

Problem Solving Conversation Role Plays – Facilitator Instructions & Resource Materials

Importance of Role Playing

Role plays allow participants to apply new technical knowledge and skills in situations that simulate those they encounter in real-life situations and facilitate transfer of learning to improve performance. Role plays require participants to react to situations in the moment when applying technical information and skills they have learned. Role plays help facilitate transfer of learning by giving participants opportunities to:

- Practice in a safe, non-threatening environment where it is permissible to make mistakes
- Work in small groups and observe the facilitator or an experienced participant demonstrate the task/skill, which helps participants to be comfortable trying out new approaches
- Become confident using job aids and tools to facilitate performance of tasks/skills
- Receive targeted feedback and support after each role-play; immediate feedback is crucial for participants to achieve a high level of proficiency and attain performance expectations

Preparing the Activity

- 1. Read the role-play scenario, character descriptions and skills checklist.** Carefully review the details of the scenario and the character descriptions for the *Diversion Staff Person who will lead the problem-solving conversation and the person(s) who have come seeking shelter*. Become familiar with the key issues being addressed in the scenario.
- 2. Adapt the activity to make it relevant** (or create a new scenario, character descriptions and skills checklist to match your objectives). If necessary, adapt the role play scenario, character descriptions and checklist to make them more consistent with the situations that participants are likely to encounter (e.g., type of organizations, cultural practices). For example, if most of the participants work in a rural community, the scenario should reflect the cultural practices and priorities of the population.
- 3. Familiarize yourself with relevant tools and aids.** Participants will be practicing using the 6 Steps for Conducting an Effective Problem-Solving Conversation Guide, as well as handouts related to Active Listening skills and Strengths Based Questions, ensure that the tools reflect the behaviors that you want them to practice.

4. **Anticipate and know how to address issues.** Study the relevant information (e.g., Infographics, handouts) so that you are ready to address issues related to the situation depicted in the role play that participants might raise during the activity.
5. **Decide how you will introduce and use the role plays.** If it is the first time that the participants are taking part in this type of role-playing activity, conduct a demonstration so that they become familiar with the expectations related to the roles and support materials. Practice and prepare other facilitators (or participant volunteers) to take on the role of diversion staff person/outreach staff, person seeking shelter/homeless and an *observer* during the demonstration to provide a suitable demonstration. Also practice explaining how to conduct the role plays.
6. **Prepare copies of resources.** Make copies of the 6 Steps for Conducting an Effective Problem-Solving Conversation Guide, the Art of Active Listening, and 50 Strengths Based Questions. Note: participants should receive a separate copy of the entire Facilitating Role Plays Handout so that they will have it for reference after the training.

Conducting the activity

1. **Introduce the activity using the slide that outlines the role-play instructions.** Emphasize that role-playing provides participants with an opportunity to apply their new knowledge, skills, and tools in situations that simulate actual interactions with stakeholders.
2. **Identify specific learning objectives.** Describe the objectives that are associated with the role-play activity. For example: *Participants will demonstrate their ability to actively listen, paraphrase, practice open body language.*
3. **Ask participants to break into groups of four or five.** Direct the members of each group to choose who will play the role of the *Diversion/Outreach Staff person and person seeking shelter/experiencing homelessness*. Remind the groups that during the training workshop (or outside the workshop if time is limited) each participant should be given the opportunity to play/practice the roles. Distribute copies of the instructions for the diversion staff person/outreach staff, person seeking shelter/experiencing homelessness and an *observer*. Review the expectations for each role with the participants.
4. **Provide a demonstration.** In addition to showing how the activity is conducted, the demonstration will help participants feel more comfortable trying out new approaches. Prepare for the brief demonstration as suggested in item 5 above.
5. **Distribute role-play materials to the small groups/participants taking on the Diversion Staff person, person seeking shelter, and observer roles.** Give each participant a copy of the scenario information sheet that includes a description of their character, so they can respond “in character” during the role play. Give the “observer” a role play observation checklist. To maintain spontaneity of the interactions during the role play, ask the participants not to discuss the details of their roles prior to the role play.
6. **Give the groups 15 minutes to conduct the role play.** Circulate among the groups to answer any questions that may arise and provide guidance as needed.
7. **Instruct each group to discuss the role play.** After the small groups have finished with the role play, ask the groups to take five minutes to talk about what happened during the role play from the



perspective of the Diversion/Outreach Staff person (self-assessment), the persons seeking shelter/experiencing homelessness (personal satisfaction with the interaction, sense of engagement), and the observer (objective assessment using the Role Play Observation Checklist). The groups should discuss the following questions among themselves.

