

**SST Initial Individual Goal Setting
Session Manual for Previously
Trained VA Providers**

April 2024 Version

***(Do not use this version of the manual if you
are currently a training participant in the VA
SST Training Program.)***

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OVERVIEW OF THE MANUAL

This manual is divided into 3 sections:

Section 1- Important Information for SST Providers Regarding the Initial Individual Goal Setting Sessions: The first section of the manual reviews important information about the initial individual goal setting session including a list of all the documents and materials group facilitator(s) should have with them during the initial individual goal setting session. There are also resources available to help group facilitator(s) in conducting the initial individual goal setting session.

Section 2-Initial Individual Goal Setting Session Guidance and Instructions: The second section includes instructions and guidance on conducting an initial individual goal setting session. This includes an overview of the purpose of the initial individual goal setting session and provides more detailed instructions and guidance for each part of the initial individual goal setting session. Please review this section **before** conducting the initial goal setting session so you are familiar with the material.

Section 3-Initial Individual Goal Setting Session: The last section is the Initial Individual Goal Setting Session itself, which the provider will bring with them to conduct the initial session with the group member. The Goal Setting Brief Background Interview and the Goal Setting Sheet are found in the addendum of this manual, as well as in the body of section 3. It may be helpful to have one hardcopy of this entire manual printed to refer to when conducting the initial session. It is also recommended to print multiple copies of the Brief Background Interview and the Goal Setting Sheet to use during each group member's initial session.

SECTION 1: IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR SST PROVIDERS REGARDING THE INITIAL INDIVIDUAL GOAL SETTING SESSIONS

General Guidance

- There are previous versions of The SST Initial Individual Goal Setting Session Manual as the SST Training Program continues to incorporate ideas to make this current manual even better. As such, please ensure you are using the most recent version. One way to verify is to reach out to the SST Training Program Manager, Elizabeth Gilbert, Ph.D., elizabeth.gilbert@va.gov.
- All group members entering your SST group as standard practice need to complete an Initial Individual Goal Setting Session with you or your co-facilitator (if you have a co-facilitator).
- Review in detail this Manual for the Initial Individual Goal Setting Session before meeting with group members. These sessions are generally conducted 1 on 1, although sometimes both SST facilitators are present for the meeting. Please do not conduct the individual goal setting sessions in a group format. All individual sessions should ideally be completed in person (i.e., NOT via phone or VVC).
- It is often helpful to integrate Measurement Based Care (MBC) in your SST groups. That process would start at the initial session. You may opt to use a measure you find relevant to your SST Group (e.g., there may be a relevant measure as part of MBC or program evaluation initiatives at your facility such as a measure that is part of the Northeast Program Evaluation Center (NEPEC) program evaluation measures for PRRC). Some options that are included in the Bellack et al. (2004) book include: *Social Skills Goal Self-Rating Scale* (p. 316) and *Social Skills Effectiveness Self-Rating Scale* (p. 321). These scales may then be administered periodically in your SST groups to track progress and provide feedback to group members. You may also use the *Goal Setting Sheet* (which is part of this manual) to track progress on goals and steps have been achieved (e.g., checking off steps that have been accomplished and regularly reviewing the *Goal Setting Sheet* in individual sessions or group). You may refer to the section of the Bellack et al. (2004) SST book entitled “Ongoing Assessment of Progress Made in Group” (pages 110-112) regarding how to use feedback from group members regarding progress made to inform the intervention.

Materials to Bring

- Prepare to take the following items to the Individual Goal Setting Session:
 - Copy of the Initial Individual Goal Setting Guide
 - Clipboard and pen for you to record responses
 - Copy of the “Brief Background Interview”
 - 2 copies of the “Goal Setting Sheet.” One for you to record responses and one for the group member (in case they want to follow along with this document when you are discussing it).
 - Note that there may be additional materials to bring (or send) to group members when conducting an individual session for an SST-Telehealth group. You may refer to the TMS SST-TH recorded webinar as a reference: [Social Skills Training for Serious Mental Illness Telehealth to Home \(SST-TH\) \(Enduring\) \(VA TMS Item #131002036\)](#) 3.25 CE and SST-TH updated slide deck that accompanies this recorded webinar: [Social Skills Training Telehealth-to-Home \(Updated Deck\)](#)
 - Measurement Based Care related materials, if you choose into integrate formal MBC into your group.

Resources for Conducting the Initial Individual Goal Setting Session

- TMS courses:
 - *Social Skills Training (SST) for Serious Mental Illness** (VA TMS Item #29604). You will find this web course in TMS under your **Learning History** (this is the web course that was completed when providers were in the SST Training Program). Enter the course title to search for this web course. When you click on the title of the web course, you can select “Review content” to then enter into the course and review the section on the Initial Individual Goal Setting Session.
 - [Sociocultural and Linguistic Factors in Implementing Social Skills Training Groups \(Enduring\)](#) (VA TMS Item #131003157) 1.5 CE
- SST Website: [VISN 5 MIRECC - VA Social Skills Training for Serious Mental Illness \(SST\) Training Program](#)
 - Advanced tutorials related to the individual session and other relevant materials
 - Social Skills Training (SST) Quick Guide
 - SST Information for Veterans (SST Veteran Facing Brochure, which can be found in the SST Handbook as well
- After reviewing relevant materials, you can also reach out to the SST Training Program Manager Elizabeth Gilbert, PH.D., if you have remaining questions elizabeth.gilbert@va.gov.

SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING

Initial Individual Goal Setting Session Guide:
Previously Trained VA Providers

Section 2:

SST Initial Individual Goal Setting Session: Instructions and Guidance for Previously Trained VA Providers

This individual session packet is intended as a resource for you as a provider of Social Skill Training for Serious Mental Illness (SST). This current section includes instructions and guidance when conducting the SST Initial Individual Goal Setting Session. It is important to read this section in advance of the initial sessions with group members so you are prepared for the session and can effectively conduct the session.

