**ROLE PLAY – WHAT’S ITS PURPOSE?**

Role playing is a powerful learning tool that encourages thinking and creativity in a non-threatening setting. Using a role play during a training is a great way to demonstrate “how to do” a particular task. Role-plays can help learners identify problems, share experiences and discuss possible solutions.

Advantages of Role Plays

* Role playing gives the learner a safe, low-stress, no-consequence environment to practice techniques before trying them out in a real situation.
* Allows team members to learn from other highly skilled colleagues by watching and copying techniques and receive real-time feedback on their actions.
* Allows learners to learn from both theory and practice, thus getting a more in-depth understanding of the target skill.

Disadvantages of Role Plays

* Some people feel uncomfortable in role play situations and even dread this part of the training.
* Inconsistent feedback from inexpert members can confuse and limit training growth. Effective roleplay facilitators should make use of highly skilled team members (experts in that field) to give constructive feedback to lower skilled members.
* Role play training takes a significant amount of time — preparation, doing the role play, providing feedback, debrief and review
* Role Plays are often rushed and not given the time it deserves – need to plan ahead and budget enough time.
* Many training sessions fail by having groups that are too large and dilute the amount of learning that could have occurred. Limit your group to 6 people for best results.

.Benefits of Role-Play

1. Builds confidence**:** When you role-play, you can throw any number of situations at learners, which builds confidence in team members that can help them in their day-to-day roles.
2. Helps develop good listening skills**:** Good role-playing requires good listening in addition to understanding the words the other person is saying.
3. Emphasizes paying attention to body language and non-verbal clues.

1. Encourages creative problem-solving skills like using Interest Based Negotiation
2. No matter how outlandish a situation you create in a controlled environment, generally, something even more bizarre is bound to happen in real life.
3. Role-playing will give your attendees the chance to get some experience in handling difficult situations and in developing creative problem-solving skills.

**TYPES OF ROLE PLAY**

1. Demonstration **-** Allows attendees to learn from highly skilled trainers by watching and copying techniques and receive real-time feedback on their actions.

2. Experiential activity and training technique when used with a focus on the topic or theme of your training workshop.

3. Combination of both: after a demonstration, attendees try out their own role play and can practice new skills

For No. 1

* prepare an outline or script for the trainers to follow so that the specific skills are highlighted
* have rehearsals so that the trainers are prepared to follow the general script with some ad lib

For No. 2 & 3, the following time is suggested:

* 5 minutes to introduce the exercise with clear and specific directions
* 10 – 15 minutes for role-play followed by discussion
* 5-10 minutes for final exercise review and debrief

When selecting a role play, it is important to link these to your learner outcomes to ensure you maximize your training time. Once a topic has been selected, you should

next identify the key points to be covered through the role-play and Identify roles.

Role-Play Instructions

* Introduce the exercise and define the result you want to achieve as the result of the role play.
* Set the scene by describing the situation and the roles involved. Role-play situations should be carefully selected and be challenging for participants.
* Ensure that the role players understand the reason for the role play (the why)
* Allow five minutes for role players to prepare for their performance. Observers (other participants) will watch the role-play and will lead the discussion after the role-play has been performed.
* Observers should watch the dynamics of the situation, how the role-players attitudes and feelings change, and how they deal with difficult moments.
* Provide around five to ten minutes for the role-play to be performed. Once the situation has become sufficiently explored you should stop the role-play.

Questions: To the observers

* What did you notice most about the role-play? Can you identify one thing that stood out?
* Why do you think the role-players behaved the way they did?
* Would you have behaved differently in the same situation?’
* Did you notice any problems? What was the cause of the problems?
* Looking back on the role-play, what solutions would you suggest?

Questions: To the role-players

* How did you feel during the role-play? Did your feelings change? Why was that?
* What was the most difficult part of the role-play and how did you overcome this?
* Reflecting back, is there anything you would have done differently?

Some Role-Playing Tips

* Use actual situations:The best role-play is as realistic as possible.
* If possible - Videotaping the participants in role-playing scenarios is a valuable teaching tool. It allows people to see themselves—*and* their strengths and weaknesses, which can be quite powerful. It also allows them (and you) to “record” improvement as they progress.