- What did the Diversion/Outreach Staff person do in this situation that was most effective?
- What might the Diversion/Outreach person consider doing differently?
- Did the Diversion/Outreach person follow the steps and meet the standards for the items included on the Role Play Observation Checklist?

Post a prepared flip chart of the discussion questions where each small group can see it or display the PowerPoint slide that shows the questions. Encourage participants to provide constructive criticism during their discussions.

- 8. Rotate roles and substitute new role plays.** If time permits, participants should rotate roles within their small groups. If the small groups are each working on different role plays, the groups can pass their role play materials to the next group. Ideally each small group member will have an opportunity to play the role of the Diversion/Outreach Staff person. To keep participants engaged in the activity, do not practice more than two roles plays in a row.
- 9. Process the activity.** After the groups have completed one (or two) rounds of role plays, conduct a discussion in the large group using the following questions:

While playing the role of the Diversion/Outreach Staff Person

- How did it feel to integrate new skills such as active listening, paraphrasing, asking open-ended, strengths-based question into your interaction with the person seeking shelter?
- What worked well? What still feels awkward and requires more practice?
- What did you think about the pacing/length of the interaction?
- Did the person seeking shelter/experiencing homelessness raise issues or questions that you did not know how to answer or didn't know how to follow-up on?

While playing the role of a person seeking shelter/experiencing homelessness

- Did the Diversion/Outreach Staff person adequately address your reason for seeking shelter/experiencing homelessness? Resolve other issues/concerns raised during the meeting?
- Were you able to understand and use the information the Diversion/Outreach Staff person provided?
- Were you comfortable answering and asking questions?
- After being a person who seeks shelter/ experiencing homelessness what changes would you make when you roleplay the Diversion/Outreach Staff person?

While playing the role of the observer:

- What was it like using the checklist? Do you feel it helped with the process of both knowing what to observe and organizing your feedback to share with the Diversion/Outreach Staff person?



The included role plays were developed by [OrgCode Consulting, Inc.](#) and are used with permission.

- Can you share some examples of interesting interactions and creative solutions that you observed in the role plays?



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Scenario and General Instructions for Role Plays

Instructions: *Distribute the descriptions to the participants playing the various roles.*

Case 1: The Broken Shower

Situation: The person seeking shelter is fixated on the fact that the landlord said they would fix the shower but hasn't. As a result, the person decided to withhold all rent. The landlord has evicted.

Diversion Staff Person

Pretend that you are a diversion strategy staff person facilitating a problem-solving conversation with a person who is seeking shelter due to an immediate housing crisis.

Before you begin the role play:

- Read the scenario that describes the problem-solving conversation you will facilitate.
- Review the Role Play Observation Checklist so you are familiar with the skills and behaviors that you are expected to perform during the role play.
- Review other resources, like the *6 Steps for Conducting an Effective Problem-Solving Conversation Infographic*, *Art of Active Listening*, and *50 Strengths Based Questions* handouts that provide guidance related to the task you are going to perform.
- Review the *Guidelines for Giving and Receiving Feedback After Role Plays*

During the role play, apply your prior experience along with the guidance from the training, resources, to facilitate the meeting described in the scenario.



Case 1: The Broken Shower

Situation: The person seeking shelter is fixated on the fact that the landlord said they would fix the shower but hasn't. As a result, the person decided to withhold all rent. The landlord has evicted.

Person Seeking Shelter

Pretend that you are the person seeking shelter and your landlord has evicted you for withholding the rent.

Before you begin the role play:

- Read the scenario that describes your character in the problem-solving conversation and make sure you understand your character's situation.



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Case 1: The Broken Shower

Situation: The person seeking shelter is fixated on the fact that the landlord said they would fix the shower but hasn't. As a result, the person decided to withhold all rent. The landlord has evicted

Observer

Before you begin the role play:

- Review the Role Play Observation Checklist so you are familiar with the skills and behaviors that you are expected to perform during the role play.
- Review the *Guidelines for Giving and Receiving Feedback After Role Plays*

While observing the role play between the diversion staff person and person seeking shelter, remember to:

- Use the observation checklist to note what you observe—tick yes, no or NA if not observed.
- Use the space provided to write more detailed observations about specific issues.
- Be prepared to give feedback to the diversion staff person regarding how well he or she managed the interactions with the person seeking shelter.



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Case 2: Money for drugs... not rent

Situation: The person seeking shelter spent their rent money on opioids rather than rent and now are homeless. They seem fixated on the problems their drug use has caused and their lack of willpower to save money for rent.

