



Transforming Youth Recovery

One Community, One School, One Student At A Time

Activity and Program Toolkit



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The Importance of Activities and Programming

An important factor for recovery protection for any student is being able to have fun without using substances. Providing effective activities and programming for your CRP students (or allowing them to plan their own) is an important piece of that puzzle. In addition to being fun, activities and programs allow students to get to know each other better, attract new students to the group, and build community amongst members. Whether you are just starting out and need a few easy programs or activities to complete, or you are an established program looking to switch things up, we hope you will find this toolkit to be helpful in providing meaningful, fun and effective activities and programs for your students.

Meetings

Weekly meetings are an important part of the life of any recovery group or organization, but without an intentional effort to keep them fun and interesting, members can lose interest. Use these activities to add new life to your weekly meetings!

Inspirational Video Hour - Invite each student to submit a YouTube link of an inspirational video (up to 4 minutes long) and spend the time showing the videos one after another and then processing it afterwards with the group.

Song Share - Have each student bring in a song that resonates with them, play it and share which lyrics impacted them most and why.

Fishbowl - Have the group write topics they want to share and discuss and put them in a bowl, and have each student select one and share about it.

Roses and Thorns – Have the students go around and speak about something awesome they've got going on and a challenge they are experiencing. After everyone goes around then you open it up to what each person would like from the group in supporting them. (This activity can be a more intensive session, or as a weekly intro – if you want to keep it lighter, you can call it “Happies and Crappies” instead!)

Open Responses - Write out prompter statements on pieces of paper and put them in a basket. Then the students can go around and pick one, read it and share about it. Creating ways for students to reveal these things to each other in a safe and structured way gets them to see that they are not all different from each other. For example:

- The toughest thing about being a student in recovery is:
- I never thought I would get to experience ____ in recovery.
- I need to let go of:
- When I remember how far I've come I feel:
- What I wish the rest of campus knew about recovery is:
- A way a fellow student in recovery can help me in my journey is:
- What I'm willing to give to this community is:



- An area where I look forward to growing is:

Blessing Our New Space - Have a meeting where you invite everyone to bring an item that means something to them to put in the CRP space, and have them each talk about what makes this item special to them. They can leave the item in the space, or, if they would prefer not to, you can always make this activity more of a “show and tell.”

Ice Breakers, Energizers and Team Builders

Ice Breakers

Human Knot (An oldie but a goodie!)

Description: Everyone stands in a circle. (An ideal size group for this is about 6-10.) Have them take one hand, and grab the hand of someone else in the circle (cannot be someone right next to them). Then, have them take the other hand, and grab the hand of a different person in the circle (again, cannot be someone next to them). Then, the group must untangle themselves to form a circle again.

Items Needed: None

Animal Noises

Description: The group stands in the circle, and one person is “it.” That person stands in the center of the circle and makes an “arrow” with his/her hands. The person in the center closes his/her eyes and spins in place in one direction, while the group in the circle spins in the opposite direction.

The person in the middle says, “Stop,” which stops all rotating. The person in the middle, keeping his/her eyes closed, names an animal. The person to whom s/he is pointing must imitate the noise made by that animal. The person in the middle must try to guess who s/he is pointing at based on the animal noise. If s/he gets it right, the person who made the noise is it. If not, they stay in the middle until they guess right.

The game continues for as long as the facilitator wants.

Items Needed: None

Chocolataschnitzel

Description: Take a big, family size candy bar and wrap it in many, many layers of newspaper and masking tape (about 10 layers minimum). Have everyone sit on the floor (or a table) around the wrapped chocolate bar, with a pair of mittens, a scarf, earmuffs or a hat, a fork, a spoon and a pair of dice in the middle as well.

Give one die to the person who will “start.” Explain that each person should roll the die once, hoping to get a six. If they get another number, they pass the die on to the next person in the circle, who repeats the process. If they get a six, the person yells “Chocolataschnitzel!” (this part is optional) and, as quickly as they can, puts on the mittens, scarf and earmuffs/hat, then uses the fork and spoon only to try and open the chocolate package.



Everyone else in the circle continues to roll the die, and the next person to roll a six will also yell "Chocolataschnizzel," then take over for the previous person, putting on the attire and attempting to open the package.

This continues until someone finally breaks into the package.