General Notes about the Initial Individual Goal Setting Session Guide

The session guide (i.e., which starts with section 3) that providers will review with group members includes information to share with group members in the individual goal setting session. You can paraphrase the information provided or, in some cases, use the language word for word. If you do decide to use the language in the guide, which may be the case if there has been a gap in time since you last conducted the initial session, strive to make the session conversational and collaborative (e.g., pausing and asking if the group member has questions) rather than reading to the group member. It is to your advantage to thoroughly review this Initial Individual Goal Setting Session Guide more than once previous to conducting an individual goal setting session. **Knowing the interview format and content will help you efficiently conduct the interview with fidelity to the Guide and within a single 50-minute session.**



Guide Key:

- [Words in brackets] are instructions and descriptive information to the provider conducting the session (i.e., these sections are not read to the group member).
- *Italicized words* are suggested scripts to share with the group member.
- **Bolded words** are important to emphasize to the group member during the initial individual goal setting session.



Tips for an effective Initial Individual Goal Setting Session

- Be thoughtful about the use of time when using this interview guide. Some questions, for example, when asking about the group member's background as part of the "*Brief Background Interview*," could possibly open up a long discussion. Be respectful and make it clear to the group member that the initial interview is just the beginning in terms of getting to know the group member. Be direct and focused when sharing information about the group and also when asking about the group member in order to make the best use of time.
- Review the group member's chart in advance of the session so you are aware of their background (group members appreciate this preparation and it may enhance alliance). Reviewing the chart may also help the provider to be more efficient when conducting the "*Brief Background Interview*."
- Read Section 2 thoroughly before conducting the initial session.
- Throughout the session, discuss how the group member's identity and sociocultural and linguistic factors will be addressed in the SST group. Listen for comments related to aspects of a group member's identity so you can refer back to these comments and follow-up (especially during the "*Brief Background Interview*").
- Be prepared to provide additional resources for the group member's support system if they want to include their support system in their participation in the SST Group (e.g., Veteran Facing Brochure might be helpful to share with family and friends). Remember that some materials are translated into Spanish so check with the group member about language preferences.
- Do your best to keep the group member focused on the content of this session. If a group member is off topic, for example, you can gently acknowledge what they are saying and remind them of the goal of this session. Using visual aids may also help to keep group members on track (for example, you can point to the agenda).
- Work as a "team" with the group member and be collaborative throughout the session.
- Bring the SST positivity to the session and take every opportunity to encourage and reinforce the group member for participating in the group!

Considerations about Inpatient and Other Short-Term Treatment Settings

SST is typically conducted on an outpatient basis, with groups conducted at least once a week, and lasting 3 months or longer. This Initial Individual Goal Setting Session Guide was created primarily for use in goal setting with group members entering outpatient SST groups. However, SST can also be productively employed in inpatient and other shorter-term treatment settings. In shorter-term treatment settings, in order to achieve results, more frequent group meeting times are often scheduled. This guide can be used for conducting Initial Individual Goal Setting Sessions with group members in short-term treatment settings like inpatient units.

When conducting the Initial Individual Goal Setting Session with group members in short-term treatment settings, there are important considerations. One main consideration is that it is important to do your best to collaboratively set a goal with the group member that is achievable within their current environment and the group time frame. For example, when a goal for an inpatient SST group is set, the goal should be achievable while the group member is on the inpatient unit participating in the SST group before their expected discharge date. A group member's "goal for the SST group" may be modest given the short timeframe and limited social environment but setting and moving forward on these goals can nonetheless be an empowering experience and a step forward in the journey of recovery. Examples of these types of goals are included in a section titled "Examples of "end of group" goals for SST groups conducted in short-term treatment settings like inpatient units."

Another consideration is that group members on inpatient units or in other short term or crisis treatment settings are likely to be experiencing more symptoms and be in crisis. This can be challenging for the goal setting process. Do your best to collaboratively problem solve if you can with the group member to define a goal for the SST group that would genuinely help the group member move forward in a valued and healthy direction during their time in the SST group. However, also recognize that some group members may not wish to or be able to engage fully in the process of goal setting but may nonetheless benefit from participation in the SST group. In Initial Individual Goal Setting Sessions, goal setting is certainly encouraged but is in no way required. Respect the group members' preferences and do your best to be flexible in terms of also being willing to follow up at a later time regarding goal setting if the group member is not ready to set a goal in the session.

Detailed Instructions and Guidance for Specific Sections of the Initial Individual Goal Setting Session

Below are instructions and guidance to keep in mind for the sections of the initial individual goal setting session. Review these instructions and guidance before conducting the initial session.

Introductions and Purpose of the Session

Complete brief introductions and inform the group member about who will be the SST group facilitators. Provide the group member with an overview of the purpose of the initial individual session and share the schedule for the planned SST groups.

Setting the Agenda

Take time to provide the group member to set the agenda. You may view the printed-out agenda together and read each item that will be addressed in the session. It helps to pause and address any questions the group member may have before commencing to the next section.

SST Overview and Group Format

Ensure that you review the main points of the SST Group format so the group member knows what to expect (i.e., the summary at the end of the SST Group Format Section, which lists 5 main aspects of the SST Group). It may also be beneficial to emphasize that SST is not a process group, but a very structured group focused on practice in session.

Group Guidelines

In reviewing the guidelines, you may check in with the group member to inquire whether they have questions and anything else to add. The SST Quick Guide includes sample recovery-oriented scripts to use when introducing the group guidelines (on the bottom right of the front page).

Introduction to the Recovery Framework

In addition to sharing the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) definition of recovery, check-in with the group member about what they already know about recovery and how they define recovery. Ensure that you discuss the connection between recovery and goal setting; this will help you segue to the next part of the initial session, which is focused on goal setting.

