

Common Treatment Models in Recreational Therapy

1. Leisure Education Model:

- Focuses on teaching individuals the importance of leisure activities and how to engage in them to improve their overall well-being.
- Emphasizes leisure awareness, leisure resources, and leisure skills development.
- Aims to enhance an individual's ability to make meaningful leisure choices and engage in activities that promote mental and physical health.

2. Health Protection/Health Promotion Model:

- Centers around using recreational activities to address and improve specific health issues and prevent further health problems.
- Tailors activities to the physical, emotional, and cognitive needs of individuals with chronic illnesses, disabilities, or mental health conditions.
- Promotes healthy lifestyle choices and behaviors through structured recreational programs.

3. Psychotherapy-Based Model:

- Integrates recreational activities with principles of psychotherapy to address psychological and emotional issues.
- Often used in mental health settings to help individuals manage and overcome conditions such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD.
- Combines traditional talk therapy with experiential activities for therapeutic benefit.

4. Behavioral Model:

- Focuses on using recreational activities to modify and reinforce positive behaviors while decreasing negative ones.
- Utilizes principles of behaviorism, such as rewards and consequences, to shape desired behaviors.
- Effective in treating individuals with developmental disorders and challenging behaviors.

5. Ecological Model:

- Takes into account the individual's environment and social context in planning recreational interventions.
- Recognizes the influence of factors like family, community, and culture on leisure choices and well-being.
- Promotes inclusivity and community integration by considering the broader ecological system.

6. Strengths-Based Model:

- Identifies and builds on an individual's existing strengths and abilities through recreational activities.
- Encourages self-esteem and self-efficacy by emphasizing what the individual can do rather than focusing on limitations.
- Particularly useful in empowering individuals with disabilities to lead fulfilling lives.

7. Client-Centered Model:

- Prioritizes the preferences and needs of the individual in selecting recreational activities.
- Emphasizes autonomy and personal choice, allowing clients to drive their therapeutic journey.
- Therapists act as facilitators and supporters, adapting activities to align with client goals.

8. Adapted Recreation Model:

- Customizes recreational activities to accommodate individuals with physical or cognitive disabilities.
- Focuses on making leisure activities accessible and enjoyable for everyone, regardless of their abilities.
- Promotes inclusion and participation in community recreation programs.



These models provide recreational therapists with a framework to design interventions tailored to the unique needs and goals of their clients. The choice of model depends on the client's condition, treatment objectives, and the therapist's expertise.

Educational Background of the Board Certified and Licensed Recreational Therapist

- 1. University Degree:** Recreational therapists must hold at least a bachelor's degree in recreational therapy. Many choose to pursue a master's degree or doctorate degree for advanced training.
- 2. General Psychology Courses:** During their undergraduate education, students in recreational therapy programs take foundational courses in general psychology. These courses cover fundamental principles of psychology, including areas like developmental psychology, abnormal psychology, and cognitive psychology.
- 3. Abnormal Psychology:** Recreational therapists study abnormal psychology to understand various mental health disorders, their symptoms, and their impact on individuals' behavior and well-being. This knowledge is crucial for assessing and working with clients who have mental health conditions.
- 4. Developmental Psychology:** Recreational therapists learn about developmental stages and milestones across the lifespan. This understanding helps them tailor recreational interventions to the age and developmental level of their clients.
- 5. Behavioral Psychology:** Behavioral psychology courses provide insights into behavior modification techniques and principles. Recreational therapists use this knowledge to encourage positive behaviors and address challenging behaviors in their clients.
- 6. Psychological Assessment:** Recreational therapists are trained in the basics of psychological assessment, which includes understanding assessment tools and interpreting assessment results. This is essential for conducting initial assessments of clients' needs and progress.
- 7. Counseling Skills:** Recreational therapy programs include coursework in counseling skills, which covers effective communication, active listening, empathy, and building therapeutic relationships. These skills are essential for providing emotional support and guidance to clients.
- 8. Group Dynamics and Social Psychology:** Understanding group dynamics and social interactions is crucial for recreational therapists who often lead group activities and therapy sessions. They learn how to facilitate group cohesion and promote social interaction among clients.
- 9. Therapeutic Techniques:** Recreational therapists explore therapeutic techniques within the context of recreational activities. This includes techniques from various branches of psychology, such as art therapy, music therapy, and play therapy.
- 10. Ethics and Professional Conduct:** Recreational therapy programs emphasize the ethical guidelines and professional standards that govern the field. This includes confidentiality, informed consent, and maintaining ethical boundaries.
- 11. Practicum and Internships:** To gain practical experience, recreational therapy students must complete two supervised practicum and internship placements in healthcare or community settings. These experiences allow them to apply their psychological knowledge in real-world situations.



