

# **SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING**

## ***Initial Individual Session***

# INDIVIDUAL SESSION: OVERVIEW AND GOAL SETTING

Introduce the session by stating something like: “Thank you so much for being here today. In Social Skills Training, we work on developing skills in interacting with others. Developing these skills can help individuals move toward their goals for recovery. Let’s now talk about the agenda for today’s session.”

## Agenda for the Individual Session:

- ☐ Obtain informed consent for audio recording (if audio recording session, this must be done BEFORE start of recording)
- ☐ Please note that the individual session packet is intended as a resource for you as a clinician. You are not expected to nor should you read all the information to the Veteran.
- ☐ Overview
  - Introduction of your group leaders
  - Discuss purpose of the group; how SST is different from other groups
- ☐ Discuss the format of the group (including at home practice review, skill introduction, role plays, feedback, assigning at home practice)
- ☐ Discuss group expectations
- ☐ Use the Recovery Wheel handout to review components of recovery
- ☐ Ask the Veteran questions from the Goal Setting Brief Background Interview if you do not already know the Veteran well.
- ☐ Review broad Quality of Life domains

- ▣ Use goal setting sheet to collaboratively identify one recovery-related goal
- ▣ If participating in the VA-SST Program, complete *Social Skills Training Veteran Outcome Survey: Initial Questionnaire* (See the “Guidelines for Administering the Assessments” for directions.)

## Overview

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.

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 is different from other types of therapy groups. Group members do not sit around and talk about their problems. Instead, members spend group time trying out ways to actually solve their problems. They do this by practicing different skills during the group and then trying out these skills in real-life situations.

## Group Format

Group members practice a new skill through role playing, initially with the group leaders and then with each other. 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 leaders role play the skill with each other. Then the group members get a chance to practice. The group leaders and fellow group members will give feedback about what went well in the role play, and will also give suggestions on how to make the role play even better. Feedback is positive and people usually wind up having a great time!

Group members will also be asked to do at home practice, whereby they will practice the skill outside the group. At the beginning of each session, group members will get the chance to talk about how the at home practice went. Nobody is ever forced to do a role play or to do at home practice if he or she does not feel comfortable.

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. Discussing the material with others will help you improve the skills you learn. It will also be very important to practice the skills you learn at home.

## Group Rules

Group members must be willing to keep an open mind. They must be willing to try new techniques designed to communicate with one another. 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 six rules that group members are expected to follow during the group meetings. Let's review this list together.

1. Stay on the group topic.
2. Only one person may speak at a time.
3. No name-calling or cursing.
4. No criticizing or making fun of each other.
5. No eating or drinking during group.
6. No cell phones on during the class.

Do you have any additional group expectations you would like to add?

## Introduction to the Recovery Framework

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 RECOVERY WHEEL

Here is a picture of something we call the recovery wheel. We are going to use this picture to review all of the most important parts of recovery. In this class, we will be practicing skills to help achieve your recovery goals and live a more satisfying life.



**Let's go around the wheel and review each of these 6 important aspects of recovery.**

- **Hope:** The belief that people can and do overcome obstacles in their lives.
- **Self-Respect:** Learning to accept who you are and believing in yourself again.
- **Empowerment:** The sense that people have the authority to make important decisions in their own lives.
- **Holistic:** Recovery involves many aspects of a person's life, including their mind, body, spirit, and community.
- **Non-Linear:** The lifelong road to recovery is not a straight line. The journey sometimes takes us in unexpected directions. It involves occasional setbacks and growing as a person.
- **Strengths:** Recovery focuses on building your unique strengths, coping abilities, and skills to help you bounce back during hard times so that you are better able to reach your life-goals.

## Optional Goal Setting Brief Background Interview

The Goal Setting Brief Background Interview is on page 16 of this document. If you do not know the Veteran well, or if you think it would be helpful to review some background information in the context of goal setting, this Goal Setting Brief Background Interview can be a helpful tool. Following completion of the Goal Setting Brief Background Interview, you can then move onto working with the Veteran to set goals, which is the focus of the next 3 sections of this Individual Session packet.