Goal Setting Brief Background Interview

In this next part of the initial session, you are starting to help the group member to develop an SST Goal. To inform the goal, you will now take time to get to know the group member during the “*Brief Background Interview*.” The “*Brief Background Interview*” questions are included in the session guide itself and also at the end of this document as an addendum to make it easier to print out separately.

When introducing the interview with the group member, let them know that this is in fact intended to be a brief interview. Despite the open-ended nature of some of the questions, the focus of the interview is not a detailed exploration into the group members’ background. The purpose is to assess some essential details about the group members’ life. Focus the Interview accordingly so it is not overly lengthy but also express your genuine interest in getting to know the group member better over time.

The “*Brief Background Interview*” includes questions about several different areas of the group member’s life. If you do not know the group member well, you should ask all the questions in this interview. If you already know the group member well, to save time in the session, you may wish to summarize what you do know about the group member on the form and confirm it with the group member in the session and ask if they have any additional important details to add. You can then also query the group member regarding the areas about which you know less and then record these responses (and sometimes you may be surprised to learn something new about a group member you have worked with for a long time!).

Regarding the questions about sociocultural and linguistic considerations in SST (a few of the questions on the “*Brief Background Interview*”), the *Cultural Identity Wheel* is included in this section to help facilitate this discussion. The *Cultural Identity Wheel* graphic (which is found as an addendum in the current manual) should be reviewed with the group member to help better understand what aspects of their identity, if any, may be relevant to their SST goal and participation in the SST group. The questions in the Brief Background Interview are phrased to help keep the conversation about identity and culture focused on SST. You may also refer back to content that was said earlier in the session and/or information you already know about a group member (e.g., a group member may have mentioned earlier that being a Veteran is important part of their identity. You may mention this detail when asking the questions on the “*Brief Background Interview*” as examples of sociocultural and linguistic considerations/parts of their identity that may be important to think about in

the SST Group and in how they practice skills taught in group). Being familiar with this background information can be helpful in the context of goal setting. Keep in mind that some group members will not feel ready to share this information with you and it will take time to build trust and a relationship before more is shared. In addition, other group members may not yet be able to articulate how their identity is related to group. Please honor and validate the group member's choice about what content they decide to share or not to share. Group members may opt to disclose more at another time. The hope is that you are opening up the discussion about their identity and culture.

As noted in the title, this interview is meant to be relatively brief given that a chart review should be completed prior to meeting with the group member. Following completion of the "*Brief Background Interview*," you can then move onto working with the group member to set goals. You can clarify with the group member that the background information will help guide the goal that the group member develops for the SST group.

Identify Quality of Life Domains

After the "*Brief Background Interview*," you will then help the group member to identify a Quality of Life Domain that is most relevant and important to them right now. After reading all 4 of the Quality of Life Domains with the group member, you can inquire which is the most important to them right now. You may also clarify that the quality of life domain will inform their goal for the group. You can use the *Goal Setting Sheet* to circle the quality of life domain chosen by the group member. Sometimes the group member will identify multiple quality of life domains. There is overlap between the domains but see if there is one that seems like the most important to the group member and the one they want to focus on while in the SST group.

Goal Setting

This section is focused on setting the SMART SST goal for the group. A main goal for this initial individual goal setting session is to guide the group member to define a SMART goal for the SST group and to break this SMART goal down into manageable steps. Remember, the group member SMART goals will help set the SST Group curriculum (i.e., what skills are taught in group) and these are the goals referenced during role play set-up and when developing the outside practice assignments.

You may reference information you learned about the group member from the "*Brief Background Interview*," including information about social, cultural, and linguistic factors, as you work with the group member to set an

SST SMART Goal. It is important to ask the group member if they have heard of SMART goals and define what a SMART Goal is in this section. SMART stands for **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant, **T**ime-Bound.

Goal setting is sometimes challenging for group members (and providers!). It is often beneficial to review the sample goals listed in the Goal Setting section of this guide when you arrive at that section of the session to inspire a goal for the group. Use the *Goal Setting Sheet* (where the Quality of Life Domain was identified) to document the goal identified by the group member and the steps they will take to achieve this goal. The group facilitator conducting the initial session may write down the responses on the *Goal Setting Sheet* as the group member shares their ideas.

The group member does not need to set a long-term recovery goal for the group, but some providers find it's helpful to work with the group member to define their long-term goal and then to work back to a goal for the SST group. In developing the steps to achieve the short-term goal, some of these steps may be accomplished outside of the SST Group (e.g., "talk to my recovery coaching about coping skills to manage my voices" or "find a list of community activities during the Veteran resource fairs"). One step that is often included is to attend the SST Group. Develop as many steps as will be helpful to the group member in working towards their goal and there is no specific number of steps that a group member must identify.

Some group members will not be ready to set a goal and/or be able to discuss the steps to achieve the goal at the initial individual goal setting session. For these group members, it is important to schedule a time to follow-up with the group member to complete the goal setting process. In helping the group members set initial goals for the SST group, be sure to do your best to have the group member set a goal that is truly important to the group member rather than something that only their family or the VA providers working with them would want. Goals may also be updated and changed while the group member is in the SST Group.



Other Goal Setting Tips and Considerations

- The group facilitator should retain the original *Goal Setting Sheet*; the group member should be given a copy of the *Goal Setting Sheet*.
- Ensure that the goal has a social component and is relevant to the SST

Group (e.g., the short-term goal of losing 5 lbs may be adjusted to “I will find a person to walk with me once per week” so that it is a goal that is relevant to SST). It is okay to modify the steps based on changes in the strategy to achieve the goal during the course of the SST Group.

- It is ideal for the group member to work on a single goal the entire SST group. However, it is okay if the group member wants to change their goal. An additional Goal Setting Sheet needs to be completed for SST in these cases.

Section 3:

SST INITIAL INDIVIDUAL GOAL SETTING SESSION



Please note, it is important to read the previous section entitled “Instructions and Guidance for Previously Trained VA Providers.” You will start with the “Overview and Goal Setting” section; see below.