Recreational therapists receive a well-rounded education in psychology that equips them with the foundational knowledge and skills necessary to assess, plan, and implement therapeutic recreational interventions. This education is vital for understanding the psychological aspects of their clients' well-being and tailoring interventions to meet their unique needs.

Recreational Therapy, an Evidence-Based Practice

- 1. Evidence of Effectiveness:** Numerous studies and research articles have demonstrated the effectiveness of recreational therapy in improving the mental health and well-being of individuals with various mental health conditions. These studies provide empirical evidence that supports the role of recreational therapy in clinical settings.
- 2. Positive Impact on Mental Health:** Recreational therapy interventions have been shown to reduce symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Engaging in enjoyable leisure activities can have a profound positive impact on an individual's mental state, promoting relaxation and emotional regulation.
- 3. Enhanced Social Interaction:** Evidence suggests that recreational therapy promotes social interaction and a sense of belonging, especially for individuals with mental health challenges that may lead to social isolation. These interactions contribute to improved self-esteem and reduced feelings of loneliness.
- 4. Stress Reduction:** Participating in recreational activities, such as mindfulness-based nature walks or art therapy, has been proven to reduce stress levels and promote relaxation. These outcomes align with EBP principles for managing mental health issues.
- 5. Coping Skills Development:** Recreational therapy can help individuals develop effective coping strategies for managing the symptoms of mental health conditions. Clients learn to manage stress, anxiety, and other challenges through engaging and enjoyable activities.
- 6. Holistic Approach:** EBP recognizes the importance of a holistic approach to mental health care. Recreational therapy addresses not only the psychological but also the physical, social, and emotional aspects of well-being, aligning with the principles of holistic care.
- 7. Individualized Treatment:** Evidence-based recreational therapy is client-centered and tailored to each individual's unique needs and preferences. This personalized approach is in line with EBP's emphasis on individualized treatment planning.
- 8. Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Recreational therapists often collaborate with other mental health professionals, such as psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers, to provide comprehensive care. This interdisciplinary approach enhances the effectiveness of mental health treatment.
- 9. Client Satisfaction:** EBP considers client satisfaction as an important outcome measure. Clients often report high levels of satisfaction with recreational therapy interventions, indicating that they find value in these services.
- 10. Long-Term Benefits:** Recreational therapy has shown potential for long-lasting benefits. Clients who engage in recreational therapy interventions may continue to use the skills and coping strategies learned in therapy in their daily lives, promoting sustained mental well-being.



The inclusion of recreational therapy in clinical mental health services is supported by a growing body of evidence that highlights its effectiveness in improving mental health outcomes. When delivered based on evidence-based practice principles, recreational therapy can contribute positively to the overall treatment plan for individuals with mental health challenges. It complements traditional therapeutic approaches and provides a holistic and client-centered approach to mental health care.

Sometimes Sessions may Consist Primarily of Talking, Here is Why!

Yes, There are times when a recreational therapy session may primarily consist of talking rather than engaging in a specific leisure intervention. This approach aligns with the principles of client-centered care and recognizes the importance of verbal communication in therapeutic interventions. Here are some reasons why a recreational therapy session might focus on talking:

Assessment and Goal Setting: At the beginning of therapy or during periodic evaluations, recreational therapists engage in in-depth discussions with clients to assess their needs, preferences, and goals. This information gathering often involves conversations to gain a comprehensive understanding of the client's current state and their desired outcomes.

Treatment Planning: Based on the assessment, recreational therapists collaboratively develop treatment plans with clients. During this process, it's essential to communicate and explain the therapeutic goals, objectives, and the role of recreational activities in achieving those goals. Clarifying the purpose and expectations is crucial.

Building Rapport: Establishing a strong therapeutic relationship is fundamental to the success of recreational therapy. Meaningful conversations help build rapport, trust, and a sense of safety between the therapist and the client. This trust can be the foundation for effective therapeutic work.

Emotional Support: Many clients may have emotional challenges or complex feelings related to their conditions or disabilities. Talking allows them to express their emotions, fears, and frustrations. Providing a safe space for clients to share their thoughts and feelings can be therapeutic in itself.

Counseling and Psychoeducation: Recreational therapists may integrate counseling techniques into their practice. This involves discussions aimed at addressing cognitive or emotional challenges, helping clients develop coping strategies, and providing psychoeducation on mental health and well-being.

Progress Monitoring: Recreational therapists regularly check in with clients to evaluate their progress toward treatment goals. Conversations allow therapists to gather feedback, assess changes in behavior or mindset, and make necessary adjustments to the treatment plan.

Conflict Resolution and Communication Skills: In group or family therapy settings, talking sessions may focus on improving communication and conflict resolution skills. Clients may discuss interpersonal dynamics, misunderstandings, and strategies for more effective communication.