**Tips for Vibrant Trainings**

**Supplement to 2015 IACP Trainer Handbook**

**Role Plays and Experiential Exercises**

When planning experiential exercises and role plays, trainers are encouraged to ask the following questions:

WHY?

* What learning objective(s) will this exercise serve? Once you clearly articulate your learning objective, build your exercise/fact pattern around the objective

WHO?

* Some people learn best through observation; others jump right in and start doing things. The watchers favor reflective observation while the doers favor active experimentation.

WHEN?

* Role plays or experiential exercises can be used at many points during a training, for many different reasons. Do you want to encourage your learners out of their heads and into their bodies? Do you want to create frustration and from there, open learners to creativity? Do you want to re-energize the training? Do you want learners to experience what it is like to be a spouse? Answers to these various questions will help trainers schedule the experiential learning components at the time in the training when they will most crystalize or advance learning. Always be mindful of building trust and comfort in the group before introducing harder exercises. But be willing to take risks, as hard exercises build trust.

WHERE?

* Make sure to think through room logistics ahead of any exercises. More than one trainer has torn their hair out when they realize that the room is too loud/small/big/hot/crowded/dark/light!

HOW?

* How will the trainers design the exercise to meet the learning objective? Will the trainers develop one fact pattern to be used during the whole training, with progressively more info added? Will a discrete exercise be best to achieve the learning objective? How long will you run the exercise? Always remember to build in debrief time – both small group and big group (if that serves your learning objectives). Think through whether you will assign learners roles or let them choose roles. Will you have observers? What role will the observers play? Will trainers provide coaching/intervention during the role play?

WHAT?

* There are infinite varieties of experiential learning exercises. Below are a few ideas (more details in the appendix):
* Initial interview:
  + Demonstrate lawyer as gladiator and lawyer as advisor in two different fishbowls in which client is interviewed. Group debrief on what it means to be a zealous advocate.
* One on one or small group sharing about why

**Tip: Role playing the initial CP process**

* Handout – fictionalized case example about the new clients
* Depending on the size of the group, it may be useful to pre-assign roles in each of the role play sequences, so that each participant has ample experience both as the professional and as the client
* Role playing only makes sense after the participants have clearly understood the paradigm shift pertaining to their professional role in being CLP practitioners
* If there are enough participants, it might also be useful to have one person observe the role-play and participate in the debriefings from a neutral perspective
* Each role play should focus on clarifying expectations and wishes between professionals and clients and among the professionals of how they wish to work together
* Each role play sequence should be debriefed both in the small group as well as in the whole group of course participants

**Tip: Experiential identification with the emotional situation of people going through separation and divorce**

* Using an effective video or text, to present a case example or two with an emphasis on the emotional perspective and its impact on the thinking and decision-making capabilities of those involved
* Once trust and a certain comfort level has been established in the group, one possibility is to do a partner activity in which the group is divided into groups of two and that they share their own experience of loss and separation (own experiences or those of relatives, acquaintances or friends)
* Introduction after this sequence of the role of the mental health professional

**Tip: Developing awareness of language sensitivity**

* How we communicate can be crucial to the success of the process. Rather than lecturing about this, an activity about how language can be unintentionally insulting or demeaning can be taken from the “Nonviolent Communication” handbook (Marshall Rosenberg) or similar sources to help get the point across
* Nonverbal communication can also be practices in an experiential approach, when there is time

**Tip: Becoming more aware of one’s own stereotypes, prejudices and antipathies about the other professionals in an interdisciplinary team**

* Two of the trainers in the course can tell about their own ideas about each other before they began working together and getting to know each other more fully before breaking the group down into the professional groups present and encouraging each group to reflect on an collect their own ideas about each other – can be both illuminating and humorous

**Tip: Becoming more self-aware of one’s own easily-triggered reactions to certain situations/people/words**

* Trigger exercise (borrowed from Rita Pollak). Altogether a half hour activity. First a self-reflection then filling out form. Choosing a partner and spending about five minutes each telling each other about their observations. The last few minutes about what they have learned and hope not to repeat in the future, if possible.