RED LÚDICA

FREE PRINTABLE GUIDES

Laughter Therapy activities for *older people*

Twelve play, music and laughter activities step by step, for care homes, day centres and community groups. All can be done seated.



1 The circle greeting

2 Waking up the body from the chair

3 Faces on the clap

4 The conductor's baton

5 The vowel choir

6 The song with actions

7 Passing imaginary objects

8 The scarf that can be anything

9 The laughter chain

10 Seated partner dance

11 A moment on stage

12 The goodbye circle

Planning *a session*

A 45-minute session with one or two activities per moment. With 30 minutes, one per moment; with 60, add breaks for a drink of water.

MOMENT	TIME	ACTIVITIES
To begin Greet each other, wake up the body and ease into play.	10 min	The circle greeting · Waking up the body from the chair · Faces on the clap
Rhythm and voice Music, clapping and vowels: what works best with almost any group.	10–15 min	The conductor's baton · The vowel choir · The song with actions
Play and laughter Imagination and small surprises so laughter appears on its own.	10–15 min	Passing imaginary objects · The scarf that can be anything · The laughter chain
To say goodbye A warm ending that makes people look forward to next week.	5–10 min	Seated partner dance · A moment on stage · The goodbye circle

BEFORE THE SESSION

- [ ] Talk to the care team: mobility, hearing, health and the group's tastes.
- [ ] A clear room with stable chairs in a circle.
- [ ] Music the group knows and a speaker.
- [ ] Water to hand and the materials for the chosen activities.

TAKE CARE

- [ ] Nobody has to join in: watching is taking part too.
- [ ] Stop if anyone gets tired, dizzy or feels pain.
- [ ] No jokes about age, memory or bodies.
- [ ] Laughter Therapy complements and never replaces any treatment.

FIVE KEYS

1. **Talk to the staff first.** Ask about the group's mobility, hearing and health. The care team knows each person.
2. **Invite, never insist.** Watching is taking part too. Many people join in at the second or third session.
3. **Get down to their level.** Sit in the circle, face people, speak slowly and use big gestures.
4. **Laugh with, never at.** No jokes about age, memory or bodies. The laughter comes from the play.
5. **Breaks and water.** Take short breaks, keep water handy and stop if anyone gets tired or dizzy.

ACTIVITY 1 · TO BEGIN

The circle greeting

6 to 25 people | 10 min | No materials

What it's for: Build the group, remember names and give everyone a moment in the spotlight without putting them on the spot.

PREPARATION

- Arrange the chairs in a circle, with no tables in the middle.
- Sit in the circle yourself, at the same height.
- Keep a list of names in case someone forgets their own or someone else's.

STEP BY STEP

1. Start yourself: say your name and greet everyone with a big gesture, such as a wave.
2. Ask the group to greet you back all together, using your name: "Good morning, Rose!".
3. Go round the circle: each person says their name and chooses their greeting.
4. If someone doesn't want to invent one, they can copy the greeting of the person next to them.
5. Second round, faster: just the gesture, and the group says the name.

ADAPTATIONS

- Wheelchair users: the whole game is played seated; arm, head and face gestures count just the same.
- Cognitive impairment: offer two greetings to choose from and say each person's name with them.
- Hearing loss: face the person, speak slowly and pair each name with the gesture.

If it doesn't take off

If the group is flat, exaggerate your greeting and ask for a round of applause for each person: applause lifts the energy.

The key

The group returns every greeting with energy. Everyone should feel welcome from the very first minute.

ACTIVITY 2 · TO BEGIN

Waking up the body from the chair

6 to 30 people | 10 min | Stable chairs

What it's for: Gently activate the body, release tension and warm up the voice for laughter.

PREPARATION

- Check that the chairs are stable and, if possible, without wheels.
- Ask the staff if anyone has a movement limitation you should know about.
- Play some calm, familiar music in the background.

STEP BY STEP

1. Suggest "waking up" like in the morning: stretch your arms up and give a big yawn.
2. Shake your hands as if they were wet, gently at first and then fast.
3. Face massage: rub your cheeks, forehead and ears with your fingertips.
4. Shoulders up to your ears, hold for a moment and drop them with an "aaah!".
5. Finish with a big stretch and a smile to the person next to you.

ADAPTATIONS

- Wheelchair users: all movements use the arms, hands and face.
- Cognitive impairment: do each movement in front of the group and wait for them to copy; no need to explain.
- Pain or limited mobility: moving the hands and face is enough; the yawn is just as contagious.