Introductions and Purpose of the Session

[Introduce yourself and inform the group member about an additional group facilitator, and if known, what the schedule of the SST group sessions will be. Then introduce the session by stating something like]:

“Thank you so much for being here today to talk about the Social Skills Training group and how you would like to benefit from it. In Social Skills Training, we work on developing skills in interacting with others. Developing these skills can help individuals move forward on their goals and improve their quality of life. Today we will be talking about the SST group and your goals for the group.”

[Then proceed to list the agenda items below. Don’t go into too much detail for each section as you will expand on the sections as you progress through the initial individual goal setting session. This is simply to establish the agenda:]

Agenda for the Individual Session

“First, let’s talk in more detail about the agenda for today’s session.

Overall, the plan is to talk about what happens in an SST group and to work toward setting a recovery-oriented SST goal)” [Then summarize

the specific items on the agenda listed below as relevant to the group member in your own words.]

- ☐ Discuss overview and purpose of the group; how SST is different from other groups
- ☐ Discuss the format of the group (including outside practice review, skill introduction, role plays, feedback, assigning outside practice)
- ☐ Discuss group expectations
- ☐ Review and discuss concept of recovery and how recovery is connected to goal setting
- ☐ Complete the Goal Setting Brief Background Interview
- ☐ Review broad Quality of Life domains and identify Quality of Life Domain most important to the group member now.
- ☐ Discuss rationale for goal setting and use goal setting sheet to collaboratively identify one recovery-related goal.
- ☐ Complete a measurement-based care measure (if applicable). **[After reviewing the agenda items, ask if there any questions.]** *“Any questions about the agenda before moving on?”*

SST Overview & Group Format

[Introduce this section to the group member by saying something like:] *“Let me now give you an overview of what SST is and the group format.”*

“Social Skills Training teaches people how they can better communicate their feelings, thoughts, and needs to others. It also teaches them how they can better respond to other people's feelings, thoughts, and needs. Social skills help people get what they want more often and help them avoid doing things they don't want to do. Research has shown that SST groups help group members improve their social skills and more successfully integrate into their communities.

Improving your social skills can help you achieve your recovery goals. Social skills can help you communicate better with your friends, relatives, and employers. These skills can help you talk to people you are interested in having a relationship with. You can focus on skills that will allow you to become more independent. **Social skills training can help you improve the skills you need to achieve almost any goal you choose.** In this meeting today, I would like to help you identify one personal recovery goal to work on in the group.

Social Skills Training may be different from other types of groups you have participated in. Group members focus on practicing skills during the group and trying out ways to solve their problems. They do this by practicing different skills during the group and then trying out these skills in real-life situations. Any questions so far? “

“That was a broad overview of SST. Now, let's talk more specifically about the group format and what happens in an SST Group.”

“Group members practice a new skill through role playing with the group facilitator(s). Role playing is acting in a pretend situation. Group members first review how to break down each skill into a few easy steps. Next, they watch the group facilitator(s) role play the skill with each other. Then the group members get a chance to practice. Each group member gets the opportunity to do a series of 3 roleplays of the skill of the day and typically use the same scenario for all 3 role plays. The scenario is personalized for your role play based on what goal you are working on and the social situation in which you might wish to use the skill. Group facilitator(s) encourage group members to think about their social and cultural background or language in order to make their scenario more relevant to their life and to use the social skill in a way that is most effective. **The group facilitator(s) and fellow group members will give feedback about what went well in each role play and will also give suggestions on how to make the next role play even better. Feedback is positive and people usually wind up having a great time!**

Group members will also be asked to do outside practice. This is where you will get a chance to practice the skill outside the group. You collaborate with the group facilitator(s) to create an outside practice assignment that involves practicing the social skill in a way that is helpful to you in working toward your goals. Group members are encouraged to consider their social and cultural background when developing outside practice assignments so that the outside practice assignment is tailored to the specific situation in which they will use the social skill for outside practice. At the beginning of each session, group members have the opportunity to talk about how their outside practice assignment for the last session went. Nobody is ever forced to do a role play or to do an outside practice if they do not feel comfortable. However, practicing social skills in role plays in the group and practicing it outside of the group as part of the outside practice is what helps group members improve their social skills and move forward on their goals.

So, to review, the SST group is structured and focuses on empowering group members to effectively use social skills to move forward on personal goal(s). The SST group includes:

- 1. Review of the outside practice of the previous group's social skill*
- 2. Discussion of the rationale and steps of the social skill of the day*
- 3. Roleplay demonstration by the group facilitator(s) of the social skill of the day*
- 4. Group members practice the social skill of the day. Each group member gets the opportunity to do 3 roleplays with the group facilitator, with positive feedback after each roleplay. Constructive suggestions are also given regarding how to make the roleplays "even better."*
- 5. Before the end of the group, each group member creates a plan to practice the skill for outside practice.*

Plan to participate actively. The more you participate, the more you will get out of the group. Feel free to ask questions and make comments about the social skills you're learning; talk about the program with other members of the group as well as the staff and your support system. You can even share the skill sheets with your support system so they can help you practice and learn about what you are doing in the group. Discussing the material with others will help you improve the skills you learn. It will also be very important to practice the skills outside of group. Please let me know how we can include the people important in your life while you are in the

SST group, such as make extra copies of skill sheets or provide them with information about SST.”

Group Guidelines

[Introduce this section to the group member by saying something like:]
“Let’s now talk about the group guidelines, which are also sometimes called group expectations.

Group members must be willing to keep an open mind. The group is an open, safe, and inclusive environment where individual differences and differences of opinion are respected. They must be willing to try new ways to communicate with others. Group members will learn about new skills and discuss how to use them in their lives. They will be encouraged to practice the skills in group and in real-life situations.

