

Social Skills Training group Conducted on an Inpatient Unit

A How-To Guide

VA Social Skills Training Program

June 17, 2013

Introduction

- SST groups provide benefits for individuals with serious mental illness whether in an out-patient or in-patient setting.
- There are some notable differences in group preparation and leadership between the two settings.
- The following presentation contains some helpful hints for an in-patient setting based on the experiences of other SST group leaders, trainers, and consultants.

Overview

- Factors to consider
- Addressing challenges
- Selecting group members
- Individual sessions
- Selecting curriculum
- Maximizing benefits of intervention
- Successes and challenges of implementing SST in inpatient unit

Factors to Take into Account

1. Possible effects of acute psychiatric symptoms on group participation:
 - a. Positive symptoms
 - b. Negative symptoms
 - c. Adjusting to new medications
 - d. Manic symptoms
 - e. Cognitive problems

Additional Factors

2. The importance of cooperation/active assistance from inpatient staff.
3. A space for group that will provide an opportunity for learning and actively practicing skills without a lot of distraction.
4. A greater likelihood of interruptions on an inpatient ward.
5. Short stays on acute units.

Addressing Challenges

- Promoting SST buy-in from the staff on the unit
 - Staff spend 24/7 with the veterans on the unit. They know who would benefit from group, when the group can be scheduled, and skills that might be helpful.
 - Present SST in such a way to emphasize its potential to improve day-to-day atmosphere on the unit.
 - If the group leader does not work on the unit, try to recruit someone from the unit to co-lead. If one person is not always available, it may be possible for this to be done with staff rotating through the group.

Addressing Challenges

- Keep staff aware of skills being taught and how veterans are responding.
- Staff can be very helpful with homework assignments. Examples: Making a request at the nursing station or giving positive feedback about something that was done for them.
- Use the environment where the veterans are living to obtain scenarios! Make it relevant to their present day-to-day life.

Selecting Group Members

- It is helpful to find a “point person” on the unit who will select 5-6 veterans with SMI to participate.
- Criteria might include the ability to:
 1. interact in a small group
 2. communicate in simple sentences
 3. focus attention for a few minutes without interrupting.
 4. follow simple directions and respond to limits set.

Individual Session

1. Talk to group members prior to actual group to orient to the format and the purpose of the group which is to improve communication skills.
2. MODIFY individual session; keep it simple and short.
3. Discuss goals that they might want to address such as improving communication with family, providers, and others in the community.

Selecting Curriculum

- Many of the veterans on the unit may only be able to attend 1-2 groups prior to being discharged if unit is acute.
- It is probably best to focus on the four basic skills with some other skills in the mix. Some examples that are relevant to in-patient setting: Health Maintenance skills, Conversation skills, and Assertiveness skills.

Selecting Curriculum

- If the stay is longer, other skills (e.g., Communal Living skills) could be attempted.
- As previously mentioned, the staff can be a source of ideas on skills that might benefit group. Ask staff.

Maximizing the Benefit of the Intervention

- May need to shorten group to 30-40 minutes if more suitable to your population.
- Have a small group (4 to 5 members), not a community meeting type group.
- If possible, doing the group twice a week, at least, to increase the opportunities for practice.
- Finding a room in a low traffic area to create a comfortable atmosphere for role playing.

Maximizing the Benefit of the Intervention (continued)

- Emphasize role plays rather than discussion.
- Give brief, clear instruction.
- Check frequently for comprehension
- Assign active roles for veterans who are distracted by symptoms. (reading from the board, giving feedback etc.)

Successes & Challenges

- Examples from clinicians in the field.
- What concerns do you have about SST in an inpatient unit?
- What are your successes & challenges of implementing SST in an inpatient unit?

Resources

- Social Skills Training for Schizophrenia: A Step-by-Step Guide (Bellack, Mueser, Gingerich, & Agresta, 2004)
 - Chapter 7 – Tailoring Skills for Individual Needs
 - Chapter 8 – Troubleshooting: Common Problems & Challenging Clients
 - Chapter 10 – Reducing Relapse by Creating a Supportive Environment