Items Needed: Large chocolate bar (or other prize), newspaper, masking tape, pair of mittens, scarf, earmuffs or hat, fork, spoon, dice

Matching Pairs

Description: Print out pictures or names of "famous pairs" on pieces of paper. (For example, "Pebbles and Bam Bam; Peanut Butter and Jelly; Minnie and Mickey Mouse; etc.) The facilitator tapes a piece of paper to the back of each person. The participants must then find their "other half" by asking questions of other participants in the group. However, the questions can only be "yes" or "no" questions. (For example, "Am I alive?" "Am I a cartoon?" "Am I an actor?"")

Items Needed: Pictures or names of "famous pairs" – enough for everyone in the group (Snap, Crackle and Pop are a good group of three if you have an uneven number)

Energizers

Super Model

Description: The group stands in a circle. The facilitator will randomly point to one person in the circle and give a command. The person being pointed to and those on his/her sides must perform an action pertaining to that command.

The commands are:

Super Model – Participant should immediately pose as a fashion model. The participants on either side of him/her become "photographers" and should mimic the gesture of taking a photo.

Elephant – Participant puts hands together in front of his/her nose to make a "trunk." The participants on either side form a circle with their hands and put them on the side of the person in the middle to form "ears."

Jello – Participant shakes his or her body continuously (like Jello). The participants on either side hold each other's hands around the middle participant to form a "bowl" for the Jello.

Queen Bee – Participant put his/her hands together behind his/her back, then flutters them back and forth to mimic a bee's tail. The two participants on either side put their arms away from the bee and flutter them like wings.

Donkey – Participants and others next to him/her should freeze and not move at all.

Items Needed: None

Team Builders



Connected

Description: Sitting or standing in a circle, one person takes a ball of string and loops it once around their wrist. They then toss the ball of string to someone else in the circle, and tell that person a reason they appreciate him/her (or some variation – you can do something they're good at, a time they helped you, a trait you admire, etc.). That person then loops the string around his/her wrist and tosses it to the next person. This continues until everyone has a piece of string looped around his/her wrist.

The facilitator tells one person to pull on the string, using this to demonstrate how one person's actions affect everyone in the group. The facilitator then takes someone's loop to demonstrate that if that person is overwhelmed, someone else can help them out. The facilitator can also press on the middle of the web to demonstrate that even though you may not see it, when things are tough it affects everyone; they can have someone drop their loop to demonstrate that the whole web becomes weaker when one person drops the ball; they can cut a piece of string in the middle to demonstrate that if two people don't have a good relationship, it impacts everyone on the team.

At the end, if desired, each person in the group can keep his/her loop as a bracelet/anklet – a reminder of the activity and the interconnection of the team.

Items Needed: A ball of rope/string/yarn

Pass It

Description: Each person receives a piece of paper with two blank sides. Instruct everyone to write a simple sentence at the top of the page. Then, choose a direction to pass the papers in, and have everyone pass their paper to the person next to him/her. Based on the sentence, tell that person to draw a picture, and fold over the top of the paper so only the picture is visible.

Have folks pass the paper to their neighbors. Have participants alternate drawing pictures based on the sentence, or writing a sentence based on the picture, then folding the paper over so only the last thing drawn or written is visible. Play continues until everyone gets their original sheet back (or until the sheet is full).

If you'd like, the facilitator can use this exercise to begin a discussion about communication, using it as an example for issues of conflict resolution, cultural and language differences and electronic communication.

Items Needed: Piece of paper and writing utensil for each person in the group

Jigsaw Puzzle Pieces

Description: Blindfold all members of the group. Using a large, child's style jigsaw puzzle, give each member of the group a piece of the puzzle. The group must work together to get each of their pieces put together into the puzzle. If desired, the facilitator can set a time limit for the group, or may allow the group to ask him/her 3 questions during the course of the game.

Items Needed: Large, children's style jigsaw puzzle with limited number of pieces based on group size, blindfolds for each member of group

Tap Someone



Description: The facilitator should instruct all participants to close their eyes. Then, s/he will tap a few individuals (based on the size of the group) to open their eyes and come to the front of the room. Once standing, the facilitator will read a statement and instruct the person or people selected to tap (on the arm, shoulder or back) someone to whom that statement pertains. Once the facilitator has read through several statements, the individuals will resume their positions, and new individuals will be selected. This continues until all members of the group have had the chance to “tap someone.”