There are guidelines that group members are expected to follow during the group meetings. Let’s review this list together [if you as a group facilitator have developed additional group expectations relevant to your setting, also share these with the group member].

- 1. Stay on the group topic.*
- 2. Respect individual differences and differences of opinion; no criticizing or making fun of each other.*
- 3. Respect group members’ social, cultural, and linguistic differences.*
- 4. Only one person may speak at a time.*
- 5. No name-calling or cursing.*
- 6. No eating during group.*
- 7. Please turn cell phones off or onto silent during group.*

Do you have any thoughts or reactions about these expectations or additional group expectations you would like us to consider adding to the group?

Also, I (we) want to directly note that as group facilitators(s), we have a responsibility to help group members follow the group guidelines so that the group operates in a healthy and beneficial way. For this reason, I (we) may need to take action to make sure group guidelines are followed. We like to make a special note to all potential group members that discriminatory or hurtful language will not be tolerated in the group. In extreme cases, a group member may be asked to leave group if they do not follow group

guidelines in a way that is hurting others or getting in the way of group members learning skills. Any questions?"

Introduction to the Recovery Framework

[Introduce this section to the group member by saying something like:]
"Let's now talk about recovery. Are you familiar with the recovery concept in mental health?" [After listening to the group member's thoughts on recovery, share additional information about recovery below that was not covered in the group member's discussion.]

Mental illnesses are conditions that affect thoughts, feelings, and behavior. They can interfere with day to day functioning and can cause significant changes in the quality of an individual's life. Mental illnesses include a variety of conditions.

It is now recognized that mental illness does not have to lead to a lifetime of disability. It is important to recognize that people are not either healthy or ill. Rather, recovery is a process or journey that you go on, and people may consider themselves in recovery while continuing to have, and be affected by, mental illness.

The following information about recovery is from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration website:

"Recovery is a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential.

This definition does not describe recovery as an end state, but rather as a process. Complete symptom remission is neither a prerequisite of recovery nor a necessary outcome of the process. Recovery can have many pathways that may include professional clinical treatment; use of medications; support from families and in schools; faith-based approaches; peer support; and other approaches."

*"Goal setting can be an important part of the recovery process. **Most people who make steady progress in their recovery report that it is important to set goals and work toward them.** For this reason, for the remainder of this session, the focus of our discussion will be goal setting. First, I will ask you some questions about yourself relevant to goal setting for the social skills group and then you will have an opportunity to discuss*

and choose your recovery goal for the social skills group. This goal will help us decide on what skills we teach in group. Your role plays will be connected to your goal in the group.”

Brief Background Interview

“Let’s take time now to talk more about your background so that we can help set a goal for the group and learn more about you. This will be just a brief discussion to gather more personal information that may be related to setting a goal for SST. Any questions?” [proceed to ask the following questions and/or summarize what you already know with the group member and check with them for accuracy of that information.]

BRIEF BACKGROUND INTERVIEW

Name: _____ Date: _____

Education (highest level completed): _____

Current occupation: _____

Pronouns: _____

What is your work history? _____

What activities are you involved in on a daily or weekly basis? _____

Are there any activities that you are currently not participating in but would like to? _____

Who are the people you spend most of your time with? What communities are important to you? For example, some people are part of a community organization, or a faith community, or spend a lot of time with their neighbors. _____

Are there people whom you do not currently spend time with but would like to? _____

Something that can be helpful to think about in this goal setting session is how our personal background and social life may impact the way we communicate and/or our personal goals. To help you reflect, we include here a Cultural Identity Wheel for you to consider.

[Hand the group member the Cultural Identity Wheel handout provided in the addendum.]

Let's look at this wheel and talk about it a bit. [Pause and look at cultural identity wheel.] We all have different aspects of our identity, some seen and some unseen, that make us who we are. And some of those aspects show up more or become more important in certain settings. This wheel is not comprehensive and doesn't include all aspects of identity, but many find it a useful tool when talking about many of the different aspects that make up who we are.

This wheel is divided up into an inner and outer ring:

- *Outer ring:* Some of these may be things we may have influence over, while others we may not have much influence over.
- *Inner ring:* These are parts of our identity we really don't have much influence over.



[After checking if the group member is willing, briefly discuss how the group member relates to the Cultural Identity Wheel while keeping conversation focused on SST. A possible script for this discussion follows in italics. There is a script below, as well, if the group member opts not to disclose more about their background.]

Are there certain parts of the wheel that might be related to your goal for the SST group? Perhaps there are folks or groups of folks or communities with whom you'd like to communicate more effectively or with whom you would like to feel more connected? If so, would you be willing to share who that would be? For example, some people may have a goal related to their identity or community (e.g., connecting more to their spiritual community, responding to racist comments, etc.).

[Take notes here on Veteran's reported identities and stated relevance (if any) for SST goal]

In group, you will practice the social skills inside and outside of group. In looking at this wheel together, are there certain aspects of who you are that you think are particularly relevant to how you socialize and connect with others?

Thanks for sharing. Let's talk more about specifics about what effective communication might look like in your life. Here are some examples of how communication might be different for based on communities you are a part of or based on how you personally identify in some of the areas we were talking about before when looking at the wheel.

People from different communities may have different approaches to

- *eye contact*
- *how much one smiles*
- *the distance people stand from one another when talking*
- *the degree to which one uses hand gestures*
- *to whom and how one self-discloses*

- *how loud one talks*
- *whether one tends to talk at the same time as others in conversation, etc.*

In looking at these examples, is there anything you think is important for us to know about when you interact with others or how you would like to interact with others?

[Take notes regarding the group member’s observations about social behaviors in the communities they will be using the skills taught.]