Life Skills and Decision-Making: Conversations can address life skills, decision-making processes, and goal-setting outside of therapy. These discussions help clients transfer skills learned in therapy to real-life situations.

Goal Reflection: As clients achieve their therapeutic goals or milestones, talking sessions provide an opportunity for reflection and celebration. It's a time to acknowledge achievements, discuss future aspirations, and plan for transitioning out of therapy.

Adaptation and Coping Strategies: Clients facing changes in their abilities or health conditions may require conversations focused on adaptation and the development of coping strategies. These discussions can be crucial for fostering resilience and acceptance.



Talking sessions in recreational therapy are an essential aspect of the therapeutic process. These conversations complement the use of leisure interventions and contribute to the overall well-being and growth of clients in recreational therapy.

Family Sessions in Recreational Therapy

Family-based programming in recreational therapy involves designing and implementing therapeutic activities and interventions that engage the entire family unit. This approach recognizes the interconnectedness of family dynamics and aims to improve overall family functioning and well-being. Here's a summary of family-based programming in recreational therapy and some applicable models:

- **Holistic Approach:** Family-based recreational therapy takes a holistic approach, addressing the physical, emotional, social, and psychological well-being of each family member while considering the family system as a whole.
- **Improved Communication:** It focuses on enhancing communication and interaction within the family, aiming to strengthen relationships and resolve conflicts constructively.
- **Shared Activities:** Family members participate in recreational activities together, creating opportunities for bonding, mutual support, and enjoyment.
- **Conflict Resolution:** The therapy may include interventions that teach conflict resolution skills, helping families navigate disagreements and challenges more effectively.
- **Enhanced Coping Strategies:** Families learn and practice coping strategies through recreational activities to manage stress, improve resilience, and support each other during difficult times.
- **Positive Family Dynamics:** The goal is to foster positive family dynamics, encourage playfulness, and create a supportive and nurturing environment.
- **Tailored Interventions:** Interventions are tailored to the unique needs and goals of each family, recognizing that every family is distinct.



Recreational Therapists can create a supportive and therapeutic environment that fosters positive change, enhances communication, and strengthens family relationships.

How We See It

Chess

- **What the Average Person Might See:** A strategy board game where players move pieces to capture the opponent's king.
- **What a Recreational Therapist Would See:** A mentally stimulating game that enhances critical thinking, problem-solving, patience, and impulse control.
- **Population and Diagnosis:** Recreational therapists may use Chess with children, teens, and young adults diagnosed with ADHD, anxiety, depression, or autism spectrum disorders to improve cognitive skills, emotional regulation, and impulse control.

Uno

- **What the Average Person Might See:** A popular card game where players match colors and numbers to empty their hand of cards.
- **What a Recreational Therapist Would See:** An engaging card game that promotes social interaction, turn-taking, decision-making, and communication skills.
- **Population and Diagnosis:** Recreational therapists may use Uno with children, teens, and young adults in group therapy settings, including those with social skills deficits, attention difficulties (e.g., ADHD), or communication challenges, to improve social engagement, concentration, and communication abilities.

Basketball

- **What the Average Person Might See:** A competitive sport played with a ball and hoop, where players aim to score points by shooting the ball through the opposing team's hoop.
- **What a Recreational Therapist Would See:** A physical activity that promotes teamwork, coordination, and social interaction.
- **Population and Diagnosis:** Recreational therapists may use Basketball to engage children, teens, and young adults with various diagnoses, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or behavioral disorders, to improve physical fitness and social skills.



Throughout their education, Recreational Therapists develop the ability to see the therapeutic potential in a wide range of leisure activities, making them skilled professionals who can harness the power of recreation to improve the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of their clients.

How We See It

Collage Making

- **What the Average Person Might See:** An art activity where individuals create visually appealing collages using magazines, scissors, and glue.
- **What a Recreational Therapist Would See:** A therapeutic art activity that encourages self-expression, creativity, and emotional processing.
- **Population and Diagnosis:** Recreational therapists might use Collage Making with children, teens, and young adults, especially those dealing with emotional challenges like depression or anxiety, to promote self-expression and emotional healing.

Pottery

- **What the Average Person Might See:** A hands-on craft where participants mold clay into various shapes and forms.
- **What a Recreational Therapist Would See:** A sensory-rich activity that fosters relaxation, fine motor skills, and self-esteem.
- **Population and Diagnosis:** Recreational therapists may use Pottery with children, teens, and young adults, particularly those facing stress or emotional difficulties, to provide a calming and therapeutic outlet for self-expression.

