

The American Therapeutic Recreation Association Information Sheet

Recreational Therapy and School Systems

Recreational Therapists work as part of a team in the school systems with students who *may* have physical, cognitive, behavioral, and social/emotional impairments that adversely affect their educational performance.

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, prevention, recovery and well-being.

The primary purpose of Recreational Therapy in schools is to help students develop and enhance necessary skills for successful participation in the school setting through purposeful recreation and leisure interventions, as well as to facilitate the transition from school into community programs.

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) is federal legislation that ensures that all students with special needs are provided with early intervention, special education and related services. IDEA specifically identifies “recreation, including therapeutic recreation” services as a part of student’s related services (IDEA, 2004, {34 CFR 300.34 (a)}). To meet IDEA’s requirement for a *highly qualified teacher* in the related service of Recreational Therapy, a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS) is needed. A CTRS is nationally credentialed through the National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification (NCTRC).

Students in special education programs in schools often lack skills necessary for successful functioning and social

participation in the educational setting. Students require Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) and a team of related services staff to assist them in inclusion throughout school settings. Recreational Therapists



function as a member of a student’s IEP team, alongside Speech/Language Pathologists, Occupational therapists, Physical therapists,

Social Workers, and School Psychologists. As a member of the IEP team, Recreational Therapists assess, plan, implement, and evaluate services for students including setting goals, using therapeutic activities, monitoring progress on levels of performance toward success in school settings, and coordinating service delivery between school, community recreation programs and other community organizations.

Recreational Therapists attain education and training in areas which include, but are not limited to the following: theories and practices of recreation, leisure, and play, psychology; abnormal psychology; human growth and development; coping strategies and mechanisms; group dynamics, structures and social interaction; activity analysis; and additional strategies to assist students to function as independently as possible

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Empowering Recreational Therapists to Empower Those They Serve

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in their school environment. Recreational Therapists put this knowledge into practice with students through the following:



- **Use of standardized assessments** of student skills, abilities, and attitudes. Assessments may evaluate one or more of the following areas: physical, cognitive, behavioral, social/emotional, and/or leisure functioning.
- **Improvement of physical functioning** through adapted sports and participation in recreation specific activities to develop locomotor skills, balance, coordination, motor planning, strength and endurance, object control skills, and eyelhand coordination, to increase group participation in Physical Education (PE) programs.
- **Improvement of cognitive functioning** through the development of therapeutic activities that improve attention span, problem solving, decision making skills, and creative expression.
- **Improvement of behavioral functioning** through the development of therapeutic activities that improve anger/frustration control, respect for others and self, trust issues, gender issues, gang intervention, assertiveness training, conflict resolution, stress management, relaxation training, values clarification, and team building skills.
- **Improvement of social/emotional functioning** through the development of therapeutic activities that improve social/group interactions, peer relationships, cooperation, boundary issues, self-expression, leadership, self-advocacy, play skills, communication, and team building skills.
- **Instruction of leisure education** to develop the skills necessary for independence in recreational

participation (awareness, interests, attitudes, patterns, skills, advocacy), knowledge of recreational resources (at school, home, and in the community), and the recognition of the benefits of recreational involvement.

- **Provision of therapeutic recreational services within the least restrictive environment** for transitioning students with disabilities into the community through social skill training, education on the use of local transportation, identification of environmental and social barriers, money management, self-management skills, and awareness of leisure interests and resources.

Recreational Therapists design interventions and programs to assist students with disabilities in a variety of settings including:

- Preschool, Elementary, Secondary, and 18-22 year old Transition Programs (Public, Private, Residential, and Charter Schools);
- Before and After school Programs;
- Extracurricular Activities and Programs;
- School-based Clubs and Organizations; and
- Community Recreation Programs.

Recreational Therapy has a long history of being part of a team of therapies that work together to support individuals in the development and growth of independence, as well as a healthy quality of life. As a related service in schools, Recreational Therapy improves functioning and independence for lifelong skills needed to enhance a student's quality of life and participation inside and outside of the educational setting. Through the use of therapeutic activities in individual, group, inclusive or segregated settings within schools, Recreational Therapists are an integral and essential part of the well-being of students with disabilities.



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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