[As noted earlier, if the group member chooses not to share more about their identity after being asked any of the questions above, respect this and say something like]: *“I understand, this is a very personal topic. Perhaps as we get to know each other and trust grows, you might feel more comfortable talking about this at a later time. In any case, it’s always up to you what you choose to share.”*

Acknowledgement: Cultural Identity Assessment, developed by Mary Katherine Howell, PhD and colleagues at the Washington DC VA Medical Center

Identify Quality of Life Domains

[Introduce this section to the group member by saying something like:] *“Thanks for sharing more about yourself so we can work towards setting a goal for the SST Group. Let’s now talk about Quality of Life Domains.”*

[At the end of this section, do your best to identify the Quality of Life Domain most important to the group member. It is helpful to have the *Goal Setting Sheet* out to get ready to circle the Quality of Life Domain identified. Keep in mind any identities and communities that the group member identified during the *“Brief Background Interview”* when selecting the Quality of Life Domain.]

“Recovery is about roles and goals. For the SST group, we would like you to pick a short-term personal recovery goal that you would like to achieve by the end of the SST group.”

There are 4 Quality of Life Domains in which you may wish to choose a recovery goal to accomplish during the timeframe of the Social Skills Training Group:

1. **Interpersonal relationships** (For example, goals related to improving relationships with family or friends or romantic partners or goals related to making new friends or connecting romantically with someone.)
2. **Community Participation and Engagement** (For example, goals related to obtaining or improving paid work/volunteer work/or school. This category also includes goals related to increasing leisure activities or other community participation like involvement in social justice advocacy or community support groups.)
3. **Engagement in treatment services** (This category includes goals related to increasing attendance at appointments, improving a relationship with a health or mental health care provider, etc. This category also relates to follow-up and advocacy for receiving high quality health care. For example, speaking up to a primary care provider about physical symptoms that have not been addressed.)
4. **Physical and Emotional Well-Being** (This category includes spiritual goals. Examples of goals of this type include working toward a health goal such as finding a work-out buddy in order to exercise more or lose weight or conversations with professionals that may help you learn about healthier lifestyle choices.)

Which of these domains do you think might be most important to you right now? _____”

[Indicate the Quality of Life Domain identified on the Goal Setting Sheet.]

Goal Setting

[Introduce this section to the group member by saying something like:] *In today’s meeting we have discussed your background and current interests in the Goal Setting Brief Background Interview. We also discussed different Quality of Life Domains and the importance of these to you right now. Now we are going to work on goal setting. Next on the agenda is talking about what you might like to choose as a personal recovery goal to work on in the SST group.*

It is important that you set a goal that is relevant to your life because the purpose of this program is to help you improve your skills to reach your recovery goals and improve your life.

One of the best ways to tackle problems and obstacles is through goal setting. Setting recovery goals means to identify specifically what you want to do and what steps you are going to take to do it. By working toward and reaching goals, people move forward in valued directions and feel better about themselves, others, and their lives.

The best goals are about what you want to do (like join a club; make a friend) and are things that you really think you can start to do while you are attending the SST Group. Small steps lead to bigger goals.

Keep in mind any social or cultural factors in your life that may be relevant to your goal [If relevant, reference group member's identities and communities that were noted during the Brief Background Interview].

Most people who make steady progress in their recovery report that it is important to set goals and work toward them. Having a direction in life gives us all a sense of purpose and meaning. It doesn't matter so much whether the goals are large or small. We want to set goals related to the areas of life that you find most important.

Now let's come up with one short term goal for the end of the SST group. You are free to choose whatever goal YOU want to work on, as long as it is important to you and is related to social skills. The SST group is focused on improving interpersonal skills and relationships. For this reason, it makes sense to set a goal to accomplish in this group that involves your interactions with other people. Remember, this class is all about learning skills to help you accomplish your recovery goal.

It is useful to define your goal in what we call "SMART" terms because doing this can make the goal easier to focus on and achieve. Have you heard about "SMART" goals before? [Listen to hear what the group member already knows about "SMART" goals. Depending on what their prior knowledge is, you may continue to provide education on "SMART" goals as indicated below]

"SMART" goals are:

- ***Specific:*** *The goal should be simply written and clearly define what you want to do.*

- **Measurable:** *There should be specific ways to measure the goal that reflect progress toward the goal, and it should be easy to assess whether the goal was accomplished.*
- **Attainable:** *The goal should be achievable; it should be a challenge for you but defined so that you have a very good chance of achieving the goal.*
- **Relevant:** *This is a goal that is meaningful for you. It is a worthwhile goal and the timing of the goal is appropriate.*
- **Time-bound:** *Goals should be linked to a timeframe that makes sense (e.g., in this case the length of the SST group you are attending).*

We can also work to define some steps for achieving the goal that can also help show you the way toward getting what you want.”

[You may check in with the group member now about their goals for the SST Group and use the Goal Setting Sheet to record responses. If it seems that they may benefit from more background and examples of SST SMART goals, you can proceed to the next section.]

“What are you thinking about a goal for the SST Group? What might be a goal that is connected to the Quality of Life Domain you identified? Let’s look at the Goal Setting Sheet.”

[Several examples of goals that can be set for the SST group are included below. You only need to discuss with the group member information from the examples as is helpful for the goal setting discussion. You may wish to show the group member the pages of the manual with the examples as you are discussing this section. To introduce this section, you may wish to say something like:]

“Here are some examples of goals that can be set for the SST group. You may notice that there are also “Long-term Goals” included in these examples. It is often useful to consider what you may want in the long-term for yourself and then work backwards to find what goal may be important to focus on in the here and now. You do not need to decide upon a Long-term goal related to the SST group, although you may choose to do so.

There are examples for goals in the 4 Quality of Life Domains discussed above. It may make sense to look at the example related to the Quality of Life domain that you identified.” [Then proceed to look at the example

below that is associated with the Quality of Life domain that the group member identified earlier in the session.]

Example for Improving Interpersonal Relationships:

Long-term Goal: Have a significant other.

Goal for end of the SST group: I will start a polite conversation with a woman at least twice a week.

