

Social Skills Training (SST) Quick Guide

Preparing for SST Group Sessions

- ✓ Verify that each group member has completed an Initial Individual Goal Setting Session
- ✓ Review SST Group Session Sequence (in this guide)
- ✓ Review the Social Skills Group Observation Checklist (SSGOC) or the SSGOC Detailed Anchor Points Version
- ✓ Review skill in SST book (starting p. 193; including reading rationale, becoming familiar with steps, reading sample role play scenarios, and special considerations)
- ✓ Copy handouts with skill title and steps only from SST website (see last page for link)
- ✓ Prepare and copy outside practice sheets
- ✓ When applicable, prepare and copy measurement based care measures for group members to complete prior to group session starting
- ✓ Have a list of group members' SST Goals
- ✓ Assign facilitators to primary and secondary (if have two leaders); discuss tasks and roles related to primary and secondary group facilitators and plan the model scenario
- ✓ Prepare room (e.g., chairs in semi-circle facing board, prop flip chart/dry erase board)
- ✓ Check audio recorder settings and conduct a test recording (if applicable)

SST and Recovery Goal for SST

Always keep in mind that **Social Skills Training is a Recovery-Oriented Treatment**. Therefore, in every session you should encourage and empower the group member to move forward with their recovery and the goal identified for SST. Goal setting is an important part of the recovery process and is a core part of SST, so continue to track group member SST goals.

Sociocultural & Linguistic Factors in SST

Sample script for first group: "We have diverse backgrounds and cultures that impact how we talk to others. This diversity means that each person's interaction may vary; for instance, one's culture may prioritize eye contact, while another's might see too much eye contact as impolite. We value this diversity in our group and aim to honor and consider it when practicing new skills both within and outside of the group. Your choice of role plays and the way you practice may differ based on your goals and cultural background. We hope will be an ongoing discussion in our group."

Tips for discussing culture and identity in SST Groups:

- Review the sample scripts in the Detailed SST Group Session Sequence (inside of this guide) and be responsive to group member comments related to culture and identity.
- Facilitator self-disclosure about how their communication style relates to their culture/upbringing/community
- Facilitators refer back to the Cultural Identity Wheel

Note About the Very First SST Group:

For your very first group you will also want to add to beginning of the agenda:

1. **Introductions** of group facilitators and group members
2. Review of **group purpose and structure** (You may need to repeat this in subsequent groups as well)
3. Discuss how **sociocultural factors** will be integrated in group (see first group script above).
4. Discuss **group expectations**
5. Provide the opportunity for group members to **share individual goals** with the group
6. You will **not Review Outside Practice** in the very first group as the group members will not yet have been assigned practice prior to starting the group.

Sample Group Expectation

- Stay on the group topic.** ("Staying on the group topic will help make sure we have time for everyone to practice.")
- Respect individual differences and differences of opinion; no criticizing or making fun of each other.** ("No criticizing or making fun of each other. It's important to remember that feedback in SST focuses on what people do well.")
- Respect group members' social, cultural, and linguistic differences.** ("Listen when others share their cultural backgrounds. Do not judge or be critical of differences. Social skills may vary based on your background and the social situation. Also, no use of discriminatory language. We want everyone to be safe and valued in the group.")
- Only one person may speak at a time.** ("Only one person speaking at a time promotes respect for what everyone has to say.")
- No name-calling or cursing.** ("No name-calling or cursing. Let's work together to make sure that SST group is a positive experience for everyone.")
- No eating during group.** ("Please no eating during group. We have found that eating in group can distract from practice and people giving meaningful feedback.")
- Please turn cell phones off or onto silent during group.** ("Turning off cell phones helps show respect for each other's time and efforts in the group.")

Detailed SST Group Session Sequence

WELCOME ALL MEMBERS, SET AGENDA, AND REVIEW THE PURPOSE OF THE GROUP:

If this is the first SST group or you have new group members, take time to first review items 1-5 listed on the front of this guide in the section entitled "Note About the Very First SST Group."

STATE: "Today's new skill is [state the new skill of the day]; but, first, let's hear how your outside practice on [state skill assigned for outside practice] went."