If it doesn't take off

If someone doesn't want to move, invite them to do just the yawn. That is often enough to get them laughing.

The key

Each person only moves what feels comfortable. Invite, never correct.

ACTIVITY 3 · TO BEGIN

Faces on the clap

6 to 30 people | 10 min | Face cards

What it's for: Play with facial expressions and spark laughter by seeing the rest of the group's faces.

PREPARATION

- Use a loud clap or two wooden sticks to mark each change.
- Print the face cards: joy, surprise, pretend anger, sleepy, fright and pride.
- Seat the group in a circle so everyone can see each other.

STEP BY STEP

1. Explain: "Every time you hear the clap, we change our face and freeze".
2. Show a card, for example surprise, and clap.
3. Ask everyone to look around without changing their face: this is usually where the laughter starts.
4. Repeat with other cards, a little faster each time.
5. Last round: everyone chooses their favourite face.

ADAPTATIONS

- Wheelchair users: it is a face-only game, everyone takes part equally.
- Cognitive impairment: use just a few faces and repeat them; the card helps more than the word.
- Sight loss: say the emotion out loud and make the sound that goes with it.

If it doesn't take off

If people feel shy, start with easy faces (a smile, surprise) and do the most exaggerated ones yourself.

The key

Freezing and looking at everyone else's faces is what makes people laugh.

ACTIVITY 4 · RHYTHM AND VOICE

The conductor’s baton

6 to 30 people | 15 min | A baton and music

What it’s for: Bring the group together through music and give each person a moment in the spotlight.

PREPARATION

- Prepare three or four songs with a clear beat that the group knows: waltzes, swing, songs from their youth.
- Bring a baton, a wooden spoon or a big pencil.
- Ask the staff what music the group enjoys.

STEP BY STEP

1. Start with the baton yourself: beat time with big movements.
2. The group follows the rhythm by clapping, patting their knees or tapping their feet.
3. Change the speed or stop suddenly: whoever keeps clapping sets off the laughter.
4. Pass the baton to someone else and let them conduct in their own way.
5. At the end, a round of applause for every conductor.

ADAPTATIONS

- Wheelchair users: hands and knees; feet are optional.
- Cognitive impairment: familiar music helps a lot; look and smile more than you explain.
- Hearing loss: turn the volume up with care and mark the beat with very visible gestures.

If it doesn’t take off

If nobody wants the baton, offer it to whoever followed the beat best and conduct together, four hands on the baton.

The key

Whoever holds the baton is in charge. Being the conductor for a minute lifts anyone’s spirits.

ACTIVITY 5 · RHYTHM AND VOICE

The vowel choir

6 to 40 people | 10 min | Vowel cards

What it's for: Work on voice and breathing, and laugh at how it sounds.

PREPARATION

- Choose a very popular, short song, such as "Happy Birthday".
- Print the large vowel cards.
- Try it yourself first with each vowel: if it makes you laugh, it will work.

STEP BY STEP

1. Sing the song once with the words, so everyone has it in their head.
2. Show the A card and sing the whole song using only "a".
3. Move on to E, I, O and U, one at a time.
4. Split the group: half the room on I and half on O, at the same time.
5. Finish with the vowel that got the biggest laugh, louder and slower.

ADAPTATIONS

- Wheelchair users: it is a voice game, everyone takes part equally.
- Cognitive impairment: lifelong songs are remembered very well; stick to two vowels.
- Hearing loss: show the card and exaggerate your mouth shape.

If it doesn't take off

If it's hard to get going, sing the first vowel solo and over the top: they laugh and feel brave enough to try.

The key

Choose a song everyone knows. The words disappear, leaving the melody... and the laughter.

ACTIVITY 6 · RHYTHM AND VOICE

The song with actions

6 to 40 people | 15 min | Song list

What it's for: Combine music, memory and movement, and create something that belongs to the group.

PREPARATION

- Choose a familiar song with words that are easy to act out: sun, sea, heart, boat.
- Write down the words that will have an action.
- Keep the lyrics to hand in case anyone needs them.

STEP BY STEP

1. Sing the song once without actions.
2. Ask the group what action to do for each key word and note their ideas.
3. Sing it again with the actions.
4. The third time, only actions on the key words, without singing them.
5. If the group wants, record a video for families, always with permission.