Suggested Statements:

- Tap someone who makes you laugh.
- Tap someone who you would like to get to know better.
- Tap someone who is a leader.
- Tap someone who you admire.
- Tap someone who you respect.
- Tap someone is a good listener.
- Tap someone who can really brighten your day.
- Tap someone you can depend on.
- Tap someone who has inspired you.
- Tap someone who is fun to be with.
- Tap someone who has given you good advice.
- Tap someone who is very strong.
- Tap someone who challenges you.
- Tap someone who shows compassion.
- Tap someone who you appreciate.
- Tap someone who you believe in.
- Tap someone who has a good sense of humor.
- Tap someone who is creative.
- Tap someone who is reliable.
- Tap someone who is patient.

Items Needed: None

Minefield

Description: Select a fairly large outdoor area, if possible. Distribute “mines” throughout the area (mines can be balls, bowling pins, cones, foam noodles, etc.). Pair up participants. One person is A, and the other is B. Partner A can see and talk, but cannot enter the field. Partner B cannot see (should be blindfolded) or talk, but can enter the field. Partner A must guide partner B through the “minefield” from start to end, without partner B stepping on or touching any mines.

Give each set of partners about 3 minutes to come up with a strategy before beginning, then start the activity. You can make it a race if you like. The penalty for hitting a “mine” can be a restart, time penalty, or you can simply keep track of how many “mines” each pair has hit.

Have participants swap roles. If you’d like, you may give them some time to refine their communication system. Throughout, the facilitator can add or remove items, or make the task more challenging by adding a task, like picking up a certain item from the field. A fun variation is to use balls of socks as the



“mines” and have players throw them at each other. When a player is hit with a sock ball, that person is out. The last person standing wins.

Items Needed: “Mines” (balls, bowling pins, cones, foam noodles, socks, etc.), blindfolds for each participant

Beadwork/Bracelet Making

Provide supplies to members of the group to create bracelets with inspirational messages. Allow members of the group to give the bracelet to another person when complete.

Items Needed: String, letter beads, other bracelet-making items as desired

Mural/Banner

Have the students create a mural or banner that says “I Got Into Recovery Because...” Allow students to write as many things on it as they can think of, and then hang it up in a common space or use it as advertisement for the group.

Items Needed: Paint, painter’s tape, tarp, paintbrushes (for mural) or large sheet of paper or cloth, tape, markers (for banner)

Drum Circle

Drum circles are an awesome non-verbal and cathartic way for people to drum out their anxieties, fears and stressors and harmonize in a group effort. You can order drums from Amazon, get them donated, or ask everyone to bring their own “drum” or something they can play. You can also look to your institution’s music department or see if there is a local group that does drum circles for gatherings.

Items Needed: Drums

Group Art

Have everyone start drawing on a piece of paper using markers, crayons and colored pencils. Then, after a few minutes, have everyone get up and rotate clockwise one seat over. Have them continue drawing on that person’s paper. Everyone must be silent during the process. (You can play music if you’d like.) Continue until everyone has contributed to each piece. Then, take some time to process and share what the experience was like. Hang the artwork up in a common space or use it as advertisement for the group.

You can make this as simple or as complex as you’d like and use any form of art – sculpture, painting, drawing, “found art,” etc.

Items Needed: Paper, markers, crayons, colored pencils (and other supplies as desired)

Activities for Any Time

Perhaps your group needs an easy activity to do on a weekend evening, or is looking for something to do before or after a meeting. Whatever the case, these activities are designed to be easy to implement at any time!



- Board or card game night
- Tie-dye t-shirt making event
- Coloring book hour
- Therapy dog hour (Have a local organization bring the dogs to you, or go to a local shelter.)
- Scavenger hunt (Be careful with regards to institutional regulations with this one – many institutions classify scavenger hunts as “hazing” activities, so if needed, re-name the activity.)
- Card making (Make or write cards to someone who is inspiring you in your recovery journey, someone in the group that you appreciate, etc.)
- Letter to Future Self (Encourage students to include goals for wellness, recovery, fun and learning. It can be powerful to have the students seal these, give them to the leader, and then receive them later in the semester.)
- Fears in the Fire (Have students write their fears and then throw them in a campfire. Make it more fun by adding marshmallow roasting or singing campfire songs!)
- Attend one of your institution’s sporting events
- Karaoke night
- Cookout or potluck
- Study night
- Bowling
- Movie night
- Go to a local trampoline park
- Speed Friending

Retreat Ideas

Retreats are a great way for a group to bond! Here are some ideas for things to structure your retreat around.