STEP 1. REVIEW OUTSIDE PRACTICE: Display (e.g., steps written on the white board) and briefly review the steps of the skill assigned for outside practice.

Reinforce any efforts toward practice and ask about whether they had any opportunity to practice even if it was not the assigned practice. Briefly problem-solve any barriers to practice. Refer to the steps of the skill when reviewing the outside practice. Clap for any attempt to practice.

ASK: "How did you [each group member] do with using the steps of the skill?"

ASK: "Did you do Step 1?" [may progress through asking or listening for whether the steps were practiced]. If a step was not practiced, you may say "Sounds like that may be a step(s) you want to continue to work on next time."

ASK: "When you practiced the skill, did you notice if you changed how you did any of the steps to be more effective in the situation?"

STATE: "Great job using the steps of the skill!"

STEP 2. ESTABLISH A RATIONALE FOR THE SKILL: First try to elicit the rationale from the group. If you state a rationale first, make sure it is brief and allows ample opportunity for the group members to contribute. Make sure main points for the rationale of the skill as listed in the Bellack et al. book are addressed. **Give out the skill sheets with the steps of the skill and ensure the skill title and steps of the skill are visible on the white board/poster paper.**

ASK: "Why is this skill important?"

ASK: "What can make this skill sometimes difficult to do?"

STEP 3. BRIEFLY HAVE MEMBERS SHARE A RELEVANT EXPERIENCE OR RATIONALE:

Ask about personal experiences with the skill and then summarize rationale discussion.

ASK: "Can someone give a specific example of a time when they used the skill or when it would have been important to use it?"

ASK: "Is there anything about your culture and background that is important to consider when thinking about why this skill is important to practice?"

STATE: "Each one of you, try to think of a situation when you have or will have to do [the skill], which might be a good scenario to practice today. Try to think of a situation in which using this skill will help you move forward on your SST goal."

STATE: "To summarize about why this skill is important in general and in your lives [summarize rationale discussion]. We can now take a look at the steps of the skill."

STEP 4. EXPLAIN THE STEPS OF THE SKILL: Have group members read each step of the skill. Collaboratively, yet briefly, generate a rationale for each step of the skill.

ASK: "Who will read step [1]?"

ASK: (After each step) "Why is this step important?" "What would happen if you didn't do this step?" "What is an example(s) of how to do that?"

STATE: "The way these steps are practiced might vary depending on who you are talking to and the social expectations of the situation."

ASK: "Any questions about the steps?"

STEP 5. MODEL THE SKILL; REVIEW WITH GROUP MEMBERS: Model the skill with your co-facilitator as the role play buddy. Make it brief and relevant to the members' lives. After the model, review the model with group members.

STATE: *"The scenario for the model is [share details of the model]."*

STATE: *"Watch me [primary facilitator] practice the steps of the skill."*

ASK: *"Did you see me do step 1?" [continue to review each step].*

STEP 6. HAVE A GROUP MEMBER ROLE PLAY: Each group member should do the same personally relevant scenario for all 3 role plays. Assist the group members in developing a scenario related to their SST SMART goal. Provide a clear beginning and end to each role play. Make sure the scenario is brief, relevant to the skill, and at an appropriate level of complexity (if not sure, start at low complexity and build up). Make sure the role play buddy also understands their role in the role play.

ASK: *"What scenario do you want to practice that will help you move forward with [group member's personal SST SMART goal]?" "Do you have a situation coming up in which you might need to use the skill?"*

ASK: *"Is there any way you need to adjust the steps of this skill to be more effective in this situation either due to your relationship or due to culture?" "What words would you use in this situation?"*

STATE: *"Before we start the role play, let's review the scenario."*

STATE: *"Watch what [name of group member] does well in this role play. Ready, [group member role-playing]? Ok, action!"*

NOTE: If the group member did the skill absolutely perfectly the first time, increase the challenge within the identified scenario for the 2nd and 3rd role plays.