ADAPTATIONS

- Wheelchair users: arm, hand and face actions.
- Cognitive impairment: few actions and always the same ones; repetition builds confidence.
- Hearing loss: sing facing the group and make big actions.

If it doesn't take off

If no ideas come, suggest the actions yourself and let the group change them.

The key

The group invents the actions. That way, the song becomes theirs.

ACTIVITY 7 · PLAY AND LAUGHTER

Passing imaginary objects

6 to 25 people | 15 min | Object cards

What it's for: Spark imagination and expression, and laugh at each other's gestures.

PREPARATION

- Seat the group in a close circle, so the object can be "passed" from hand to hand.
- Print the object cards and choose six.
- Practise how you "hold" each object.

STEP BY STEP

1. Show the card: "We're passing round a very hot potato".
2. Pass it to the person next to you, blowing on it and complaining about how hot it is.
3. Each person receives it and passes it on in their own way, with gestures and sounds.
4. Change the object halfway round: "Now it's an ice cube!".
5. Last round: each person invents the object they pass and the group guesses what it is.

ADAPTATIONS

- Wheelchair users: played seated, hand to hand.
- Cognitive impairment: use everyday objects, such as a hot cup, a baby or a loaf of bread.
- Sight loss: say out loud which object is coming and make the sound.

If it doesn't take off

If someone finds it hard to invent, they can copy the gesture of whoever passed it to them. That counts too.

The key

Exaggerate. The hotter the potato, the more the group laughs.

ACTIVITY 8 · PLAY AND LAUGHTER

The scarf that can be anything

6 to 30 people | 15 min | One scarf per person

What it's for: Encourage creativity and humour with a simple, safe object.

PREPARATION

- Bring one fabric scarf per person, colourful if possible.
- Keep the list of ideas to hand in case the group goes blank.
- Play cheerful background music.

STEP BY STEP

1. Hand out the scarves and let people feel them and wave them to the music.
2. Clap and suggest a use: "Now it's a hat!".
3. Ask the group to look around: every hat is different.
4. At the next clap, let each person choose what their scarf is.
5. The funniest ideas are repeated by everyone.

ADAPTATIONS

- Wheelchair users: everything is done seated.
- Cognitive impairment: suggest each use and show it; the scarf is easy to handle.
- Limited hand mobility: the scarf can rest on the knees or shoulders.

If it doesn't take off

If the group goes blank, take ideas from the list and exaggerate: a scarf moustache always works.

The key

There are no wrong answers. Any invented use counts and deserves a round of applause.

ACTIVITY 9 · PLAY AND LAUGHTER

The laughter chain

6 to 30 people | 10 min | No materials

What it's for: Spark shared laughter and notice how it spreads through the group.

PREPARATION

- Seat the group in a circle where everyone can see each other.
- Explain that the laughter can start out "pretend".
- Practise a small, a medium and a big laugh yourself.

STEP BY STEP

1. Start with a very quiet laugh and look at the person next to you.
2. That person picks it up and makes it a little bigger.
3. Keep going round the circle: the last laugh is the biggest.
4. Change direction: whoever finished with the big laugh now starts with a small one.
5. Finish all together, laughing, followed by three seconds of silence.

ADAPTATIONS

- Wheelchair users: it is a voice and face game.
- Cognitive impairment: no need to understand the rule; just look and laugh with the person next to you.
- Hearing loss: add big gestures to the laugh, shoulders going up and hands on the tummy.

If it doesn't take off

If people feel shy, start with a Father Christmas "ho, ho, ho" or a rhythmic "ha, ha, ha" with clapping.

The key

The laughter starts out fake and ends up real. It spreads on its own.

ACTIVITY 10 · TO SAY GOODBYE

Seated partner dance

6 to 30 people | 15 min | Music

What it's for: Move to music, connect with another person and celebrate together.

PREPARATION

- Arrange the chairs in pairs, facing each other.
- Prepare dance music the group knows.
- If staff or family members are present, invite them to dance too.

STEP BY STEP

1. Pairs hold hands and sway from side to side with the music.
2. Suggest movements: arms up, "rowing", clapping with your partner.
3. The music stops: change partners.
4. Anyone who can and wants to dances standing for a few bars.
5. For the last song, the whole group together, holding hands in a circle.

ADAPTATIONS

- Wheelchair users: the partner sits beside or opposite them, with no need to move.
- Cognitive impairment: keep the same pairs if changing causes anxiety.
- Frailty: small movements and no pulling on the arms.

