

Social Skills Training for Serious Mental Illness (SST) Quick Guide

Preparing for SST Group Sessions

- ✓ 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 leaders to primary and secondary (if have two leaders); discuss tasks and roles related to primary and secondary group leaders 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. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration website states that "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." Goal setting is an important part of the recovery process and is a core part of SST. Remember that tracking goals is an important part of SST. Refer to your training materials on how to track group member's progress on their goals.

Sociocultural & Linguistic Factors in SST

"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" (p. 98, Bellack et. al, 2004). Effectiveness of SST is related to social, cultural, and linguistic factors. These factors can be integrated throughout the group session sequence (e.g., establishing rationale, setup role plays, etc.).

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 leaders 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
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 Expectations

(with recovery-oriented sample presentation)

- 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

(AFTER THE FIRST SESSION)

INTRODUCTION TO THE SESSION

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

REVIEW OUTSIDE PRACTICE: Reinforce any efforts toward practice! Briefly problem-solve any barriers to practice. Refer to the steps of the skill when reviewing the outside practice.

ASK: Who had an opportunity to use the skill outside of group?

ASK: How did you [each group member] do with using the steps of the skill? When you practiced the skill, did you notice if you modified any of the steps to make it socially acceptable in that situation?

STATE: "Great job!" "Nice work!" for any efforts to use the skill.

NOTE: You may need to repeat the skill if group members struggled with outside practice.

NEW SKILL REVIEW AND PRACTICE

RATIONALE AND HAVE MEMBERS SHARE A RELEVANT EXPERIENCE OR RATIONALE:

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.

ASK: Why is this skill important?

ASK: What can make this skill sometimes difficult to do? In thinking about your backgrounds, values, and relationships, is there anything that may make this skill especially important to practice? Are there any challenges that you can foresee in practicing this skill because of your culture, background, or any social expectations in a group you identify with?

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?

STATE: Considerations about the skill that the group did not state that was listed in the Bellack et al. book curricular skill sheet rationale for the skill (e.g., this skill is also important because...). Summarize the rationale.

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 personal goal for the SST group.

STEPS OF THE SKILL:

Collaboratively, yet briefly, generate a rationale for each step of the skill.

ASK: Who will read the first step? (Have a member read each step of the skill.)

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 may look different based on your community and social expectations.

ASK: How may the steps of the skill be modified depending on your community?

ASK: If group members have any questions about the steps of the skill.

MODEL: Do the model with your co-leader as the role play buddy. Make it brief and relevant to the members' lives.

STATE: What scenario will be used in the model and that the group members should watch you (primary facilitator) do the skill.

Detailed SST Group Session Sequence

(continued)

REVIEW THE MODEL WITH GROUP MEMBERS:

ASK: If you successfully completed each step.

ASK: What the members liked about each step/the role play.

GROUP MEMBER ROLE PLAY: SET UP

ASK: Questions to develop a specific role play scenario before you start (e.g., Have you had to use this skill recently? How can you use this skill to move forward with [your personal SST goal]? Do you have a situation coming up in which you might need to use the skill?).

ASK: Directly about any adaptations or modifications the group member may make (e.g., Are there any changes you think you would make to any steps of the skill based on your culture or background? Related to your culture or background, how would you want to modify the steps of the skill so that you are more effective in that situation?).

STATE: Suggestions for the scenario related to the group member's goals or real-life situations if they cannot come up with an idea. Try to avoid using the scenarios written in the book unless they are relevant to a particular individual.

STATE: The scenario and check the accuracy with the group member before starting the 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.

STATE: Remind the other group members to watch the role play and notice how the group member does the steps of the skill. Make it clear to the group what the scenario is and what the role of the role play buddy is before the role play starts.

GROUP MEMBER ROLE PLAY: SKILL PRACTICE

NOTE: Have each group member do 3 role plays. Each group member should do the same personally relevant scenario for all 3 role plays.

NOTE: Provide a clear beginning and end to each role play.

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

GROUP MEMBER ROLE PLAY: POSITIVE FEEDBACK

NOTE: Be specific! 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 [name of group member] say for that step?

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

STATE: The facilitator should provide specific, positive feedback as well leaving ample opportunity for the group members to provide specific, positive feedback.

GROUP MEMBER ROLE PLAY: SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

NOTE: Make only 1 or 2 specific suggestions for improvement.

ASK: For suggestions from the group on what the group member practicing the skill can do "even better".

Detailed SST Group Session Sequence

(continued)

GROUP MEMBER ROLE PLAY: SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT (continued)

STATE: If no one has any, you come up with one.

NOTE: 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.

END OF SESSION:

OUTSIDE PRACTICE: Help each group member generate specific assignments relevant to their SST goal. Set up an outside practice that is focused on effectiveness by taking into consideration social, cultural, and linguistic factors. Ideally, the members can use the scenario they practiced in group for outside practice.

ASK: Members to write down their practice plan on their outside practice sheet.

NOTE: Make sure you leave adequate time for this through good time management during the group.

STATE: Thank the group members for their presence and participation in SST!

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