Nature Art

- **What the Average Person Might See:** An outdoor activity where participants collect natural materials like leaves, sticks, and rocks to create art in a natural setting.
- **What a Recreational Therapist Would See:** A holistic experience that connects children, teens, and young adults with nature, reduces stress, and encourages mindfulness, making it suitable for these age groups.
- **Population and Diagnosis:** Recreational therapists might use Nature Art with children, teens, and young adults, especially those with stress-related concerns, to promote well-being through nature engagement.



Throughout their education, Recreational Therapists develop the ability to see the therapeutic potential in a wide range of leisure activities, making them skilled professionals who can harness the power of recreation to improve the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of their clients.

What Leads to Misconceptions about Recreational Therapy?

- 1. Misunderstanding of the Role:** There can be a lack of awareness and understanding about the specific role and responsibilities of recreational therapists. Some may perceive their work as primarily focused on leisure activities rather than therapeutic interventions.
- 2. Perceived Lack of Formal Education:** Some individuals may assume that recreational therapists do not undergo extensive formal education compared to other mental health professionals, such as psychologists or social workers. This misconception can lead to doubts about their qualifications.
- 3. Limited Exposure to Recreational Therapy:** People who have not personally experienced or witnessed the benefits of recreational therapy may underestimate its value as a clinical intervention. This lack of exposure can contribute to skepticism.
- 4. Traditional Beliefs About Therapy:** Traditional beliefs about therapy often emphasize talk therapy and medication as the primary forms of treatment for mental health conditions. Recreational therapy's experiential and activity-based approach may not align with these traditional views.
- 5. Professional Hierarchy:** In some healthcare settings, there may be a hierarchical perception of mental health professionals, with psychologists and psychiatrists seen as the highest authorities. Recreational therapists may not always be included in this hierarchy.
- 6. Lack of Recognition:** In certain regions or healthcare systems, recreational therapy may not be as widely recognized or integrated into mental health care, leading to doubts about its legitimacy.
- 7. Stigma Around Leisure Activities:** There can be a stigma associated with leisure activities, with some individuals viewing them as frivolous or unrelated to serious mental health treatment. This stigma can extend to recreational therapy.
- 8. Limited Exposure to Research:** Some may not be aware of the growing body of research supporting the effectiveness of recreational therapy in mental health treatment. The absence of research exposure may lead to skepticism.



It's important to note that these beliefs do not accurately reflect the qualifications and capabilities of recreational therapists. Recreational therapists undergo education and training specifically focused on using recreational activities as therapeutic interventions. They are qualified to work with individuals with a wide range of mental health conditions and contribute significantly to holistic treatment plans. Public awareness and education about the role and benefits of recreational therapy can help address misconceptions and promote its recognition as a valuable form of mental health care.

Recreational Therapy in Comparison

Occupational Therapy

Recreational Therapy differs from Occupational Therapy in many ways including:

Outcomes: RT Outcomes often focus on decreasing diagnosis symptoms through leisure interventions, improved emotional well-being, enhanced social skills, and a greater sense of enjoyment in life. OT outcomes typically involve improved independence in daily activities, enhanced self-care abilities, and better functional capacity to perform essential tasks.

Interventions: Recreational therapists use a variety of recreational or play-based interventions, such as sports, games, arts and crafts, music, and outdoor adventures, to achieve therapeutic outcomes. Activities are carefully chosen to align with the client's treatment goals.

Focus: RT is aimed to look at the whole person through a strengths-based approach. RT will incorporate leisure interests into treatment to promote engagement from the client and reduce identified issues in the clients life. OT focuses on helping individuals engage in daily activities or "occupations." These activities can include self-care, work, and play, with the goal of improving functional independence.

Both Recreational Therapy and Occupational Therapy are important healthcare professions that enhance individuals' lives, they have distinct focuses, goals, and interventions. Recreational therapy emphasizes leisure and enjoyment in treatment protocols, while occupational therapy concentrates on functional activities of daily living and improving overall independence and quality of life. The choice between the two depends on an individual's specific needs and goals.



Recreational Therapy in Comparison

Traditional Talk Therapy

Recreational Therapy differs from traditional talk therapy in many ways including:

Methods of Communication: RT uses both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. Recreational Therapist may use verbal processing methods but will also look at body language, posture, facial expressions, actions, and participation in session.

Interventions: Recreational therapists use a variety of recreational or play-based interventions, such as sports, games, arts and crafts, music, and outdoor adventures, to achieve therapeutic outcomes. Activities are carefully chosen to align with the client's treatment goals.

Client Engagement: RT engages clients through hands-on, experiential activities that can be enjoyable and interactive. Clients may find it easier to participate in therapy when it involves their personal interests.

Recreational Therapy and traditional talk therapy differ in their methods, goals, and interventions. Recreational therapy uses enjoyable activities to achieve therapeutic outcomes and may be more suitable for certain populations and goals.



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