51 Thanksgiving & Autumn Activities for Recreational Therapy

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This eBook was created to support recreational therapists and activity professionals in delivering meaningful, person-centered, and uplifting seasonal interventions.

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1. Gratitude Tree

Supplies: Paper tree trunk, cut-out leaves, markers, tape
Instructions: Participants write something they're thankful for on each leaf and tape it to the tree.
Benefits: Social – sharing gratitude; Emotional – positivity; Cognitive – reflection; Leisure – creative

2. Thankful Stones

Supplies: Smooth stones, paint pens or acrylic paint
Instructions: Write words of gratitude on stones. Display in a jar or take one home as a reminder.
Benefits: Emotional – mindfulness; Cognitive – memory link; Leisure – art-based relaxation

3. Autumn Sensory Walk

Supplies: Outdoor area, optional checklist (crunchy leaves, cool breeze, wood smell, etc.)
Instructions: Go on a short walk focusing on the five senses. Discuss afterward.
Benefits: Physical – movement; Emotional – grounding; Cognitive – mindfulness; Social – shared experience

4. Thankful Circle Discussion

Supplies: Talking stick or fall-themed item
Instructions: Each person shares one thing they're thankful for.
Benefits: Social – connection; Emotional – appreciation; Cognitive – reflection

5. Pumpkin Gratitude Toss

Supplies: Small foam pumpkins or a soft ball, gratitude prompts
Instructions: Toss the pumpkin; whoever catches it answers a gratitude question.
Benefits: Social – interaction; Physical – coordination; Cognitive – quick thinking

6. Leaf Collage of Appreciation

Supplies: Paper leaves, magazines, scissors, glue
Instructions: Cut and paste pictures or words that represent gratitude.
Benefits: Emotional – self-expression; Cognitive – creative processing; Leisure – art

7. Self-Care Pie Chart

Supplies: Paper circles, colored pencils
Instructions: Divide a paper "pie" into slices for physical, emotional, social, and spiritual self-care. Write examples in each slice.
Benefits: Cognitive – insight; Emotional – awareness; Leisure – reflection

8. Autumn Yoga Flow

Supplies: Yoga mats or chairs, gentle playlist
Instructions: Lead gentle stretches using fall-themed names such as "Falling Leaf" pose.
Benefits: Physical – flexibility; Emotional – relaxation; Cognitive – focus

9. Warm Drinks & Reflection

Supplies: Hot cocoa, tea, or cider; reflection question cards
Instructions: Sip and discuss questions such as "What warmed your heart this year?"
Benefits: Social – conversation; Emotional – comfort; Leisure – relaxation

10. Kindness Leaves

Supplies: Paper leaves, pens, string
Instructions: Write kind notes for others and hang them on a "Kindness Tree."
Benefits: Social – empathy; Emotional – kindness; Cognitive – perspective

11. Autumn Memory Collage

Supplies: Magazines, old fall photos, glue, scissors, poster board
Instructions: Create a collage that captures favorite autumn memories like family dinners, school days, or fall scents. Share one story from your collage.
Benefits: Emotional – nostalgia; Social – storytelling; Cognitive – memory recall; Leisure – art-based reflection

12. Thanksgiving Trivia

Supplies: Printed trivia questions or slides
Instructions: Teams answer fall- and gratitude-themed questions.
Benefits: Cognitive – recall; Social – teamwork; Leisure – learning

13. Nature Mandalas

Supplies: Leaves, sticks, acorns, flowers
Instructions: Create circular patterns using natural materials.
Benefits: Emotional – mindfulness; Cognitive – pattern recognition; Leisure – art

14. Gratitude Journal Workshop

Supplies: Notebooks, pens, prompts
Instructions: Write daily gratitude reflections and share one if desired.
Benefits: Cognitive – self-reflection; Emotional – optimism; Leisure – journaling

15. Cozy Reading Hour

Supplies: Fall books or short stories, blankets, warm lighting
Instructions: Read individually or as a group, followed by a discussion.
Benefits: Emotional – calm; Cognitive – comprehension; Leisure – relaxation

