

CLINICAL TIP

Social Skills Training

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Social skills training can be used in a variety of clinical settings and is a useful tool for clinicians to have in their toolbox. Social skills are

listed as a component of 121 evidence based practices listed on SAMSHA's registry of evidence based programs and practices. These practices are diverse and include a wide range of clinical issues such as: schizophrenia, autism, families, substance use, depression, and anxiety.

Background

Social skills are the behaviors people use when communicating or interacting with one another.

- Communication with others includes not only the content of a conversation, but the way in which it is communicated.
- Problems with social skills can include difficulty with appropriate eye contact, facial expressions, and tone of voice.
- Problems with social skills can contribute to difficulty engaging in the community resulting in a poorer quality of life.
- Social skills training can benefit individuals with mental illness and substance use disorders by providing opportunities to practice appropriate social skills in support of their recovery and wellbeing.

The Steps of Social Skills Training

Step 1. Rationale

Provide reasons why it is important for your client to learn the skill.

Step 2. Steps

Break the skill down into manageable steps.

Step 3. Demonstration

Modeling the skill to your client.

Step 4. Role Play

Encourage your client to participate in a role-play using the skill. In groups, clients can role-play with each other.

Step 5. Feedback

Talk with your client about how it went. Be sure to include praise and suggestions for improvement.

Step 6. Practice

Encourage your client to practice the skill outside of the session in real-life situations.

Sample Skill: Listening to Others

The following is an example using the 6 steps of social skills training. In this case, an individual seeks to improve her relationship with her mother and the skill she and her counselor have chosen to work on is listening. It may benefit you take a moment to imagine what this might look like in a session with a client.



Step 1: *“How might it be helpful for you to improve your listening skills?” or “It may help your relationship with your mother if you are better able to listen to her concerns.”*

Step 2: *“Sometimes it helps to take a deep breath or two to begin.” And/or “active listening includes making eye contact, not interrupting, and repeating back what you hear.” and/or “How would you know if someone is listening to you?”*

Step 3: *“Let me show you how I listen to others. Why don’t you let me know how I follow the steps of active listening.” And/or “Notice how I follow the steps and reflect back to you what I hear you saying, without interrupting.”*

Step 4: *“Now let’s think about how you might use active listening with your mom. You can practice active listening steps with me.” Or “We can try this together. First, you tell me what happened to you last week, and I will listen, then we can switch.”*

Step 5: *“What went well with that practice?” and “Is there anything you (or I) could have done better?”*

Step 6: *“How can you use this in the next week or with your mom?” and “Who can you ask to practice with you over the weekend?”*

Some Suggested Social Skills Topics

- Expressing positive feelings
- Expressing unpleasant feelings
- Making and refusing requests
- Making and responding to complaints
- Asking for help or information
- Responding to unwanted advice
- Starting a conversation
- Drug or alcohol refusal
- Disagreeing with someone
- Apologizing to someone
- Ending a conversation
- Giving complements
- Listening to others



REFERENCES

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