Steps for achieving goal:

- 1. Attend SST group biweekly and practice skills taught in group, including starting a conversation.*
- 2. Prepare a list of appropriate topics to use in conversation and practice using these with a friend.*
- 3. Prepare a list of safe and appropriate places at which to meet women. Once the SST conversation skills module is completed, go and try out the skills once a week.*
- 4. Do my best not to get discouraged by reminding myself that not every conversation goes well. Review my efforts with my SST group to identify positives and areas needing improvement.*
- 5. Increase the frequency of starting conversations with women to 2x a week.*

Example for Improving Community Participation:

Long-term Goal: I will obtain a full-time paying job

Goal for end of the SST group: I will find a part-time volunteer position.

Steps for achieving goal:

- 1. Attend SST group biweekly and practice skills taught in group, including asking for information.*
- 2. Research and prepare a list of possible volunteer locations. Decide which volunteer locations seem most promising.*
- 3. Prepare a list of questions for a volunteer coordinator.*
- 4. Contact volunteer coordinator and ask questions from list about opportunities.*
- 5. Prepare for volunteer interviews (if required) by practicing mock interviews with case manager and then attend the interviews.*

Example for Improving Engagement in Treatment Services

Long-term Goal: I will be able to state my mental health recovery plan and to report weekly behaviors to further mental health recovery.

Goal for end of the SST group: I will attend and participate in meetings with both my social worker and psychiatrist. I will be able to voice in the meetings at least one personal goal related to mental health recovery and ask for assistance from a professional in working toward this goal. I will request follow-up appointments from both professionals.

Steps for achieving goal:

- 1. Attend SST group biweekly and practice skills taught in group, including asking for help.*
- 2. Read pamphlet on mental health recovery and make a list of possible recovery goals.*
- 3. Call to make an appointment with the social worker. Make a realistic plan regarding what I wish to cover during the meeting including asking for assistance in working toward a recovery goal. Attend meeting with the social worker and implement plan. Request a follow-up appointment.*
- 4. Call to make an appointment with the psychiatrist. Make a realistic plan regarding what I wish to cover during the meeting, including asking for assistance in working toward a recovery goal. Attend meeting with the psychiatrist and implement plan. Request a follow-up appointment.*

Example for Improving Physical and Emotional Wellbeing

Long-term Goal: I will have a Body Mass Index (BMI) in the healthy range.

Goal for end of the SST group: I will establish a healthy weight loss support network by attending the weight management group 3X and meeting with work out buddy 3x for exercise.

Steps for achieving goal:

- 1. Attend SST group biweekly and practice skills taught in group, including asking for help.*
- 2. I will contact the weight management group and schedule an appointment.*
- 3. I will ask questions in the weight management group related to furthering my goal.*
- 4. I will try to identify a possible healthy work-out buddy or group with whom I can walk 1X week. I will ask the person to take a walk with them on multiple occasions.*

ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE GOALS

[You may choose to review the following examples of possible goals, as well, if you think this would benefit the group member. There are additional

goals in this section that are relevant to inpatient and short-term treatment settings.]

“Would you like to see some more example goals that someone may have in an SST Group? If so, below are some other examples of possible goals for the end of the SST group. The most helpful goal you can set is one that is a “SMART” goal for YOU, one that is focused on what is important to YOU in terms of recovery. The most helpful goal will be one that will present a bit of a challenge for you but one that you will also have a very good chance of achieving by the end of the SST group.

You do not need to pick one of these goals. These are just included as examples to help in the process of choosing goals. We encourage you to come up with a goal tailored to your individual recovery journey.”

Start a volunteer job

Start a paying job

Move into a new apartment

Find a partner

Apologize to 2 people I’ve hurt in my life

Do a leisure activity once a week involving other people

Join and attend a book club once a month

Attend with a friend a demonstration for social justice 1X a month

Speak up to my parents when they say negative things about gay people

Find a friend to go to coffee with once a week

Attend a church singles group 2X a month

Join a recreational sports team (softball, etc.)

Find a buddy to walk with 1x a week

Join a running group training for a marathon

At least once per day actively work to make positive changes (e.g., improving listening skills, etc.) in conversations with my wife

Attend the monthly city council meeting 2X and make a statement 1x on an issue I care about

Obtain an AA sponsor

Join the church choir and practice weekly

Take an art class and ask for feedback from teacher 1x a week regarding my painting

Take grandchildren to the park 1x a week

Join and participate in a parent and me class

Talk to a family member on the phone 1x a week

Talk with social worker and psychiatrist 1x a month about recovery plan

Start a conversation with someone in my community residence 1x a day

Play pool or cards 1x a week with someone at my house/apartment
Join and participate weekly in the MOVE weight loss program
Join the PRRC and attend the writer's group and yoga groups weekly
Address directly the prejudice (or stigmatizing comments) I regularly experience during my weekly softball practices
Communicate to my healthcare providers about my pronouns in all my upcoming appointments over the next 3 months

[If the group member is currently on an inpatient unit or other short-term treatment setting, you may review these following goals.]

“Here are examples of “end of group” goals for SST groups conducted in short-term treatment settings like inpatient units.

Call my boss and explain that I need to be on sick leave for the next 2 weeks and let them know when I might be back at work.

Reach out to my sponsor by phone 2X this week.

Politely but directly request a new housing placement after my discharge when I meet with my treatment providers 3X this week.

Ask using a friendly voice another person on the inpatient unit who seems nice to play a board game 2X this week.

Ask my sister and mom to come visit me this week and explain to them the best times.

Ask a nurse about the rules and schedule about TV use and going outside.”

[Continue to work with the group member in developing an SST SMART Goal and recording responses on the Goal Setting Sheet. Remember, it is possible that the goal is not set in one session, so you may discuss scheduling another time to meet to continue developing the SST SMART Goal.]

[Take time to summarize the outcome of the session and next steps. Here is an example of how you may wrap-up the session.]