16. Scented Self-Care Sachets

Supplies: Fabric, ribbon, dried lavender or orange peels
Instructions: Make small sachets to keep or gift.
Benefits: Emotional – relaxation; Cognitive – sensory engagement; Leisure – crafting

17. Gratitude Chain

Supplies: Paper strips, markers, stapler
Instructions: Write one thing you're thankful for on each strip and link them to form a chain.
Benefits: Social – teamwork; Emotional – positivity; Leisure – craft

18. Autumn Music Memories

Supplies: Playlist of seasonal or nostalgic songs
Instructions: Listen together and discuss what memories or feelings the songs evoke.
Benefits: Emotional – nostalgia; Social – sharing; Cognitive – memory recall

19. Guided Imagery: Autumn Woods

Supplies: Calm background music, relaxation script
Instructions: Lead participants through a guided visualization of a peaceful autumn walk.
Benefits: Emotional – relaxation; Cognitive – focus; Leisure – meditation

20. Apple Taste Test

Supplies: Apple slices (different varieties), napkins
Instructions: Taste and rate each apple type, then discuss favorites.
Benefits: Physical – sensory; Social – interaction; Cognitive – comparison

21. Autumn-Themed Scavenger Hunt

Supplies: Checklist, small prizes
Instructions: Find autumn-related objects indoors or outdoors.
Benefits: Physical – activity; Cognitive – problem-solving; Social – collaboration

22. Thankful Bingo

Supplies: Printable bingo cards with gratitude prompts
Instructions: Play as a group and share responses aloud.
Benefits: Social – engagement; Cognitive – attention; Leisure – play

23. Mindful Leaf Breathing

Supplies: Paper leaf templates
Instructions: Trace the outline while breathing in and out slowly along the edges.
Benefits: Physical – relaxation; Emotional – grounding; Cognitive – focus

24. Corn Kernel Gratitude Jar

Supplies: Mason jar, dried corn kernels, paper slips
Instructions: Add a kernel each time you think of something you're grateful for.
Benefits: Emotional – habit building; Cognitive – reflection; Leisure – mindfulness

25. Fall Photo Booth

Supplies: Props (scarves, hats, pumpkins), camera
Instructions: Take fun group photos and share one thing you're thankful for with each shot.
Benefits: Social – bonding; Emotional – joy; Leisure – creativity

26. Comfort Food Cook-Off

Supplies: Kitchen access, simple recipes
Instructions: Prepare or share favorite fall comfort foods and vote on favorites.
Benefits: Social – teamwork; Physical – coordination; Emotional – comfort

27. Reflection Questions in a Jar

Supplies: Jar, printed prompts
Instructions: Draw a question and share a response about gratitude, kindness, or appreciation.
Benefits: Cognitive – reflection; Social – communication; Emotional – empathy

28. Fall Nature Art Press

Supplies: Leaves, wax paper, iron
Instructions: Press and seal leaves to preserve their color and texture.
Benefits: Emotional – appreciation; Cognitive – observation; Leisure – art

29. Fireside Story Sharing

Supplies: Fireplace image or campfire light, chairs in a circle
Instructions: Share warm, funny, or meaningful fall memories.
Benefits: Social – storytelling; Emotional – connection; Leisure – reflection

30. Thankful Collage Poster

Supplies: Magazines, poster board, glue
Instructions: Create a group collage showing what the group values most.
Benefits: Social – teamwork; Emotional – positivity; Cognitive – creativity

31. Fall Memory Lane Game

Supplies: Discussion cards (e.g., “Favorite fall meal,” “Best Halloween costume,” “Autumn smell from childhood”)
Instructions: Draw a card and share the memory. Encourage laughter and connection.
Benefits: Emotional – nostalgia; Social – bonding; Cognitive – memory recall; Leisure – conversation

32. Gratitude Letter Writing

Supplies: Stationery, envelopes
Instructions: Write letters to someone you appreciate and express thanks.
Benefits: Emotional – gratitude; Social – connection; Cognitive – writing skills

33. Harvest Candle Craft

Supplies: Small jars, soy wax, cinnamon sticks
Instructions: Make and decorate fall-scented candles.
Benefits: Emotional – self-expression; Leisure – craft; Cognitive – sequencing steps

