

# Behavioral Health Room Designs with Patient and Staff Safety in Mind

Creating Safe and Healing Environments in Behavioral Health Settings



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# Behavioral Health Room Designs with Patient and Staff Safety in Mind

## 1. Introduction

### - The Importance of Design in Behavioral Health Settings

- The design of behavioral health settings plays a critical role in the treatment and recovery of patients. A well-designed environment can significantly reduce stress, anxiety, and agitation, which are common in individuals with behavioral health issues. The physical environment impacts the well-being of patients and staff, affecting recovery rates and job satisfaction. Thoughtful design can create spaces that are not only safe but also therapeutic, promoting a sense of calm and well-being. This is especially important in behavioral health settings where patients are particularly sensitive to their surroundings. By prioritizing design, facilities can improve patient outcomes, enhance the effectiveness of treatment, and ensure the safety of both patients and staff.

### - Purpose of the eBook

- The purpose of this eBook is to provide comprehensive guidelines and best practices for designing behavioral health settings that prioritize patient and staff safety. It aims to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, offering insights that are both evidence-based and actionable. This eBook is intended for a wide range of stakeholders, including architects, designers, healthcare professionals, and administrators. By presenting a holistic approach to design, this eBook seeks to equip readers with the tools and knowledge needed to create environments that support the complex needs of behavioral health patients while ensuring safety and promoting healing.

### - How to Use This eBook

- This eBook is structured to be a practical resource that can be easily navigated by different stakeholders involved in the design and management of behavioral health facilities. Each chapter is dedicated to a specific aspect of design, starting with fundamental principles and progressing to detailed case studies and future trends. Readers are encouraged to use the table of contents to locate topics of interest and refer to the appendices for checklists, glossaries, and additional resources. The goal is to provide a user-friendly guide that can be referenced at various stages of the design process, from initial planning to final implementation.

## 2. Understanding Behavioral Health Needs

### - Types of Behavioral Health Issues

- Behavioral health encompasses a broad range of mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and PTSD. Each of these conditions presents unique challenges that must be considered in the design of treatment environments. For instance, patients with anxiety may benefit from spaces that minimize sensory overload, while those with depression may require environments that maximize natural light and provide stimulating activities. Understanding the specific needs associated with different behavioral health issues is crucial for creating spaces that support effective treatment and enhance patient comfort.

### - Specific Needs of Behavioral Health Patients

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- Behavioral health patients have distinct needs that must be addressed through thoughtful design. These needs include privacy, security, and a calming environment. Privacy is essential for fostering a sense of dignity and respect, which is crucial for patient well-being. Security measures must be in place to prevent self-harm and protect patients and staff from aggressive behavior. Additionally, the environment should be designed to reduce stress and promote relaxation, with elements such as natural light, calming colors, and quiet spaces. By understanding and addressing these specific needs, designers can create environments that facilitate healing and recovery.

- The Role of Environment in Behavioral Health

- The physical environment plays a pivotal role in behavioral health, influencing patient outcomes and staff well-being. Research has shown that the design of healthcare environments can impact everything from patient stress levels to recovery times. For example, natural light has been linked to improved mood and sleep patterns, while access to nature and outdoor spaces can reduce anxiety and promote a sense of calm. In addition, well-designed environments can enhance staff satisfaction and retention by providing a safe and pleasant workplace. The environment is a key component of the therapeutic process, and careful consideration of design elements can significantly enhance the effectiveness of behavioral health treatment.

### 3. Principles of Safe Design

- Safety First: Ensuring Patient and Staff Safety

- In behavioral health settings, safety is the foremost priority. This encompasses both physical safety and emotional well-being. Design features must be implemented to prevent self-harm, manage aggression, and ensure that staff can perform their duties safely. This involves the use of ligature-resistant fixtures, secure furniture, and strategic room layouts that minimize risk. Additionally, safety protocols should be embedded into the design process from the outset, involving input from clinical staff and safety experts. A comprehensive approach to safety not only protects patients and staff but also fosters a therapeutic environment where patients can feel secure and supported.

- Evidence-Based Design Principles

- Evidence-based design (EBD) involves making design decisions based on the best available research and data. In the context of behavioral health, EBD principles are used to create environments that promote healing, reduce stress, and improve patient outcomes. Key principles include the use of natural light, access to nature, and the incorporation of calming colors and materials. EBD also emphasizes the importance of flexible spaces that can be adapted to different needs and the use of technology to enhance safety and treatment. By grounding design decisions in research, EBD ensures that environments are not only aesthetically pleasing but also functionally effective in supporting health and well-being.

