



Working with Veterans Aligning Rhythm2Recovery Exercises to National Mental Health Guidelines For Servicemen & Women.

Veterans thrive in a safe, bonded, task-oriented group focused on a goal directed mission. The drum-circle creates a therapeutically rich environment that invites connection while meeting a goal. Each week the level of trust deepens and the level of honesty expands. The veteran has the ability to voice thoughts and struggles with like-minded individuals that share a common culture and style of interpersonal interactions. The shared “mission” of creating music together provides an opportunity for leadership, commitment to the team, loyalty and perseverance - All values of the veteran population. Because sharing feelings is not an easy task for a veteran, the use of the drum to convey emotions is especially supportive to the group members – the drum is their emotional voice. Often for the first time in civilian life, the veterans experience a place of “belonging” which has been greatly missed once they leave active duty¹.

The US Department of Veterans Affairs lists 8 areas of ‘Pro-Active Health & Well-Being’ centered around a pillar of mindful awareness that mental health providers should address². Below we have listed the different Rhythm2Recovery (R2R) exercises that can be used to engage and develop these components.

Working Your Body (Energy & Flexibility). Drumming is a physical exercise useful for cardio-vascular health and motor-coordination³. For veterans working through physical injuries, rhythmic exercise can reduce pain and assist in the fluidity of muscle movement, and the development of muscle tone, utilized by therapists in body, movement, and speech rehabilitation.

Surroundings (Physical & Emotional). Rhythm2Recovery exercises such as ‘The Speaker’s Chair’, ‘Contrasting Emotions’ and ‘A Few Good Friends’ can be used to examine how our environment and the people we surround ourselves with can impact both our physical & emotional health.

Personal Development (Personal & Work Life). In Rhythm2Recovery personal development starts with understanding our values and working towards aligning our actions to these. Exercises such as ‘Find Your Bass’, and ‘The Values Rhythm’ look at cementing our sense of self through identifying our core values, whilst ‘The Ego Trap’ and ‘I’ve Got the Power’ focus on working towards embedding these within our day to day activities.

Food & Drink (Nourishing & Fueling). Exercises including ‘The Speaker’s Chair’ and ‘It’s Your Choice’ can be used to examine healthy choices when it comes to diet. In addition, R2R has a specific manual to address addiction issues, with themes that include peer pressure, emotional management & relapse prevention.

Recharge (Sleep & Refresh). Rhythmic drumming at slow tempos (60bpm - Alpha brain waves) assists with relaxation whilst higher tempo drumming can lift energy and mood⁴. R2R mindfulness exercises can help lower anxieties that impact sleep.

Family, Friends & Co-workers (Relationships). The R2R program on Healthy Relationships utilizes the communal nature of the drum-circle to explore a wide range of relational themes including, values, trust, teamwork, communication, problem-solving, and many more. Relationship focused exercises are a central part of the R2R catalogue.

Spirit & Soul (Growing & Connecting). Drumming is a practice that has traditionally been used to connect us to the spiritual realm. The rhythms we play connect us to the rhythms of life that surround us and ground us to the vibrations of the earth and the cosmos. We live in a world of rhythm.

Power of the Mind (Relaxing & Healing). Rhythm2Recovery exercises link the drumming we do to reflective practice. Much of this reflection asks us to reexamine our perspective, particularly those thoughts that embed negativity and cynicism. Exercises like ‘Attention’, ‘The Lookout’ & ‘Find Your Strengths’ promote a positive outlook. Drumming also impacts the sub-conscious mind and can reduce the impacts of trauma⁵.

Mindful Awareness. Drumming is traditionally a mindful practice. In Rhythm2Recovery guided mindfulness exercises explore a range of issues, including ‘Acceptance’, ‘Forgiveness’, ‘Gratitude’ and ‘Uncertainty’.

1. King, T (2018). *Working with Veterans*. In Faulkner, S (Ed), How to extend the benefits of the Community Drum-Circle to Specific Populations.

2. Office of Patient Centered care & Cultural transformation. *Whole Health for Life*, (2019). US Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington.

3. Dunbar, R., Kaskatis, K., MacDonald, I., & Barra, V. (2012). Performance of Music Elevates Pain Threshold and Positive Affect: Implications for the Evolutionary Function of Music. *Evolutionary psychology: journal of evolutionary approaches to psychology and behavior*. 10. 688-702.

4. Kaplan, C.D. (2000). The short-term effects of group hand drumming on mood, group cohesiveness and rhythm perception. *Doctoral Thesis, University of Connecticut*. <https://opencommons.uconn.edu/dissertations/AAI9949659/>

5. Benisimon, M., Amir, D., & Wolf, Y. (2008). Drumming through trauma: Music therapy with post-traumatic soldiers. *The arts in psychotherapy*, 35, 34-48.