- Equine therapy
- Ropes course
- Yoga
- Kayaking/canoeing
- Service (nearby rehab, park cleanup, animal shelter, etc.)
- Nature walk
- Sweat lodge
- Visit to another CRP
- Camping

On Campus Partnerships

This is a great way to put that asset mapping to good use! Are there offices on campus who have expressed that they would like to be of assistance to you? Take advantage of those offers by using their services for a variety of activities. We recommend looking to your gym or fitness center for a group fitness class or an evening activity such as rock climbing, or reaching out to your wilderness or outdoors group for discounted outdoor adventures!



Program Ideas and Fundraising Events

Putting on programs takes a little more work, but is well worth it for the payout you get in terms of campus visibility, stigma reduction, marketing for your group, and sense of accomplishment. Tying programs in with pre-existing days, weeks or months (like Recovery Week or Alcohol Awareness Week) can give them an extra boost to be successful. Here are some ideas for programs that have been successful on our grantees' campuses!

One of the biggest advantages of programming is that it can double as fundraising. See the programs with asterisks for opportunities to program and fundraise in one!

- Screening of The Anonymous People – Our very favorite! This can raise awareness and help reduce stigma on your campus. Many instructors teaching related classes on campus will offer extra credit for students who attend.
- Coffeehouse Night – Provide coffee/light refreshments and format it as an open mic night for students to share music, poetry and other forms of performance art. Or, bring in a featured performer – it can be a big name or a local artist.
- Coffee Crawl – Work with local coffeehouses to set up a series of places where students can sample coffee!
- Recovery Yoga – Offer a yoga or meditation workshop on campus. Bonus points if you can offer it outdoors!
- 5K for Recovery* – Set up a 5K walk and/or fun run to promote recovery visibility on your campus. You can even use it as a fundraiser!
- Sober Tailgates – Offer a sober area for students to grill out, toss around a football, and enjoy each others' company before football games. Look at partnering with the CRPs at other local schools to increase attendance and combine efforts!
- Blackout Day – Wear black to honor students who have died due to a substance misuse disorder.
- Topic-Based Panel – Set up a recovery-positive panel on campus to discuss current topics related to the recovery movement, such as substance misuse policies on campus, underage drinking policies on campus, or what life in recovery looks like.
- Golf Tournament* – This one can be a lot of work, but can bring great visibility to your CRP and can also be a great fundraiser!
- Homecoming – Participate in your institution's homecoming events
- Canvassing for Recovery* - Display art created by students or locals. To make it a fundraiser, auction off the pieces.
- Campus Walk – Walk around campus handing out balloons or other giveaways with information about the CRP.
- Holiday Party – Throw a Halloween, Christmas, Easter, St. Patrick's Day or other holiday party. You can also throw birthday parties (or an "un-birthday party" to celebrate everyone's birthday at once) or parties to celebrate sober anniversaries.
- Drugs Over Dinner – See drugsoverdinner.org for information about how to create a customized dinner conversation to discuss relevant topics. After answering a few simple questions, the website provides you with a toolkit to plan, host and moderate this conversation.



- Service Project – Complete a service project on campus, like writing Valentines to veterans or active duty soldiers, or go off campus and serve a meal to the homeless, help organize food at a food bank, or telling your stories at a local treatment center.
- Rally, March or Protest – Engage in civic action by organizing a rally, march or protest to bring to light issues surrounding recovery and advocate for change.
- Recovery Sporting Event* – Put together a basketball game, a volleyball tournament, a kickball tournament or a softball game. Charge a team registration fee to make it a fundraiser!
- Recovery Tree – Have students write encouraging messages to people in recovery, then hang them on a “tree” and keep it somewhere where group members can access it.
- Inflatables – Order a bounce house, inflatable obstacle course, inflatable sumo wrestling or inflatable jousting from a local company.
- Guest Speaker – Bring in a guest speaker to address a topic related to recovery. You can aim for a well-known celebrity like Tara Connor, or find someone more local.
- All Night Dance Marathon* - Support a pre-existing dance marathon on your campus like “Up ‘Til Dawn” by creating a team, or make it a fundraiser by creating your own!
- Banquet – Hold a formal banquet to recognize the successes of your CRP, celebrate graduates or give out awards to allies.
- Parents’ Weekend – Bring parents to campus to show off the success of your students and your program!
- Film Festival – Screen films made by students in the group and/or related to recovery.

Remember that you don’t have to do everything by yourself. Look for campus or community partners who can help plan, fund, staff and execute the event!

Conclusion

Whether big or small, events and activities on your campus will be integral to the success of your program! We hope you will use this toolkit to make planning them a little bit easier – and of course, don’t forget to ask your students what *they* want!





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