- Balancing Safety and Comfort

- One of the main challenges in designing behavioral health environments is balancing the need for safety with the need for comfort. While safety features such as ligature-resistant fixtures and secure furniture are essential, it is also important to create spaces that feel welcoming and therapeutic. This can be achieved by using soft materials, warm colors, and

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home-like furnishings that reduce the institutional feel. Additionally, spaces should be designed to provide opportunities for social interaction, privacy, and relaxation. By carefully considering both safety and comfort, designers can create environments that support healing and well-being.

### 4. Room Design Elements

#### - Layout and Space Utilization

- Effective room layout and space utilization are critical in behavioral health settings. The layout should facilitate easy movement and clear sightlines for staff monitoring. It should also provide areas for both privacy and social interaction, catering to the varied needs of patients. Spaces should be flexible to accommodate different activities and treatment modalities. Additionally, the layout should ensure that staff have easy access to all areas and that emergency egress routes are clear and unobstructed. By carefully planning the layout and use of space, designers can create environments that are both functional and conducive to healing.

#### - Furniture and Fixtures

- Furniture and fixtures in behavioral health settings must be chosen with care to ensure safety, durability, and comfort. All items should be ligature-resistant to prevent self-harm, and materials should be robust enough to withstand heavy use and potential damage. At the same time, furniture should be comfortable and aesthetically pleasing to create a welcoming environment. Soft furnishings, rounded edges, and tamper-proof fixtures are essential to reduce the risk of injury. By selecting appropriate furniture and fixtures, designers can enhance both the safety and comfort of the environment.

#### - Lighting and Color Schemes

- Lighting and color schemes play a significant role in the therapeutic environment. Natural light is highly beneficial for mental health, improving mood and sleep patterns. Where natural light is not available, artificial lighting should be designed to mimic natural light as closely as possible. Color schemes should be calming and non-stimulating, with soft, neutral tones preferred. Bright colors can be used strategically to create focal points and add interest without overwhelming the senses. By carefully considering lighting and color, designers can create environments that promote relaxation and well-being.

#### - Acoustic Considerations

- Noise control is a crucial aspect of design in behavioral health settings. Excessive noise can increase stress and agitation, while a quiet environment can promote calm and relaxation. Acoustic treatments such as soundproofing, soft furnishings, and white noise machines can help to control noise levels. The layout should also consider the placement of noisy areas away from patient rooms and quiet spaces. By addressing acoustic considerations, designers can create environments that support mental health and well-being.

### 5. Safety Considerations

#### - Preventing Self-Harm and Suicide

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- Preventing self-harm and suicide is a primary concern in behavioral health settings. Design features such as ligature-resistant fixtures, breakaway shower rods, and tamper-proof hardware are essential. Rooms should be free of sharp edges, and furniture should be secured to prevent it from being used as a weapon. Additionally, regular safety audits and staff training are important to identify and mitigate potential risks. By prioritizing these safety features, designers can create environments that protect patients from self-harm and support their recovery.

- Managing Aggression and Violence

- Managing aggression and violence is another key concern. Design strategies include creating de-escalation areas where patients can calm down, ensuring clear sightlines for staff monitoring, and providing safe escape routes for staff. Furniture should be durable and secured to the floor, and rooms should be designed to minimize the risk of patients injuring themselves or others. By incorporating these strategies, designers can create environments that reduce the potential for aggression and violence.

- Infection Control and Hygiene

- Infection control and hygiene are critical in healthcare settings. Materials should be easy to clean and resistant to mold and bacteria. Handwashing stations and sanitizing equipment should be readily accessible. Design features that facilitate regular cleaning and maintenance are also important. By prioritizing infection control, designers can create environments that protect the health of patients and staff.

- Anti-Ligature TV Enclosures

- Anti-ligature TV enclosures are designed to prevent patients from using the TV as a point of ligature. These enclosures are secure and tamper-proof, while still allowing patients to enjoy the therapeutic benefits of television. They are an important safety feature in behavioral health settings, ensuring that patients can engage with media in a safe manner.

- Ligature-Resistant Clocks

- Ligature-resistant clocks are designed to prevent self-harm while still providing patients with a sense of time and routine. These clocks are typically mounted securely and designed without any potential ligature points.

They are an important addition to behavioral health environments, contributing to patient safety and the overall therapeutic atmosphere.

