Team Building Activities

Team Building Activities Guide

Team Chemistry Workshops

CONTENTS

- Part 1 · About this workshop
- Part 2 · Two Truths and a Lie (Recovery Edition)
- Part 3 · Strength Bombardment
- Part 4 · Vulnerability Circle
- Part 5 · Team Charter Creation
- Part 6 · Appreciation Rounds
- Part 7 · Fear in a Hat
- Part 8 · Best Practices for Team Building Activities

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Part 1 · About this workshop

These evidence-based team building activities are designed specifically for substance use disorder treatment teams. Unlike generic corporate exercises, these activities address the unique dynamics of clinical teams—high emotional intensity, burnout risk, the need for vulnerability, and the critical importance of trust in patient care.

When to Use These Activities

- During team retreats or development days
- When onboarding new team members
- After team conflicts or challenging periods
- As part of regular team meeting rotations
- When team chemistry feels stagnant

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Part 2 · Two Truths and a Lie (Recovery Edition)

15-20 minutes · 4-12 people

Purpose: Build personal connections and reveal unexpected commonalities among team members

Materials Needed

- Paper and pens
- Timer (optional)

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Each team member writes down two true statements about their recovery journey, professional experience, or personal growth—and one false statement

2. Examples: "I've been working in SUD treatment for 8 years" (true), "I have three kids" (true), "I speak fluent Spanish" (lie)

3. Go around the circle with each person sharing their three statements

4. The group discusses and votes on which one is the lie

5. After revealing the truth, share a brief story about one of the true statements

Debrief Questions

- What did you learn about teammates that surprised you?
- Did you discover any unexpected commonalities?
- How does knowing these personal details change how you see each other?
- What barriers to connection did this activity help break down?

Activity Variations

Recovery-focused: All statements must relate to recovery or addiction treatment work

Values-based: Statements must reveal personal values or beliefs

Skills showcase: Highlight professional skills or unique experiences

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Part 3 · Strength Bombardment

30-45 minutes · 6-15 people

Purpose: Build team members' confidence and create culture of affirmation

Materials Needed

- Sticky notes or index cards
- Pens
- Optional: chart paper

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Each team member gets a sheet of paper with their name at the top (or uses chart paper taped to wall)

2. Set timer for 10-15 minutes: everyone walks around writing genuine strengths they observe in each colleague

3. Focus on specific, observable behaviors: "You stay calm during crises," "You explain concepts in ways patients understand," "You support new staff"

4. No generic compliments—be specific and authentic

5. Each person takes 2-3 minutes to read their affirmations aloud to the group

6. Team discusses patterns they notice in the strengths identified

Debrief Questions

- Were you surprised by any of the strengths people identified in you?
- Did you notice any strengths you weren't aware you were demonstrating?
- How does it feel to receive this affirmation from your team?
- What patterns emerged across the team—what are our collective strengths?
- How can we leverage these identified strengths more intentionally?

Activity Variations

Anonymous version: All notes submitted anonymously, read aloud by facilitator

Digital version: Use shared document or online tool

Themed focus: Strengths specific to clinical work, team collaboration, or patient care

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Part 4 · Vulnerability Circle

45-60 minutes · 5-10 people

Purpose: Build psychological safety through shared vulnerability and authentic connection

Materials Needed

- Private, comfortable space
- Tissues
- Strict confidentiality agreement

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Establish ground rules: confidentiality, no advice-giving unless asked, no judgment, active listening

2. Facilitator shares first to model vulnerability and set the tone

3. Each person shares a professional struggle, personal challenge, or moment of self-doubt (2-3 minutes each)

4. Examples: "I sometimes feel like an imposter," "I struggle with work-life balance," "I'm scared of saying the wrong thing"

5. After each share, group simply says "thank you" or offers brief affirmation—no fixing

6. After all shares, open discussion about common themes and mutual support

Debrief Questions

- How did it feel to be vulnerable with your team?
- What common struggles emerged? How does knowing others share these struggles help?
- How can we create space for this kind of authenticity in our daily work?
- What commitments can we make to support each other in these areas?
- How does vulnerability strengthen rather than weaken our team?

