



VA Social Skills Training for Serious Mental Illness (VA SST) Training Program

Regional Trainer Program

Social Skills Training (SST; Bellack et al., 2004) is an evidence-based practice for persons with schizophrenia (Dixon et al., 2010). SST is also commonly used effectively with people with other types of serious mental illness (SMI). SST is a structured format for teaching interpersonal skills that incorporates modeling, role plays and other behavioral learning activities. In the VA, it is offered to Veterans with a primary diagnosis of schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, bipolar disorder, or treatment resistant major depression (when social skills is an area for growth). The Uniform Mental Health Services in VA Medical Centers (2008) guidelines require that SST is available to Veterans with SMI at every VA Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center (PRCC), VA Medical Center, and very large VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic. Since SST workshops began in April 2008 to train VHA mental health staff in this treatment, over 1200 providers have been trained across more than 200 unique VHA sites.

The VA SST Training Program is training Regional Trainers (RTs) across all Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs). In turn, the Regional Trainers will serve as expert SST trainers and consultants for their particular VISN and serve as a liaison among providers within their VISNs and VA SST Program staff.

Potential RTs should be licensed mental health providers who excel in SST delivery, champion SST's overall cause, and most importantly have ample time, energy, and support to serve in this role.

While the VA SST Training Program has laid out some concrete expectations, some were purposely left flexible. The end goal is to ensure that training participants learn how to demonstrate fidelity to the SST model.

Expectations for RTs:

- Complete TMS web course "Social Skills Training (SST) for Serious Mental Illness" (VA TMS ID# 29604) (if not previously completed). You will be assigned this course if you did not complete it previously as an VA SST training participant.
- Complete TMS web course "[Sociocultural and Linguistic Factors in Implementing Social Skills Groups \(Enduring\)](#)" (TMS ID: 131003157) (if not previously completed).
- Complete TMS web course "How to Conduct an SST Experiential Learning Session (enduring)" (TMS VA #42862). You will be assigned this course in TMS.
- Participate in the 2-day Train the Trainer in-person workshop led by VA SST Program staff. Travel to the Train the Trainer workshop is paid for by OMHSP. For 6 months after the Train the Trainer workshop, new RTs attend a weekly consultation call of an SST National Trainer/Consultant to learn more about the consultation process.

- Within 12 months of attending the Train the Trainer workshop, new RTs perform an in-person, 1-day SST experiential learning session and 6 months of consultation for providers in their VISN. Preferably, staff trained will be from a PRRC setting or another VA mental health setting that serves a large number of Veterans diagnosed with serious mental illness.
- Once trained, newly trained RTs are to announce themselves as SST VISN Regional Trainers to VISN Leadership, Local Facility Leadership, and the VISN's Evidence Based Psychotherapy Coordinators. Regional trainers are expected to provide a minimum of one VISN-wide, in-person 1-day experiential learning session training per fiscal year, and may provide more than one training per fiscal year, as appropriate, to meet the needs of the VISN.
- SST RTs should be considered an asset to the VISN, as the ability to offer regional trainings allows the VISN to dictate the frequency of training based on local needs, allows a greater number of local mental health providers (e.g., psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, nurses, etc.) to gain competence in SST, and increases Veteran access to SST treatment.
- For each in-person, 1-day experiential learning session training conducted, the RT will also spend approximately 1-2 hours per week engaged in planning/administrative activities for the 90 days prior to the training. RTs are expected to work with MH leadership, EBP coordinators, training program coordinators, EES, VA SST Program staff and other regional SST trainers in the VISN to assess training needs, advocate, plan, and execute workshops.
- Following the yearly 1-day SST Experiential Learning Session, SST RTs then conduct consultation with four or more of the training participants for 6 months. For each consultation group consisting of 4 participants, the Regional Trainer is to commit 5 hours/week for the duration of the 6-month consultation period. Regional Trainers are expected to conduct the following activities during these 5 hours/week:
 - Review and rate audio recordings of training participants' individual and group SST sessions.
 - Provide feedback on SST sessions and other important data in the SST online EBP portal.
 - Lead a one-hour weekly group consultation meeting with training participants. These are generally conducted via videoconference. These meetings may be conducted in person if the training participants are local to the SST Regional Trainer.
 - Complete documentation requested by VA SST Program.
 - Participate in all administrative SST program requirements including program evaluation, data tracking, relevant SOPs, and EES and VA SST Program collaboration and communication.
- In addition to conducting regional trainings and consultation, RTs attend a one-hour videoconference with the SST training team and other VISN RTs each month. RTs are expected to attend these calls at least 75% of the time each fiscal year. If not attending a particular call, the expectation is that the Regional Trainer will review the call agenda and related materials to be sure to keep updated regarding VA SST Training Program developments

- Please note that the VISN or local facilities are responsible for providing funding for travel to regional SST trainings as well as travel coordination for these trainings. For regional trainings, VISNs may decide whether they would rather have the Regional Trainer travel to the local area for training, or for training participants to travel to a training site within the VISN.
- Ultimately, it will be up to the Regional Trainer plus VISN and local leadership to determine realistic long-term expectations (i.e., scope of future trainings beyond the requested yearly minimum) and, therefore, any future time commitments to be determined. It is expected that leadership will support reserving the necessary time in the Regional Trainer's grid to allow the Regional Trainer to conduct all SST training and consultation activities. A LEAF form exception should be submitted to support the Regional Trainer use of time to support EBP training.

References

Bellack, A.S., Mueser, K.M., Gingerich, S., & Agresta, J. (2004). *Social Skills Training for Schizophrenia: A Step-by-Step Guide*. The Guilford Press.

Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Health Administration (2008). *Uniform Mental Health Services in VA Medical Centers and Clinics*. VHA Handbook 1160.01, 28-30.

Dixon, L. B., Dickerson, F., Bellack, A. S., Bennett, M., Dickinson, D., Goldberg, R. W., ... Kreyenbuhl J. (2010). Schizophrenia Patient Outcomes Research Team (PORT). The 2009 schizophrenia PORT psychosocial treatment recommendations and summary statements. *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, 36(1), 48-70. <https://doi.org/10.1093/schbul/sbp115>

**If you are interested in the Regional Trainer program,
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