

# Sociocultural and Linguistic Considerations in Implementing SST

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VA Social Skills Training Program  
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# Presenters, Panelists, & Contributors

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# Overview

- Sociocultural & Linguistic Factors
- Considerations for Group Leaders
- Modifying SST & Examples of modified Social Skills
- Examples from Clinicians in the Field
- Resources

# Social Skills

*Social skills are the interpersonal behaviors that are socially sanctioned in a given community, and are therefore influenced by the specific sociocultural features of that community.*

-Bellack, Mueser, Gingerich, & Agresta (2004)

# Social Competence

- Ability to perceive and conform to specific social norms in a given community
- Clients are unlikely to develop the social skills that are necessary for effective living within their community if:
  - They learn from models that are out of touch with the nuances of their particular sociocultural group.
  - They are reinforced for behaviors that are maladaptive.

# Sociocultural Factors

Factors that identify membership in a specific racial or ethnic group, subculture, or socioeconomic class:

- Social norms
- Roles
- Values
- Beliefs
- Language

# Sociocultural factors may affect such skills as:

- How a person uses or does not use eye contact
- Distance a person stands from another
- How assertive a person is
- How much affect is contained in one's voice or gestures

# Considerations for Group Leaders

- Be sensitive to the sociocultural and linguistic factors relevant to the clients with whom you are working.
- This sensitivity increases the likelihood that clients:
  - Will use the skills being taught
  - Will have successful experiences with these skills



# Considerations for Group Leaders

- Do not operate under the assumption that different cultural groups employ the same verbal and nonverbal patterns of communication.
- What is appropriate or adaptive for one group or in one setting may be inappropriate, or even maladaptive, for another group or setting.

# Learning sociocultural backgrounds of group members

- Seek out individuals who have frequent contact with clients, such as staff members and family, can be helpful.
- Elicit information about social values and norms from group members through discussions centering on what life was like growing up in their neighborhoods and communities.

# Learning sociocultural backgrounds of group members

- Have frank conversations with co-workers who share the same background as the clients.
- Attend training sessions or workshops on multicultural issues, or seek consultation with knowledgeable individuals.

# Modifying Social Skills Training

- Maintain the SST Group Structure, AND...
- Be able to modify the skills taught so that they accommodate the differences in lifestyles, values, norms, and preferences.

# Modifying Social Skills Training

- Modifications may include:
  - How a person uses or does not use eye contact
  - Distance a person stands from another
  - How assertive a person is
  - How much affect is contained in one's voice or gestures

# Modifying Social Skills Training

- Adapt group guidelines or group engagement skills to fit the culture.
  - For example, SST group leaders in Puerto Rico found it culturally appropriate & acceptable for group members to speak at the same time rather than one person at a time.
  - Another example: SST group leaders in Puerto Rico delayed redirecting group members when they were off topic. They allowed group members to express their thoughts before the clinicians made an effort to reframe or redirect them. Individuals raised in a Puerto Rican context do not expect others to be straight forward in their communication, or to be redirected and interrupted while they are talking.

# Modifying Social Skills Training

- Have a discussion about “public” and “private” behavior.
  - Illicit examples from group members about where to engage in “public” and “private” behaviors.
  - Behavior at work or at the DMV is more effective if you use the social skills taught in group. For example, direct eye contact & direct speaking.
  - Behavior with family members is a bit more complicated.

# Modifying Social Skills Training

- Be mindful that family issues may be a big group topic.
  - Veterans will identify many opportunities to practice social skills with family members.
  - As noted before, behavior with family members is a bit more complicated.
  - Need to be more nuanced with social skills.
  - Work with group members to figure out what “fits” best in family relationships when setting up role plays and assigning practice assignments.



# Modifying Social Skills Training

- Individualize role plays!
  - Use scenarios related to group member's culture, lifestyle, values, etc.
  - Be mindful of verbal content to be used in the role play.
  - In individualizing role plays, you may modify verbal statements listed in the steps of the social skill. See steps highlighted in red in the next couple of slides.
  - Tell group members that the verbal statements are guidelines/examples of what to say.

# Examples of Modified Social Skills

## “Joining Ongoing Conversations at Work”

Step 1. Wait for a break or a pause in the flow of the conversation.

Step 2. Say something like “Mind if I join you?”

Step 3. Say things related to the conversation topic.

# Examples of Modified Social Skills

## “Entering into an Ongoing Conversation”

Step 1. Wait for a break in the flow of the conversation.

**Step 2. Say something like “May I join you?”**

Step 3. Decide whether the people engaged in the conversation are OK with your joining in.

Step 4. Say things related to the subject of the conversation.

# Examples of Modified Social Skills

- Involve group members to role play with the Veteran practicing the skill.
  - It can be helpful when teaching the *Coping Skills for Drug and Alcohol Use*, especially if you are unfamiliar or feeling strange using certain “jargon” while role playing with Veteran.
  - Select a group member with a background of being approached by drug dealers to take your place in the role play.
  - Choose someone you think would be a great “confederate.”

# Examples of Modified Social Skills

## “Offering an Alternative to Using Drugs and Alcohol”

Step 1. Look at the person. Make eye contact.

Step 2. Use a firm voice and tell the person that you don't want to use drugs or alcohol.

Step 3. Give the person a reason why you do not want to use.

Step 4. Suggest another activity. If the person has drugs or alcohol with him or her, leave the situation.

# Examples of Modified Social Skills

- Involve group members to role play with the Veteran practicing the skill.
  - It can be helpful when teaching the *Coping Skills for Drug and Alcohol Use*, especially if you are unfamiliar or feeling strange using certain “jargon” while role playing with Veteran.
  - Makes the role play more authentic!

# Modifying Social Skills Training

- Think about additional special considerations when teaching a skill.
  - “Giving Compliments” – Discuss using appropriate language given the situation and people they are giving compliments to.
- Modify the name of the skill being taught
  - “Letting someone know that you feel **unsafe**” vs. “Letting someone know that you feel **uncomfortable**”
  - “Asking someone **for a date**” vs. “Asking someone **to go out for an outing**”

# Modifying Social Skills Training

## Linguistic Factors:

- Recruit a bilingual group co-leader.
- Translate materials or spontaneously translate the group session.
- Model the skill in the preferred language of group members.
- Have group members role play in the language they are most comfortable conversing/using.



## Examples from clinicians in the field

What sociocultural or linguistic issues have you encountered when implementing SST?

How did you enhance your understanding of sociocultural factors that may affect the social skills you're teaching?

What types of sociocultural and linguistic modifications did you make to SST?

# Resources

## SST Manual (Bellack, et al, 2004)

- Chapter 6 – Using Curricula for SST Groups
- Chapter 7 – Tailoring Skills for Individual Needs

## SST Forms & Handouts in Spanish

- VISN 5 MIRECC Website - VA Social Skills Training Program  
[http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/training/social\\_skills.asp](http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/training/social_skills.asp)

# Resources

Social Skills Training for Schizophrenia: A Step-by-Step Guide (Bellack, Mueser, Gingerich, & Agresta, 2004)

Translated:

- Italian – 1<sup>st</sup> edition
- Korean – 1<sup>st</sup> edition
- Japanese – 2<sup>nd</sup> edition
- Chinese – 2<sup>nd</sup> edition