- Suicide-Safe Noticeboards

- Suicide-safe noticeboards are designed to provide important information without posing a risk to patients. These boards are securely mounted and made from materials that cannot be used for self-harm. They are an essential feature in behavioral health settings, ensuring that information is accessible and safety is maintained.

### 6. Special Features

- Safe Rooms and Seclusion Areas

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- Safe rooms and seclusion areas are essential for managing patients in extreme distress. These rooms should be designed to be free of any objects that could be used for self-harm, with padded walls and floors to prevent injury. They should also be equipped with monitoring systems to ensure patient safety. The design should balance safety with comfort, providing a calm environment where patients can regain control.

- Sensory Rooms and Calming Spaces

- Sensory rooms and calming spaces are designed to help patients manage stress and sensory overload. These rooms are equipped with calming lights, soft textures, and sensory objects such as weighted blankets and tactile walls. They provide a safe space for patients to relax and self-soothe, which is particularly important for individuals with conditions such as autism and PTSD.

- Technology Integration for Safety

- Technology can play a significant role in enhancing safety in behavioral health settings. This includes monitoring systems that allow staff to keep a close eye on patients, telehealth capabilities for remote consultations, and smart room features that can alert staff to potential safety issues. Integrating technology into the design can improve patient care and safety, providing additional tools for managing complex needs.

### 7. Case Studies

- Successful Behavioral Health Room Designs

- Case studies of successful behavioral health room designs provide valuable insights into best practices and effective strategies. These examples showcase real-world applications of design principles, highlighting the positive outcomes achieved. By examining these case studies, readers can gain a deeper understanding of how thoughtful design can enhance patient and staff well-being.

- Lessons Learned from Real-World Applications

- Real-world applications often come with challenges and learning opportunities. By sharing lessons learned from these experiences, designers can identify common pitfalls and develop strategies to overcome them. This section will provide practical advice and insights that can be applied to future projects, helping to ensure that designs are both effective and sustainable.

### 8. Collaboration in Design

- Working with Healthcare Professionals

- Collaboration between designers and healthcare professionals is crucial for creating effective behavioral health environments. Healthcare professionals bring valuable insights into patient needs and safety requirements, while designers provide expertise in creating functional and aesthetically pleasing spaces. By working together, these professionals can develop designs that meet the complex needs of behavioral health patients and staff.



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- Incorporating Feedback from Patients and Staff
  - Feedback from patients and staff is essential for creating environments that truly meet their needs. Patients can provide insights into what makes them feel safe and comfortable, while staff can offer practical advice on functionality and safety. By incorporating this feedback into the design process, designers can create spaces that are more effective and user-friendly.
- Role of Architects and Designers
  - Architects and designers play a critical role in creating behavioral health environments. Their expertise in space planning, material selection, and aesthetic design is essential for developing functional and therapeutic spaces. By working closely with healthcare professionals and incorporating evidence-based design principles, architects and designers can create environments that support healing and well-being.

### 9. Future Trends in Behavioral Health Design

- Innovations in Safety Features
  - The field of behavioral health design is constantly evolving, with new safety features and technologies emerging regularly. Innovations such as smart monitoring systems, advanced materials, and new design approaches are helping to create safer and more effective environments. This section will explore the latest trends and innovations, providing insights into the future of behavioral health design.
- Sustainable and Eco-Friendly Designs
  - Sustainability is becoming increasingly important in healthcare design. Eco-friendly materials, energy-efficient systems, and sustainable construction methods can help to reduce the environmental impact of healthcare facilities. Additionally, sustainable design can improve the health and well-being of patients and staff by creating cleaner, healthier environments.
- Integrating Telehealth and Remote Monitoring
  - Telehealth and remote monitoring are transforming the delivery of behavioral health care. These technologies allow for remote consultations, continuous monitoring, and real-time data collection, improving patient care and safety. Integrating these technologies into the design of behavioral health environments can enhance treatment and provide additional support for patients and staff.

### 10. Conclusion

- Summary of Key Points
  - This eBook has covered a wide range of topics related to the design of behavioral health environments, from understanding patient needs to incorporating innovative safety features. By summarizing the key points, this section will reinforce the importance of thoughtful design in creating safe and effective spaces.

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- Final Thoughts on Behavioral Health Room Design
  - In conclusion, the design of behavioral health environments plays a crucial role in patient and staff well-being. By prioritizing safety, comfort, and functionality, designers can create spaces that support healing and recovery. This eBook has provided comprehensive guidelines and best practices to help achieve these goals.
- Resources for Further Reading
  - For readers interested in exploring these topics further, this section will provide a list of additional resources, including books, articles, and websites. These resources will offer valuable information and support for those involved in the design and management of behavioral health environments.

