

The American Therapeutic Recreation Association Information Sheet

Recreational Therapy and Behavioral Health

Under the umbrella of behavioral health services, Recreational Therapists work as members of the interprofessional treatment team, across various settings, to address the clinical and functional needs of those they serve.

Recreational Therapy, also known as therapeutic recreation, is a systematic process that utilizes recreation and other activity-based interventions to address the assessed needs of individuals with illnesses and/or disabling conditions, as a means to psychological and physical health, recovery and well-being. Further, 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 (ATRA, 2015).



Research indicates that individuals with healthy and meaningful leisure habits have a greater sense of well-being, which positively affects all dimensions of their health.¹ Recreational Therapists provide services which are based on the individuals' leisure interests and lifestyle. Ultimately, this approach allows patients to apply their therapeutic outcomes directly to their life after discharge from treatment, which results in greater mental health maintenance over time.

Recreational Therapy differs from other allied therapies due to a distinct focus on treating the whole person across all domains of wellness (i.e., physical, cognitive, social, emotional, recreational, spiritual, and environmental). The Recreational Therapist's broad training qualifies them to incorporate treatment interventions ranging from, but not limited to: creative arts, music, movement and dance, exercise, physical wellness, adventure/challenge, animal assisted therapy, and games and play. Recreational Therapists also facilitate discussion or activity-based groups on wellness, coping, recovery, and leisure. Recreational Therapists have a unique perspective regarding the social, cognitive, physical, and leisure needs of the patient.

Recreational Therapists have acquired a specific body of knowledge that includes: theoretical constructs, applied methodology, and practice that span a range of disabling conditions and illnesses.² Recreational Therapists bring an element of personal connection to each patient's treatment through the development of a therapeutic relationship guided by the patient's personal history, interests, and circumstances.

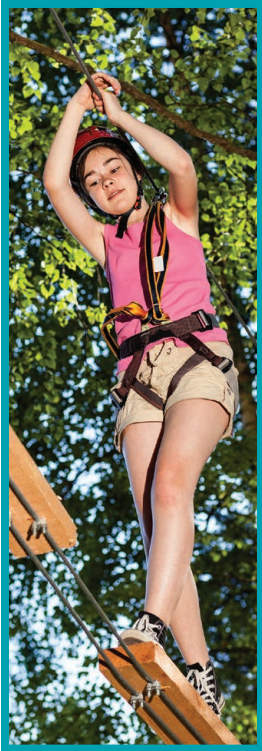
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Empowering Recreational Therapists to Empower Those They Serve

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Recreational Therapy and Behavioral Health *(continued)*

Recreational Therapists weave the concept of wellness into every aspect of the therapeutic process to ensure improved functioning and to promote patient success in everyday life and outside of the structured healthcare setting.



Areas of focus during Recreational Therapy Interventions include, but are not limited to:

- Healthy lifestyle and routine
- Stress management
- Coping strategies
- Accessing community resources to reduce isolation and promote independence
- Social interactions and effective relationship building
- Emotional processing and regulation
- Healthy decision making
- Self-esteem and self-worth

Behavioral Health Settings utilizing Recreational Therapy to assist with Mental Health recovery may include:

- Inpatient Psychiatric Hospitals – Free Standing
- Inpatient Psychiatric Units within Larger Healthcare Facilities
- Day Hospitals, Partial Hospitalization Programs, and Intensive Outpatient Treatment
- Co-Occurring Disorders Programs
- Addictions Recovery Centers
- Forensic Facilities
- Public Schools and Alternative Schools
- Community Mental Health Centers
- Veterans Hospitals
- Residential Living Facilities
- Long-term Care and Skilled Nursing Facilities

37% of all *Certified Recreational Therapists* currently work in behavioral health settings!³

¹Carruthers, C. & Deyell Hood, C. (2004). The Power of the Positive: Leisure and Well-Being. *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, 38(2), 225-245.

²National Council on Therapeutic Recreation Certification (2004), *NCTRC Scope of Practice for the Practice of Recreational Therapy*

³National Council on Therapeutic Recreation Certification (n.d.), *CTRS Professional Profile Brochure*



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.

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