Diversion Staff Person

Pretend that you are a diversion strategy staff person facilitating a problem-solving conversation with a person who is seeking shelter due to an immediate housing crisis.

Before you begin the role play:

- Read the scenario that describes the problem-solving conversation you will facilitate.
- Review the Role Play Observation Checklist so you are familiar with the skills and behaviors that you are expected to perform during the role play.
- Review other resources, like the *6 Steps for Conducting an Effective Problem-Solving Conversation Infographic*, *Art of Active Listening*, and *50 Strengths Based Questions* handouts that provide guidance related to the task you are going to perform.
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Person Seeking Shelter

Pretend that you are the person seeking shelter, you spent your money on drugs and are now homeless. You're fixated on the problems drugs have caused for you and how to save money for rent.

Before you begin the role play:

- Read the scenario that describes your character in the problem-solving conversation and make sure you understand your character's situation.



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Case 2: Money for drugs... not rent

Situation: The person seeking shelter spent their rent money on opioids rather than rent and now are homeless. They seem fixated on the problems their drug use has caused and their lack of willpower to save money for rent.

Observer

Before you begin the role play:

- Review the Role Play Observation Checklist so you are familiar with the skills and behaviors that you are expected to perform during the role play.
- Review the *Guidelines for Giving and Receiving Feedback After Role Plays*

While observing the role play between the diversion staff person and person seeking shelter, remember to:

- Use the observation checklist to note what you observe—tick yes, no or NA if not observed.
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- Be prepared to give feedback to the diversion staff person regarding how well he or she managed the interactions with the person seeking shelter.



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Case 3: Stifling Apartment

Situation: The family seeking shelter has two children with special needs and the family has voluntarily vacated their apartment and is seeking shelter because the parents feel it is too stifling of an environment for their children in the apartment.

Diversion Staff Person

Pretend that you are a diversion strategy staff person facilitating a problem-solving conversation with a person who is seeking shelter due to an immediate housing crisis.

Before you begin the role play:

- Read the scenario that describes the problem-solving conversation you will facilitate.
- Review the Role Play Observation Checklist so you are familiar with the skills and behaviors that you are expected to perform during the role play.
- Review other resources, like the *6 Steps for Conducting an Effective Problem-Solving Conversation Infographic*, *Art of Active Listening*, and *50 Strengths Based Questions* handouts that provide guidance related to the task you are going to perform.
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Case 3: Stifling Apartment

Situation: The family seeking shelter has two children with special needs and the family has voluntarily vacated their apartment and is seeking shelter because the parents feel it is too stifling of an environment for their children in the apartment.

Family Seeking Shelter

Pretend that you are the family seeking shelter and you think your apartment is not a good environment for your children.

Before you begin the role play:

- Read the scenario that describes your character in the problem-solving conversation and make sure you understand your character's situation.



Case 3: Stifling Apartment

Situation: The family seeking shelter has two children with special needs and the family has voluntarily vacated their apartment and is seeking shelter because the parents feel it is too stifling of an environment for their children in the apartment.

Observer

Before you begin the role play:

- Review the Role Play Observation Checklist so you are familiar with the skills and behaviors that you are expected to perform during the role play.
- Review the *Guidelines for Giving and Receiving Feedback After Role Plays*

While observing the role play between the diversion staff person and person seeking shelter, remember to:

- Use the observation checklist to note what you observe—tick yes, no or NA if not observed.
- Use the space provided to write more detailed observations about specific issues.
- Be prepared to give feedback to the diversion staff person regarding how well he or she managed the interactions with the person seeking shelter.



Case 4: The Youth and their dogs

Situation: The youth was evicted for getting two dogs when the apartment building has a strict no pets policy. When encountered by outreach, the youth states they will be better off sleeping on the streets and that the dogs will provide all the protection they need.

Outreach Staff Person

Pretend that you are an outreach staff person facilitating a problem-solving conversation with a person who is seeking shelter due to an immediate housing crisis.

Before you begin the role play:

- Read the scenario that describes the problem-solving conversation you will facilitate.
- Review the Role Play Observation Checklist so you are familiar with the skills and behaviors that you are expected to perform during the role play.
- Review other resources, like the *6 Steps for Conducting an Effective Problem-Solving Conversation Infographic*, *Art of Active Listening*, and *50 Strengths Based Questions* handouts that provide guidance related to the task you are going to perform.
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Young Person Experiencing Homelessness

Pretend that you are the youth with your dogs, and you are encountered by outreach staff while out on the street.

Before you begin the role play:

- Read the scenario that describes your character in the problem-solving conversation and make sure you understand your character's situation.



