Tip Sheet for Facilitating Role Plays

Generating Topics for the Role Play: Use relevant scenarios generated by the group. For example, if practicing confrontation, brainstorm situations in which it would be useful to confront the client. If practicing listening for feelings, brainstorm situations where the client would be upset, frustrated, etc.

Setting Up the Role Play: In most cases, you'll need to come up with a scenario first so the case manager will have the client’s strengths, miseries and goals to work with. You can ask the class to brainstorm details about a hypothetical client or ask the persons doing the role playing to make up the scenario. Write the details up on a chart pack so everyone can see them. You can also create a 7823 or use a copy of a 7823 with identifying information removed. Come up with fake names for the characters in the role play to reduce the association of the volunteers with their roles. It’s helpful to have the Karpman Triangle-Healthy Boundary or Dr Ford Helping-Abandoning-Empowering model posted and mention that you may be asking the group to notice what roles the case manager and client take.

Getting Volunteers in Advance: Find out if anyone in your group is good at role play or at least willing to take a turn. Getting a volunteer in advance can get things started, and later others may join in. If you have a specific role play in mind, you can always do a run through in advance, so your volunteers have a better idea of what you are looking for and what role you want them to take. If you have two volunteers for the role play, you can be the facilitator. If you only have one, you may have to role play as well as facilitate.

Explaining the Process to the Group: Several role play techniques can help get the entire class involved. Explain that at anytime whoever is role playing the case manager or the client can call a time out and ask for and receive help from the other class participants. It can be helpful if there is also a person who acts as facilitator of the role play and can solicit input from the rest of the group when a role play participant requests help. The facilitator can also call a time out and ask the participants questions about what is going on. For example, the facilitator may call a time out and ask the group what strategy the case manager is using and whether they think it is working, who of the case manager or client is doing the most work, what types of questions the case manager is asking or whether the case manager or client is falling into any of the roles out of the Karpman Triangle/Healthy Boundary or Dr Ford Helping/Abandoning/Empowering model.

Remind the person playing the client not to make it too easy but also not to role play the most difficult client to work with. Ideally the person role playing the client provides a realistic level of challenge, but eventually allows the case worker to have some success.
Let the group know that as facilitator, you may call a time out to check in with the group about whether they think the person role playing the client is being too hard or too easy or to give direction to the person role playing the client, e.g., to play more of the victim, continually say yes-but or take the interview off topic, etc.

**Modeling the process and encouraging the group to participate:** Be willing to participate in the role play by taking the case manager or client role and/or act as facilitator of the role play. If you initially role play the case manager, ask for frequent time outs to ask the group for help to model the process. If some people haven’t volunteered any ideas, ask those who haven’t talked for their suggestions. For participants who have a lot of opinions or ideas to volunteer, ask if they’d be willing to take a turn being the client or caseworker to demonstrate what they are suggesting. It’s possible for several people to take turns playing the same client or case manager, so that no one has to be in the spotlight for long. If a participant has a particular client situation they would like role played, ask if they’d consider role playing the client. To lighten things up or provide some comic relief during the process, suggest role playing the wrong way to do it.

**Creating a learning environment:** Encourage participants to come up with several possible responses for the case manager to make to the client and discuss the options generated, e.g., do they think a particular strategy is worth trying/why or why not, how do they think the client will respond to the approach, how would they respond if they were the client, etc. When someone volunteers a response that may seem inappropriate, ask the group for their thoughts and allow the group time to share their perspective. Acknowledge the learning process and that it’s natural for us to fall back into old patterns such as judgmental, helping or directive roles. If a participant says they don’t use Dr Ford skills because the way they do things already works for them, ask them for what they would say to the client and then ask the group for their thoughts. Acknowledge that we all have personal styles and preferences which we tend to be comfortable with, but it’s still to our advantage to expand our tool set as no tool works in every situation. Encourage and acknowledge as well as challenge to build an environment where it’s safe to practice, experiment with responses, make mistakes, help each other and learn as a result of the process.

**Option:** In order to have successful small group role plays, you’ll need at least two people in each small group willing to role play. If this is the case, give the small groups 3-5 minutes for scenario creation, then 5 or so minutes for their role play, and another 3-5 minutes to debrief in small groups what went well and what they might do differently. Afterwards allow time for the small groups to each share what they learned with the large group. Groups of four can consist of one person playing case manager, one person playing client, one acting as facilitator, and one as observer. It’s possible to later rotate roles, if there are more than 2 people in each small group willing to role play. Sometimes role playing in small groups can be negotiated if there are two people willing to pair up to role play the client or the case manager.