEMS over the course of your care giving. This month we are featuring Emeralds. The complete guide, which includes a contribution from Teepa, as well as Mary Sue’s recording of 18 favorite sing along songs, is available in the [Care Store](#).*