



Guidelines for Facilitating Role Plays

Role plays provide opportunities to learn and practice skills for conflict resolution. Role play scenarios are open-ended. There is no script, no right or wrong ending. The actors make it up as they go.

Before the role play...

Organize the participants.

Role plays usually are limited to two or three actors. Those who are not actors are observers. Observers should take notes during the role play and be prepared to report their impressions.

Create a positive climate.

Make it clear that there is to be no judging or criticizing of role playing, and that everyone's contribution is valuable.

Establish procedures that set role play apart from “real life.”

Participants may be more comfortable if some formalities are observed. Role play performers can wear special name tags or badges.

During the role play...

Aim for an appropriate length.

Role plays can last from 2-3 minutes to 20 minutes, depending on the skills being practiced and the level of participants' skills and role play experience. Early attempts at role playing usually will be brief. As participants become more skillful and relaxed, they may extend their role plays.

If role players get “stuck,” take a break.

Talk about the action and try to figure out what's going wrong. Sometimes even a slight change can help.

Observers remain detached.

Observers do not act in the role play or talk to the actors. They refrain from commenting or criticizing. They simply watch and take notes on their observations and impressions sheet.

After the role play...

Actors can discuss the role play.

What seemed authentic or unauthentic? What was uncomfortable? What was particularly effective?

Observers can report impressions.

Observers are likely to notice things that the actors are not aware of, such as body language, tone of voice, and pacing.

Follow-up role plays can be done.

Observers and actors can switch jobs; actors can switch roles or try to play the same role in a different way.