



The American Therapeutic Recreation Association

Information Sheet

Recreational Therapy and Mental Health

Recreational therapists work as part of a team of clinicians in conjunction with the individual diagnosed with a behavioral health issue and their support system to develop strategies for success.

“Recreational Therapy” means a treatment service designed to restore, remediate, and rehabilitate a person’s level of functioning and independence in life activities, to promote health and wellness as well as reduce or eliminate the activity limitations and restrictions to participation in life situations caused by an illness or disabling condition.



The Health Resources and Services Administration report that suicide “is a major public health issue” as are feelings of loneliness, anxiousness and feelings of low self-esteem.¹ The National Institute of Mental Health indicated that, in the U.S., anxiety disorders impact approximately 40 million individuals

annually.² The total economic burden for severe mental illness in the United States is estimated at \$317.6 billion per year,³ with a significant portion of that related to poor physical health.

Recreational Therapists work with individuals diagnosed with mental illness, their families, and in conjunction with other mental health professionals to cultivating hope and structure for their future. Recreational Therapists are trained in the understanding of psychology, abnormal psychology, human growth and development, activity analysis, and group structures. They have skills related to the use of intervention strategies to help individuals increase functioning and live as independently as possible in the most appropriate environment.

In behavioral health services, Recreational Therapists use their knowledge and skills to assist the individual in developing effective life skills aimed at:

- *Engagement in a healthy lifestyle*
- *Stress management skills and coping strategies*
- *Accessing community resources to reduce isolation and promote independence*
- *Social interactions skills and effective relationship building*

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Using Activity for Re-Creation of Life – Recreational Therapy

Recreational Therapy and Mental Health *(continued)*

Recreational Therapy practitioners, also known as Therapeutic Recreation Specialists, along with other stakeholders, aid the individual in recovery and living day-to-day with mental illness. Through the use of client-driven, interest-based activities, the Recreational Therapist works with the individual, the treatment team, community support groups, family members, and health care agencies interested to further the recovery process and promote sustainable lifestyle change. Involvement in meaningful activities is integral to the redevelopment of identity, integration of social skills, and the mastery of life skills essential to overall functioning.

Settings utilizing Recreational Therapy Services to assist with Mental Health Recovery include:

- *Inpatient Psychiatric Hospitals – Free Standing*
- *Inpatient Psychiatric Units within larger healthcare facilities*
- *Day Hospitals also known as Partial Hospitalization Facilities*

- *Forensic Facilities – facilities for evaluation and treatment of individuals within the judicial system*
- *Public Schools as well as Alternative Schools*
- *Community Mental Health Centers*
- *Veterans Hospitals*
- *Residential Living Facilities*
- *Long-term Care & Skilled Nursing Facilities*

Recreational therapy has a long history of being provided as part of the team of therapies, which work together to aid individuals in the management of their lives and recovery from mental illness. Through the use of education and active treatment strategies, Recreational Therapists assist individuals with mental illness in developing effective life skills and in achieving and experiencing the fullness that life can offer.



Recreational Therapists are professionally credentialed by the National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification (NCTRC). The Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS) “exemplifies the profession’s dedication to quality standards and excellence.” The CTRS is recognized as the qualified provider of recreational therapy services.

¹ Insel, T. R. (2008). Assessing the economic costs of serious mental illness. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 165(6), 663-665.

² World Health Organization (2012). Suicide huge but preventable public health issue. (Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2004/pr61/en/>, 16 January 2012)

³ National Institutes of Mental Health (2012). Anxiety Disorders. (Retrieved 16 January 2012 from <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/anxiety-disorders/complete-index.shtml>)

Using Activity for Re-Creation of Life – Recreational Therapy