Case 4: The Youth and their dogs

Situation: The youth was evicted for getting two dogs when the apartment building has a strict no pets policy. When encountered by outreach, the youth states they will be better off sleeping on the streets and that the dogs will provide all the protection they need.

Observer

Before you begin the role play:

- Review the Role Play Observation Checklist so you are familiar with the skills and behaviors that you are expected to perform during the role play.
- Review the *Guidelines for Giving and Receiving Feedback After Role Plays*

While observing the role play between the diversion staff person and person seeking shelter, remember to:

- Use the observation checklist to note what you observe—tick yes, no or NA if not observed.
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- Be prepared to give feedback to the diversion staff person regarding how well he or she managed the interactions with the person seeking shelter.



Case 5: Apartment for Extended Family

Situation: The person seeking shelter invited their entire extended family to come and live with them. They don't believe they should have been evicted because these people are family. The only solution they see is you calling the landlord and explaining to them that the big family should be allowed to be housed together.

Diversion Staff Person

Pretend that you are a diversion staff person facilitating a problem-solving conversation with a person who is seeking shelter due to an immediate housing crisis.

Before you begin the role play:

- Read the scenario that describes the problem-solving conversation you will facilitate.
- Review the Role Play Observation Checklist so you are familiar with the skills and behaviors that you are expected to perform during the role play.
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Family Seeking Shelter

Pretend that you invited your extended family to come live with you. You didn't tell the landlord and they are not on the lease. You, along with your family, were evicted.

Before you begin the role play:

- Read the scenario that describes your character in the problem-solving conversation and make sure you understand your character's situation.



Case 5: Apartment for Extended Family

Situation: The person seeking shelter invited their entire extended family to come and live with them. They don't believe they should have been evicted because these people are family. The only solution they see is you calling the landlord and explaining to them that the big family should be allowed to be housed together.

Observer

Before you begin the role play:

- Review the Role Play Observation Checklist so you are familiar with the skills and behaviors that you are expected to perform during the role play.
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While observing the role play between the diversion staff person and person seeking shelter, remember to:

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Role Play Observation Checklist for Diversion Staff – Problem Solving Conversation

	Yes	No	N/A	
Overall: Communicate Effectively				Specific Observations
Creates and maintains a supportive and calm environment
Introduces themselves and clearly explains the purpose of the conversation
Ensures person’s understanding/corrects misunderstandings
Shows respect for and avoids judging the person
Uses simple, clear language
Listens carefully to the person (paraphrases, summarizes, reflects).....			
Active Listening			
Maintains relaxed, friendly, attentive body posture and eye contact
Doesn’t interrupt the person
Questions build on each other to determine options/supports.....			
Uses open-ended and probing questions correctly
Listens carefully to the person (paraphrases, summarizes, reflects).....			
Does not take notes
Strengths and Supports Exploration			
Explores past housing and income history
Explores what things were like when in a better situation
Explores possible supports such as family, friends, etc.
Asks person what their ideas are for where they might go besides shelter.....			
Exploring Solutions			
Tests how realistic a possible solution is
Explores whether proposed solutions are safe/appropriate
			
			
			
			



Guidelines for Giving and Receiving Feedback After Role Plays

Ground Rules for GIVING Feedback

- Offer praise before sharing constructive criticism.
- Offer feedback using the first person—for example, “I think,” “I saw,” “I feel,” “I noticed.”
- Be brief in your comments.
- Direct comments toward behaviors over which the person has control and can change.
- Offer constructive criticism by offering ideas for improvement.
- Criticize the performance not the performer.
- Describe what you saw and heard but avoid making judgments.

Constructive feedback: “You were very thorough and seemed to cover all of the important steps. When you asked the person playing the role of [Name of Character] if s/he had any questions, however, I noticed that you were writing in your notepad and not looking at her/him. Perhaps if you stopped what you were doing and made eye contact with him/her, s/he would feel more comfortable asking questions.”

Unconstructive feedback: “You ignored [Name of Character] because you were too focused on writing on your notepad. You asked, but you didn’t seem to even care if s/he had any questions. Also, your voice is too deep and intimidating.”

Ground Rules for RECEIVING Feedback

- Ask for specific and descriptive feedback.
- Ask clarifying questions to understand the feedback.
- Accept feedback. Do not defend or justify behavior.
- Listen to the feedback and thank the observer for sharing their perspectives.
- Reflect on the feedback and use relevant feedback as information to improve your performance.

Adapted from: Effective Training in Reproductive Health: Course Design and Delivery, IPAS 2003.



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