34. Scarecrow Building

Supplies: Old clothes, straw, string
Instructions: Work in teams to build a scarecrow together.
Benefits: Physical – coordination; Social – collaboration; Leisure – creativity

35. Mindful Coloring Pages

Supplies: Autumn-themed coloring sheets, colored pencils
Instructions: Quietly color while soft music plays.
Benefits: Emotional – stress relief; Cognitive – focus; Leisure – art

36. Autumn Affirmations

Supplies: Paper, pens
Instructions: Write five affirmations inspired by fall (e.g., “I let go like the leaves”).
Benefits: Emotional – resilience; Cognitive – insight; Leisure – reflection

37. Warm Blanket Donation Project

Supplies: Blankets or materials for no-sew blankets
Instructions: Make or collect blankets to donate to a local shelter.
Benefits: Social – community service; Emotional – purpose; Physical – fine motor

38. Harvest Gratitude Wall

Supplies: Bulletin board, paper cutouts
Instructions: Add gratitude notes each day during November.
Benefits: Social – community; Emotional – positivity; Leisure – creative

39. Thanksgiving Charades

Supplies: Word cards (e.g., “turkey,” “harvest,” “thankful”)
Instructions: Act out seasonal words for others to guess.
Benefits: Physical – movement; Social – laughter; Cognitive – creativity

40. Apple Core Reflection

Supplies: Apple-shaped cutouts
Instructions: Write one positive "core" quality about yourself or someone else.
Benefits: Emotional – self-esteem; Social – encouragement; Cognitive – reflection

41. Gratitude Garland

Supplies: String, clothespins, index cards
Instructions: Hang notes of appreciation across a wall or bulletin board.
Benefits: Emotional – optimism; Social – collaboration; Leisure – craft

42. Nature Photo Challenge

Supplies: Phones or cameras
Instructions: Capture three images that show gratitude for nature and share them.
Benefits: Emotional – mindfulness; Cognitive – observation; Leisure – photography

43. Fall-Themed Word Search

Supplies: Printed puzzles
Instructions: Complete individually or in pairs.
Benefits: Cognitive – focus; Leisure – cognitive recreation

44. Thankful Tic-Tac-Toe

Supplies: Game boards, markers
Instructions: Before placing an X or O, name something you're thankful for.
Benefits: Social – play; Cognitive – strategy; Emotional – gratitude

45. Cozy Movie & Discussion

Supplies: Fall-themed movie, popcorn
Instructions: Watch together and discuss themes of kindness or gratitude.
Benefits: Social – bonding; Emotional – empathy; Leisure – relaxation

46. Gratitude Mind Map

Supplies: Paper, markers
Instructions: Write "Gratitude" in the center and branch out to people, experiences, and moments.
Benefits: Cognitive – organization; Emotional – reflection; Leisure – creativity

47. Kindness Bingo

Supplies: Bingo cards with kind actions (e.g., "Compliment someone")
Instructions: Check off each act of kindness completed during the week.
Benefits: Emotional – compassion; Social – outreach; Leisure – motivation

48. Warm Hands, Warm Hearts

Supplies: Handprint cutouts, markers
Instructions: Trace your hands and write kind or encouraging words on them.
Benefits: Emotional – positivity; Social – sharing; Leisure – art

49. Reflect & Release Leaf Toss

Supplies: Paper leaves, bowl
Instructions: Write something to let go of this year and symbolically toss it away.
Benefits: Emotional – release; Cognitive – reflection; Leisure – ritual

50. Autumn Gratitude Circle

Supplies: None
Instructions: End group sessions by naming one moment of gratitude from the week.
Benefits: Emotional – closure; Social – connection; Cognitive – memory recall

51. Gratitude Time Capsule

Supplies: Shoebox or jar, paper, pens, decorative materials
Instructions: Write notes about what you're grateful for this season and your hopes for the next year. Seal them in a "gratitude time capsule" to reopen next fall.
Benefits: Emotional – hope and reflection; Cognitive – goal-setting; Social – shared experience; Leisure – creativity

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