“Thank you for taking the time to meet today and prepare for the SST Group. We are looking forward to having you join the group. Our first SST Group will be [share the date and time of the first group here]. During our first group, you will have the option of sharing your SST goal with the other group members if you choose to do so. Do you have any questions? Let me provide you with a copy of your Goal Setting Sheet.”

[Also, provide any other handouts or resources that the group member expressed an interest in such as handouts for family members/friends that may support their participation in the SST Group.]

****End Session****



A special note for the SST Provider: Congrats! You have finished the Initial Individual Goal Setting Session.

- ❖ Please Remember to:
 - Complete a note in the medical record detailing the initial individual session, ideally utilizing a CPRS SST template (template is titled “SST 1 Initial”).
 - Pat yourself on the back for a job well-done! You just oriented an SST group member to the SST group and assisted a group member to work towards their SST SMART Goal.

GOAL SETTING SHEET

Name: _____ Date: _____

This form is to be completed by the group member and group facilitator with the group facilitator conducting the interview and recording responses. Group facilitator should retain the original and the group member should be given a copy.

In thinking about setting a recovery goal, in which of these quality of life domains do you think might be most important to you right now? Please circle the category.

1. Improving interpersonal relationships
2. Improving community participation
3. Improving engagement in treatment services
4. Improving physical and/or emotional well-being

Is there a long-term recovery goal that you would like to start to work on as part of the Social Skills Training Group? Identify a Long-term Recovery Goal:

What would be a *SMART* goal for the SST group that would help you work toward your recovery goal? Identify a Goal for the SST Group:

Date Goal for the SST Group was set: _____

Steps related to achieving the goal for end of SST group (place a checkmark (✓) after steps achieved):

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

(It is okay to modify the steps based on changes in the strategy to achieve the goal. Please just note the changes on this page or on the back of this page. It is ideal for the group member to work on a single goal the entire SST group. However, it is okay if the group member wants to change their goal. An additional GOAL SETTING SHEET needs to be completed in these cases.)

ADDENDUM

Copies of the Brief Background Interview, the Cultural Identity Wheel, and the Goal Setting Sheet are included on the following pages for ease of printing.

BRIEF BACKGROUND INTERVIEW

Name: _____ Date: _____

Education (highest level completed): _____

Current occupation: _____

Pronouns: _____

What is your work history? _____

What activities are you involved in on a daily or weekly basis? _____

Are there any activities that you are currently not participating in but would like to? _____

Who are the people you spend most of your time with? What communities are important to you? For example, some people are part of a community organization, or a faith community, or spend a lot of time with their neighbors. _____

Are there people whom you do not currently spend time with but would like to? _____

Something that can be helpful to think about in this goal setting session is how our personal background and social life may impact the way we communicate and/or our personal goals. To help you reflect, we include here a Cultural Identity Wheel for you to consider.

[Hand the group member the Cultural Identity Wheel handout provided in the addendum.]

Let's look at this wheel and talk about it a bit. [Pause and look at cultural identity wheel.] We all have different aspects of our identity, some seen and some unseen, that make us who we are. And some of those aspects show up more or become more important in certain settings. This wheel is not comprehensive and doesn't include all aspects of identity, but many find it a useful tool when talking about many of the different aspects that make up who we are.

This wheel is divided up into an inner and outer ring:

- *Outer ring: Some of these may be things we may have influence over, while others we may not have much influence over.*
- *Inner ring: These are parts of our identity we really don't have much influence over.*



Source: Johns Hopkins University Office of Diversity and Inclusion

[After checking if the group member is willing, briefly discuss how the group member relates to the Cultural Identity Wheel while keeping conversation focused on SST. A possible script for this discussion follows in italics.

There is a script below, as well, if the group member opts not to disclose more about their background.]

Are there certain parts of the wheel that might be related to your goal for the SST group? Perhaps there are folks or groups of folks or communities with whom you'd like to communicate more effectively or with whom you would like to feel more connected? If so, would you be willing to share who that would be? For example, some people may have a goal related to their identity or community (e.g., connecting more to their spiritual community, responding to racist comments, etc.).

[Take notes here on Veteran's reported identities and stated relevance (if any) for SST goal]

In group, you will practice the social skills inside and outside of group. In looking at this wheel together, are there certain aspects of who you are that you think are particularly relevant to how you socialize and connect with others?

Thanks for sharing. Let's talk more about specifics about what effective communication might look like in your life. Here are some examples of how communication might be different for based on communities you are a part of or based on how you personally identify in some of the areas we were talking about before when looking at the wheel.

People from different communities may have different approaches to

- *eye contact*
- *how much one smiles*
- *the distance people stand from one another when talking*
- *the degree to which one uses hand gestures*
- *to whom and how one self-discloses*
- *how loud one talks*
- *whether one tends to talk at the same time as others in conversation, etc.*

In looking at these examples, is there anything you think is important for us to know about when you interact with others or how you would like to interact with others?

[Take notes regarding the group member's observations about social behaviors in the communities they will be using the skills taught.]

[As noted earlier, if the group member chooses not to share more about their identity after being asked any of the questions above, respect this and say something like]: *"I understand, this is a very personal topic. Perhaps as we get to know each other and trust grows, you might feel more comfortable talking about this at a later time. In any case, it's always up to you what you choose to share."*

Acknowledgement: Cultural Identity Assessment, developed by Mary Katherine Howell, PhD and colleagues at the Washington DC VA Medical Center

The Cultural Identity Wheel



Source: Johns Hopkins University Office of Diversity and Inclusion

GOAL SETTING SHEET

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- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

(It is okay to modify the steps based on changes in the strategy to achieve the goal. Please just note the changes on this page or on the back of this page. It is ideal for the group member to work on a single goal the entire SST group. However, it is okay if the group member wants to change their goal. An additional GOAL SETTING SHEET needs to be completed in these cases.)