Activity Variations

Written version: Submit vulnerabilities anonymously, facilitator reads aloud

Pairs first: Share in pairs before larger group

Specific focus: Clinical challenges only, or personal growth areas

This is a high-trust activity. Only use with teams that have established basic safety. Have support resources available if needed.

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Part 5 · Team Charter Creation

60-90 minutes · Any size

Purpose: Co-create team norms, values, and operating agreements

Materials Needed

- Large chart paper or whiteboard
- Markers
- Sticky notes

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Divide into small groups (3-4 people) for 15 minutes to brainstorm: What makes a great team? What do we need from each other?
2. Each group shares their top 5 ideas
3. Group them into themes on the board (communication, respect, accountability, support, etc.)
4. As a full team, craft specific commitments for each theme
5. Example: Instead of "good communication," write "We will respond to messages within 24 hours and speak directly about concerns"
6. Every team member signs the charter
7. Post charter visibly in workspace and revisit quarterly

Debrief Questions

- Which commitments feel most important to you personally?
- Are there any commitments that feel challenging? How can we support each other?
- What will we do when someone (including ourselves) doesn't honor the charter?
- How will we hold each other accountable with compassion?
- When should we revisit and revise this charter?

Activity Variations

Values-first: Start with identifying shared values before creating behavioral commitments

Problem-solving focus: Begin by identifying current team frustrations, then create charter to address them

Living document: Commit to monthly "charter check-ins" to refine

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Part 6 · Appreciation Rounds

15-25 minutes · Any size

Purpose: Create culture of regular recognition and gratitude

Materials Needed

- None required

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Sit in a circle or gathering space

2. Each person shares an appreciation for the person to their right

3. Format: "[Name], I appreciate you for [specific behavior/quality] because [impact]"

4. Example: "Sarah, I appreciate you for staying late to help with that crisis patient last week because it showed me I'm not alone"

5. No cross-talk—just receive the appreciation and say "thank you"

6. Continue around the circle until everyone has given and received appreciation

7. Optional: End with one appreciation for the whole team

Debrief Questions

- How did it feel to give specific appreciation?
- How did it feel to receive it?
- What impact would it have if we did this regularly?
- How can we build appreciation into our daily rhythms?
- What prevents us from expressing appreciation more often?

Activity Variations

Popcorn style: Anyone can appreciate anyone (not just person to right)

Theme-based: Appreciation for specific situations (crisis response, patient care, team support)

Written round: Write appreciation notes before speaking them aloud

Weekly ritual: Make this a standing meeting practice

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Part 7 · Fear in a Hat

30-45 minutes · 6-20 people

Purpose: Surface and normalize professional fears, reducing isolation

Materials Needed

- Paper
- Pens
- Hat or bowl
- Facilitator

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Everyone anonymously writes their biggest professional fear on a piece of paper

2. Examples: "I'm afraid I'm not making a difference," "I'm scared I'll relapse," "I fear saying the wrong thing to a patient"

3. Fold papers and place in hat

4. Facilitator draws papers one at a time and reads aloud

5. After each fear is read, team discusses: Has anyone else felt this? What helps?
6. No one admits which fear is theirs unless they choose to

7. After all fears discussed, identify common themes and collective strategies

Debrief Questions

- What surprised you about the fears expressed?
- What themes emerged—what are we collectively worried about?
- How does knowing others share these fears change your experience?
- What support systems can we create to address these fears?
- How can we normalize talking about professional fears?

Activity Variations

Hope in a hat: Flip it—write professional hopes and dreams

Challenge in a hat: Current obstacles team members are facing

Question in a hat: Questions team members wish they could ask

Create explicit safety. Remind everyone that this is confidential and judgment-free.

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Part 8 · Best Practices for Team Building Activities

Before the Activity

- Choose activities appropriate for current team trust level
- Explain the purpose clearly
- Get buy-in before starting
- Set clear ground rules

During the Activity

- Participate yourself as facilitator (model vulnerability)
- Allow silence—don't rush
- Notice energy and adjust if needed
- Respect those who pass or opt out

After the Activity

- Always debrief—this is where learning happens
- Connect insights to daily work
- Create action items if relevant
- Follow up in next meeting

Common Pitfalls

- Forcing participation
- Skipping debrief due to time
- Doing activities without buy-in
- Using activities as one-time fixes

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