### 11. Appendices

- Appendix A: Design Checklists
  - Practical checklists for different aspects of room design, providing detailed guidance on key elements to consider. These checklists will serve as a valuable tool for ensuring that all important factors are addressed in the design process.

#### ### Practical Checklists for Behavioral Health Room Design

##### 1. Room Layout and Space Utilization

- Clear Sightlines
  - Ensure staff have unobstructed views of the entire room.
  - Avoid blind spots and areas that are difficult to monitor.
- Flexible Space
  - Design spaces that can be adapted for different activities and treatment modalities.
  - Include movable furniture to reconfigure the room as needed.
- Adequate Circulation
  - Ensure enough space for patients and staff to move around comfortably.
  - Provide clear and wide pathways free of obstructions.
- Accessibility
  - Ensure all areas are accessible to patients with mobility issues.
  - Include features such as ramps, wide doorways, and grab bars.

##### 2. Furniture and Fixtures

- Safety and Durability
  - Select ligature-resistant furniture and fixtures to prevent self-harm.
  - Use robust materials that can withstand heavy use and potential damage.
- Comfort
  - Choose comfortable and ergonomically designed furniture.
  - Include soft furnishings to create a homelike atmosphere.
- Secure Installations
  - Ensure all furniture is securely fixed to prevent it from being used as a weapon.
  - Use tamper-proof hardware and fixtures.
- Rounded Edges
  - Opt for furniture with rounded edges to minimize injury risk.

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- Avoid sharp corners and protruding elements.

### 3. Lighting and Color Schemes

- Natural Light
  - Maximize natural light through large windows and skylights.
  - Ensure windows have secure coverings for privacy and safety.
- Artificial Lighting
  - Use lighting that mimics natural light as closely as possible.
  - Include dimmable lights to adjust the ambiance as needed.
- Calming Colors
  - Select soft, neutral colors for walls and furnishings.
  - Use bright colors strategically for accent areas without overwhelming the senses.
- Light Fixtures
  - Install shatterproof and secure light fixtures.
  - Ensure light switches and controls are tamper-proof.

### 4. Acoustic Considerations

- Soundproofing
  - Use soundproof materials for walls, floors, and ceilings to reduce noise.
  - Install acoustic panels and soft furnishings to absorb sound.
- White Noise
  - Consider white noise machines to mask disruptive sounds.
  - Ensure quiet zones for relaxation and therapy.
- Layout
  - Position noisy areas away from patient rooms and quiet spaces.
  - Use doors and partitions to block sound transmission.

### 5. Safety Features

- Ligature-Resistant Fixtures
  - Install ligature-resistant door handles, faucets, and bathroom fixtures.
  - Use breakaway shower rods and tamper-proof hardware.
- Secure Windows
  - Use shatterproof glass and secure window coverings.
  - Ensure windows are lockable and cannot be opened fully.
- Emergency Egress
  - Ensure clear and accessible emergency exits.
  - Include escape routes and safe areas for staff.
- Monitoring Systems
  - Install surveillance cameras in common areas while respecting patient privacy.
  - Use alarm systems and monitoring tools for real-time safety.

### 6. Specialized Features

- Anti-Ligature TV Enclosures
  - Use tamper-proof TV enclosures that prevent ligature points.
  - Ensure TVs are securely mounted and inaccessible for tampering.
- Ligature-Resistant Clocks
  - Install secure and tamper-proof clocks.

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- Ensure clocks are easily visible and integrated into the room design.
- Suicide-Safe Noticeboards
  - Use securely mounted noticeboards made from safe materials.
  - Ensure boards are easily accessible for patient information without posing risks.

### 7. Hygiene and Infection Control

- Easy-to-Clean Surfaces
  - Use materials that are resistant to mold and bacteria.
  - Ensure surfaces are non-porous and easy to sanitize.
- Handwashing Stations
  - Install accessible handwashing stations throughout the facility.
  - Ensure stations are equipped with soap and hand sanitizers.
- Air Quality
  - Use HVAC systems with proper filtration to maintain air quality.
  - Ensure regular maintenance and cleaning of ventilation systems.

### 8. Sensory and Calming Features

- Sensory Rooms
  - Equip rooms with calming lights, soft textures, and sensory objects.
  - Provide weighted blankets, tactile walls, and other sensory tools.
- Calming Spaces
  - Create quiet zones with comfortable seating and soft furnishings.
  - Use natural elements like plants and water features to enhance relaxation.