If it doesn't take off

If someone doesn't want physical contact, they can dance holding a scarf between their hands or clap along.

The key

Holding hands. For many people, it's the most looked-forward-to moment of the session.

ACTIVITY 11 · TO SAY GOODBYE

A moment on stage

6 to 25 people | 15 min | Toy instruments

What it's for: Give each person a moment of recognition and let the group celebrate them.

PREPARATION

- Bring a toy guitar, some maracas, a toy microphone or a wooden spoon.
- Mark out a "stage" in front of the circle, even if it's just a rug.
- Prepare well-known songs for miming along.

STEP BY STEP

1. Introduce the stage like on TV: "And now, put your hands together for…".
2. The first volunteer steps up and chooses an instrument.
3. The music starts: they sing, play or pretend to play.
4. The group applauds, shouts "More!" and asks for an encore.
5. Anyone who doesn't want to get up can perform from their chair with the microphone.

ADAPTATIONS

- Wheelchair users: the stage comes to the person, not the other way round.
- Cognitive impairment: songs from their youth; memories come back with the music.
- Shyness: take the stage in pairs or a small group.

If it doesn't take off

If nobody volunteers, go first and do it very badly: the group laughs and someone will want to do better.

The key

The applause is for everyone who takes the stage, however they do it.

ACTIVITY 12 · TO SAY GOODBYE

The goodbye circle

6 to 30 people | 10 min | No materials

What it's for: Calm down after the laughter and leave with a good memory.

PREPARATION

- Turn the music down or off.
- Arrange the chairs in a circle again.
- Think of a short closing sentence.

STEP BY STEP

1. Hold hands or place a hand on your neighbour's shoulder.
2. Breathe together three times, slowly: in through the nose and out with a sigh.
3. Each person says one word about how they feel: "happy", "tired", "relaxed".
4. A last hand squeeze that goes all the way round the circle.
5. Say goodbye to each person by name.

ADAPTATIONS

- Wheelchair users: everything seated, like everyone else.
- Cognitive impairment: instead of a word, a face or a gesture.
- Hearing loss: repeat each person's word out loud.

If it doesn't take off

If someone can't find a word, offer two to choose from: "Happy or calm?".

The key

End calmly. A good goodbye makes the next session start with enthusiasm.



Joy



Surprise



Pretend anger



Sleepy



Fright



Pride

A	E
I	O
U	Ha!

Materials · *Imaginary objects*

WE'RE PASSING… *A very hot potato*	WE'RE PASSING… *An ice cube*	WE'RE PASSING… *A feather*
WE'RE PASSING… *Something very sticky*	WE'RE PASSING… *A sleeping baby*	WE'RE PASSING… *A cup of hot soup*
WE'RE PASSING… *A balloon about to pop*	WE'RE PASSING… *A fish that gets away*	WE'RE PASSING… *A freshly baked loaf*
WE'RE PASSING… *A very heavy stone*	WE'RE PASSING… *A kitten*	WE'RE PASSING… *A bunch of flowers*

Materials · *Songs and ideas*

Songs almost everyone knows. Ask the group and the staff which ones they like: their own music is always the best choice.

SING-ALONG CLASSICS

- Happy Birthday
- You Are My Sunshine
- Que Sera, Sera
- Moon River
- Over the Rainbow
- Singin' in the Rain
- Yellow Submarine
- Sweet Caroline

TRADITIONAL SONGS

- Daisy Bell
- It's a Long Way to Tipperary
- Pack Up Your Troubles
- My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean
- She'll Be Coming Round the Mountain
- Oh! Susanna
- Molly Malone
- Auld Lang Syne

IDEAS FOR THE SCARF THAT CAN BE ANYTHING

Hat
Moustache
Superhero cape
Fan
Scarf
Bib
Waving goodbye at the station
Wedding veil
Flag
Picnic blanket
Baby's nappy
Pirate eye patch
Tie
Turban
Magic carpet

Materials · *Session log*

One per session

Noting what worked helps plan the next session and explain it to the team and to families.

Date	Place	Participants	Led by

Activity	How it went	Who joined in	For next time

Staff notes

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Would you rather *someone came in* to lead it?

We run Laughter Therapy workshops in care homes, day centres and community groups. We adapt each session to the group: standing or seated, everyone at their own pace. Across Catalonia, the Costa Brava, Madrid and Bilbao.

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