## Discussing and Recording Goals

The Veteran's goal for the SST group as well as the steps to achieving the goal are recorded on the Goal Setting Sheet (pages 17-18). The Veteran does not need to set a long-term recovery goal for the group but some clinicians find it's helpful to work with the Veteran to define his or her long-term goal and then to work back to a goal for the SST group. Some Veterans will not be ready to set a goal and/or be able to discuss the steps to achieving the goal at the initial interview. For these Veterans, it is important to schedule a time to follow-up with the Veteran to complete the goal setting process. In helping the Veterans set initial goals for the SST group, be sure to do your best to have the Veteran set a goal that is truly important to the Veteran rather than something that only his or her family or the VA clinicians working with him or her would want.

In the following sections you will find discussion of Quality of Life Domains, and "SMART" [i.e., **S**pecific, **M**anageable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant, **T**ime-Bound—see following "goal setting" section for more information] goals. In interviewing the Veteran do your best to try to classify the goal in a quality of life domain as well as to formulate the goal as a "SMART goal." Be sure to fill out a Goal Setting Sheet (page 17) when interviewing the Veteran. You do not need to read to the Veteran the information in this packet about SMART goals or any of the examples of SMART goals, although excerpting part of the "Goal Setting" section below may be helpful in certain circumstances.

The detailed information is there mainly to help you as the clinician to understand how to formulate SMART goals.

The initial interview is an important tool for building rapport and a therapeutic alliance with the Veteran. **A main goal for this interview as noted is also to identify the Quality of Life Domain that best classifies the goal, to guide the Veteran to define a SMART goal for the SST group, and to break this SMART goal down into manageable steps. These are the items that you will record on the Goal Setting Sheet (pages 17-18).**

## Identify Quality of Life Domains

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.)
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.)
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 increasing exercise or losing weight, or maintaining an appropriate diet for a health condition.)

**Which of these domains do you think might be most important to you right now?** \_\_\_\_\_

## Goal Setting

Now, we are going to set a personal recovery goal. 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 reaching goals, people 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 in the next few months. Small steps lead to bigger goals.

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. The SST group is focused on improving interpersonal skills and relationships. For this reason, it is necessary 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. "**SMART**" goals are

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

- **Measurable:** There should be specific concrete benchmarks set that reflect progress toward the goal and it should be easy to assess whether the goal was accomplished.
- **Achievable:** 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.

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 for the SST group.

There are examples for goals in the 4 Quality of Life Domains discussed above. Those 4 Quality of Life Domains are: 1. Interpersonal relationships, 2. Community Participation and Engagement, 3. Engagement in treatment services, and 4. Physical and Emotional Well-Being.

Example for Improving Interpersonal Relationships:

Long-term Goal: Have a girlfriend.

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 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 job.

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 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 healthy weight loss support network by attending MOVE 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 MOVE weight management group and schedule an appointment.
3. I will ask questions in the MOVE 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 him on multiple occasions.

## ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE GOALS

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.

Examples of other “end of group” goals (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 girlfriend  
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  
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 mommy 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 board and care 1x a day

Play pool or cards 1x a week with someone at my living situation  
Join and participate weekly in the MOVE weight loss program  
Join the PRRC and attend the writer's group and yoga groups weekly

**GOAL SETTING BRIEF BACKGROUND INTERVIEW**  
(THIS SECTION PROVIDES AN OUTLINE FOR A BRIEF BACKGROUND INTERVIEW IF YOU DO NOT ALREADY KNOW THE VETERAN WELL)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Education (highest level completed): \_\_\_\_\_

Current occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

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? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## GOAL SETTING SHEET

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**This form is to be completed by the Veteran and group leader with the group leader acting as facilitator and recording secretary. Group Leader should retain the original and the Veteran should be given a copy.**

*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:*

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

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Date Goal for the SST Group was set: \_\_\_\_\_

Which category best reflects the goal? Even if the goal may overlap categories just do your best to select the most relevant category. 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

**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 Veteran to work on a single goal the entire SST group. However, if the Veteran wants to change his or her goal this is okay. An additional GOAL SETTING SHEET needs to be completed in these cases.)