

## How to Teach Behavioral Skills Using Role-Plays

(Portions adapted from: Goldstein, Arnold, P., Glick, B., Gibbs, J. 1998. *Aggression Replacement Training Revised Edition: A Comprehensive Intervention for Aggressive Youth*. Research Press, Champaign, Illinois)

### The “role” of role-plays:

- Why is role-playing important? It helps to gain insight into one’s self and enable clients to practice new skills in unfamiliar situations while receiving the support and insight of a therapist.
- Role-plays are not mental rehearsals or discussions. They require the actual acting out of a situation and account for the thoughts, feelings and decisions that are made during the role-play. Without truly acting out the situation, the client will not be able to practice learning new skills or gaining insight about their reactions to situations in the moment.
- Cognitive rehearsals and discussions of situations do not elicit the same type of interactions or emotions that a well done role-play does.
- Role-plays can also be used with parents in groups or with a facilitator taking on the role of a parent to help facilitate a more realistic situation for the youth.

### Steps to Teaching Behavioral Skills

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1. Define the skill.	5. Conduct the role-play.
2. Model the skill.	6. Provide feedback.
3. Establish skill need.	7. Assign homework.
4. Select a role-player and set up the role-play.	8. Repeat steps 4-7.
	9. Follow-up on skill use.

1. Define the skill (this should be a facilitator(s) led interactive dialog with the youth).
  - a. Tell the youth what the skill is.  
*“Today we will be learning the skill, ‘Stop, Think, and Consider the Consequences’.”*
  - b. Describe each step of the skill. Writing the steps on a white board/flip chart or having other visual learning aids is highly recommended.

“First I ‘stop’ what I am doing. Then I think about what my friend asked me to do. Then I think about what might happen if I do that.”

- c. Define the purpose of the skill. Remember the purpose should be from the youth’s point of view.

*“The reason I use the skill is so that I do not do something I will get in trouble for or regret after.” Then ask the youth, “Why do you think it is important to use this skill?”*

## 2. Model the Skill

- a. Ensure the youth are attentive and engaged before proceeding.

*“Watch and listen carefully to how I use the skill.”*

- b. Perform the skill in a clear and detailed manner.

- c. DO NOT simply “talk about” a situation, ACT THE SKILL OUT while speaking aloud the steps and reasoning you are following.

*Here is an example using two facilitators:*

*Facilitator 1: “Jimmy, do you want to... [describe an appropriate situation that is relevant to the youth].”*

*Facilitator 2: “I’m going to use the skill ‘Stop, Think, and Consider the Consequences’ because my friend wants me to do something bad with him and I need to ‘stop and think’ before I do something I will get in trouble for.” Facilitator 2 begins roleplaying “Hum... I think I might get into trouble if I do that. I should use my stop, think, and consider the consequences skill. So, I need to stop and not answer him right away. I need to think about what he just asked me, he just asked me... Then I need to think about what might happen, if I go with him...”*

- d. The skill should be repeated so the youth can see how other situations can be applied.

*“I might also use that skill when my mom yells at me and that makes me mad, but I need to stop and think so I don’t yell back at her and get into trouble.” Model an additional “situations” when the skill can be used.*

- e. No irrelevant detail should be given.
- f. Inappropriate behaviors should NOT be modeled.
- g. Ask the youth to describe what they saw.

*“What did you see me do?”*

## 3. Establish skill need.

- a. Give several concrete examples of when the skill might be used.
- b. Ask each youth to identify situations when the skill would be useful for them.

ALL youth should be asked when they would need to use the skill. Have them think of multiple situations and give detailed, concrete examples.

4. Role-play
  - Every youth should role-play at least once for each skill
  - a. Pick a youth to act out the role-play with a co-facilitator.
    - Other youth can also be used as co-actors if more persons are needed
  - b. Have the youth describe the situation in which they would use the skill and describe the role of the co-actor.
  - c. Remind the youth to use the behavioral steps and stay in character.
  - d. Begin the role-play
    - The facilitator (preferably the non-co-acting facilitator) can help coach the youth through the steps if necessary.
    - Verbally coach and point to the skill steps on the board.
  - e. Do not allow the youth to role-play inappropriate behaviors.
  - f. If the youth needs assistance, the facilitator and the youth can switch roles with the facilitator modeling how to use the skill. Then the youth should attempt the role-play again.
  - g. Have the youth continue to role-play the skill until they can perform the skill with no coaching.
5. Provide feedback and reinforcement.
  - a. Feedback should point out be specific aspects of the role-play, not general comments. (*"You really thought through all of the consequences..." Do NOT say "That was good."*)
  - b. Provide positive reinforcement after the youth has followed the correct steps.
  - c. Provide reinforcement in an amount equivalent to level quality of the role-play.
  - d. Do not provide reinforcement for role-plays that depart significant from the steps of the skills.
6. Assign homework.
  - a. After each role-play assign homework to each youth. Have the youth name a specific situation and person they use the skill with.
  - b. Encourage the youth to use the skill in increasingly difficult situations.
7. Repeat steps 4 through 7 with EACH youth.
  - a. Each youth should role-play the skill (with their own situation).
8. Follow-up on skill use.
  - a. The following group facilitators should remind youth what skill they learned last group. (*"Do you all remember we learned the skill... last week?" or "What skill did we learn last week."*)

- b. Remind youth of the steps to the skills (use of visual aid is recommended).  
*“Who remembers the first step... second step... third step...” Write the skill steps on the board.*
- c. Each youth should report on a situation when they used the skill.
- d. Youth should be encouraged to use the skills in increasingly difficult situations.
- e. In future groups the facilitator should remind the youth of the past skills they have used and ask how the youth have used the skills.

#### References

Goldstein,A., Glick, B & Gibbs, J. (1998). *Aggression Replacement Training Revised Edition: A Comprehensive Intervention for Aggressive Youth*. Research Press: Champaign.

Spiegler, M. & Guebremont, D. (2003). *Contemporary Behavior Therapy*. Wadsworth: Belmont.