### 9. Technology Integration

- Monitoring Systems
  - Implement technology for real-time patient monitoring and safety alerts.
  - Ensure systems are discreet and do not intrude on patient privacy.
- Telehealth Capabilities
  - Integrate telehealth equipment for remote consultations and therapy.
  - Ensure privacy and security of telehealth sessions.

### 10. Collaboration and Feedback

- Stakeholder Involvement
  - Involve healthcare professionals, patients, and staff in the design process.
  - Gather feedback regularly to make necessary adjustments.
- Regular Audits
  - Conduct regular safety and design audits to identify areas for improvement.
  - Ensure ongoing training for staff on safety and design features.

By following these comprehensive checklists, designers can ensure that all critical aspects of behavioral health room design are addressed, creating safe, functional, and therapeutic environments for patients and staff.

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### - Appendix B: Resource List

1. The Joint Commission (TJC)
  - Website: [[www.jointcommission.org](http://www.jointcommission.org)](<https://www.jointcommission.org>)
  - Provides accreditation and sets standards for healthcare organizations, including behavioral health facilities.
2. National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)
  - Website: [[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)](<https://www.nimh.nih.gov>)
  - Offers research and resources on mental health disorders and treatment.
3. Behavioral Health Design Guide by Facility Guidelines Institute (FGI)
  - Website: [[www.fgiguidelines.org](http://www.fgiguidelines.org)](<https://www.fgiguidelines.org>)
  - Provides guidelines for the design and construction of healthcare facilities, including behavioral health environments.
4. National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
  - Website: [[www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)](<https://www.nami.org>)
  - Offers support, education, and advocacy for individuals affected by mental illness.
5. American Society of Interior Designers (ASID)
  - Website: [[www.asid.org](http://www.asid.org)](<https://www.asid.org>)
  - Provides resources and guidelines for designing health and wellness environments.
6. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) - Mental Health
  - Website: [[www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth](http://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth)](<https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth>)
  - Offers information and resources on mental health and public health policies.
7. American Institute of Architects (AIA) - Academy of Architecture for Health
  - Website: [[www.aia.org/aah](http://www.aia.org/aah)](<https://www.aia.org/aah>)
  - Provides resources and best practices for healthcare architecture, including behavioral health facilities.
8. Mental Health America (MHA)
  - Website: [[www.mhanational.org](http://www.mhanational.org)](<https://www.mhanational.org>)
  - Offers resources and advocacy for mental health and wellness.
9. International Association for Healthcare Security and Safety (IAHSS)
  - Website: [[www.iahss.org](http://www.iahss.org)](<https://www.iahss.org>)
  - Provides resources and guidelines for security and safety in healthcare settings.
10. Health Care Without Harm (HCWH)
  - Website: [[www.noharm.org](http://www.noharm.org)](<https://www.noharm.org>)
  - Focuses on sustainable and eco-friendly healthcare design and practices.
11. American Psychiatric Association (APA)
  - Website: [[www.psychiatry.org](http://www.psychiatry.org)](<https://www.psychiatry.org>)

## Behavioral Health Room Designs with Patient and Staff Safety in Mind

- Offers research, resources, and guidelines on psychiatric practices and environments.

### 12. National Council for Behavioral Health

- Website: [[www.thenationalcouncil.org](http://www.thenationalcouncil.org)](<https://www.thenationalcouncil.org>)
- Provides resources, advocacy, and training for behavioral health professionals.

### 13. Design in Mental Health Network (DIMHN)

- Website: [[www.dimhn.org](http://www.dimhn.org)](<https://www.dimhn.org>)
- Offers resources and networking opportunities for professionals involved in the design of mental health environments.

### 14. National Center for PTSD - U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

- Website: [[www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)](<https://www.ptsd.va.gov>)
- Provides resources and research on PTSD and its treatment, including environmental considerations.

### 15. Facility Guidelines Institute (FGI)

- Website: [[www.fgiguideines.org](http://www.fgiguideines.org)](<https://www.fgiguideines.org>)
- Offers guidelines for the design and construction of various healthcare facilities, including behavioral health settings.

These resources provide comprehensive information, guidelines, and best practices for designing safe and therapeutic behavioral health environments

### About the Author

- Graham Gallagher has had the pleasure in working in this area for the past 17 years, providing assistance and solutions on how to make behavioral units more patient friendly as well as staff safe.