STEP 7. ELICIT AND PROVIDE POSITIVE THEN CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

POSITIVE FEEDBACK: The facilitator and group members provide specific, positive feedback. For each step, ask at least one of the following and expand the questioning as needed:

ASK: *"What specifically did you like about the role play?"*

ASK: *"What did you like about how [name of group member] did [a particular] step?"*

ASK: *"How did you know [name of group member] was doing that step?"*

ASK: *"What did you like about [name of group member]'s nonverbal behavior (e.g., eye contact)?"*

CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK (AKA "EVEN BETTER" FEEDBACK): Make only 1 or 2 specific suggestions for improvement. Consider if any of the steps can be practiced more effectively. You can always look at non-verbals for shaping (e.g., eye contact, fidgeting, posture, tone of voice, speed). Also, for verbal behaviors, consider if they could be more concise.

ASK: *"What can be even better about this next role play?"*

ASK: *"[Name of group member role-playing], what would you like to do to make this next role play even better?"*

ASK: *"Is there any way to further adjust the steps of the skill to be even more effective during this interaction?"*

STEP 8: HAVE THE MEMBER ROLE PLAY AGAIN The group member role plays the same scenario incorporating the "even better" feedback provided.

STATE: *"You did a great job such as [insert a specific positive comment or two made]. Now, you are going to role play again, using the same scenario. For this second role-play, what do you think about including the even better feedback to [restate and clarify the specific "even better" feedback]. How does that sound to you, [group member role playing]?"*

STEP 9. ELICIT AND PROVIDE POSITIVE THEN CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK: Refer to the sample scripts noted above for Step 7. You may identify more “even better” feedback. If there is no “even better” feedback, the group member may practice again focusing on the “even better” feedback that was provided after the first role play.

STEP 10: REPEAT ROLE PLAY AGAIN AND ELICIT/PROVIDE POSITIVE FEEDBACK: After the 3rd role play, take time to end with more specific, positive feedback.

STEP 11: REPEAT STEPS 6-10 WITH EACH GROUP MEMBER: Continue to conduct 3 role plays with each of the remaining group members (or role play with as many group members as possible) and set up the role plays as is described in Step 6 above.

STEP 12. OUTSIDE PRACTICE: Help each group member generate specific assignments relevant to their SST goal and ask them to write them down on the **Outside Practice Sheets**. Set up an outside practice that is focused on effectiveness by taking into consideration social, cultural, and linguistic factors. They can use the scenario they practiced in group for outside practice. Make sure you leave adequate time to review the practice.

ASK: “Let’s discuss the details of your practice. Who will you practice with? What is the scenario? When will you plan on practicing?”

ASK: “Would it help you to be more effective to change how you do the skill based on your style or the relationship with the person you are practicing with?”

STATE: “We look forward to hearing how your practice goes at the next group.”

Brief SST Group Session Sequence

****Welcome and set agenda****

- Step 1. Review outside practice (for sessions other than the first session)**
- Step 2. Establish a rationale for the skill**
- Step 3. Briefly have members share a relevant experience or rationale**
- Step 4. Explain the steps of the skill**
- Step 5. Model the skill; review with members**
- Step 6. Have a group member role play**
- Step 7. Elicit and provide positive, then constructive feedback**
- Step 8. Have the member role play again**
- Step 9. Elicit and provide positive, then constructive feedback**
- Step 10. Repeat role play again and elicit/provide positive feedback**
- Step 11. Repeat Steps 6-10 with each group member**
- Step 12. Develop outside practice assignments**

Roles of Primary and Secondary Facilitators in SST Sessions

The primary facilitator leads the SST group through all the steps of the group session sequence and is the facilitator who demonstrates how to do the skill in the model (Step 5). The secondary facilitator consistently plays the role of the role play buddy. The secondary can also briefly contribute to all portions of the group session sequence. The secondary facilitator can help manage group emergencies and challenges so the primary facilitator can implement the group session sequence.

Notes on Sole Facilitation of SST Sessions

Reminder that if you are leading the SST group alone, for Step 5 (Model the Skill), you might ask a staff member to be a role play buddy or ask a group member to role play with you while you model the skill. For the remainder of group (Steps 6-11), the sole facilitator would be the role play buddy. If a staff member takes the role of an SST Role Play Buddy for the entire group session, please have them review the SST Role Play Buddy Guide to review their responsibilities.

Handouts and other resources available at the VA SST website: www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/training/social_skills.asp