Social Skills Training

What is It?
A psychoeducational therapy implemented when someone lacks required social skills

Follows 10 specific steps, which distinguishes it from other types of therapies

Shown to improve functioning and QoL

Social Skills
Refers to abilities that allow one to initiate and maintain positive social relationships with others

- Communication
- Problem-solving
- Decision making
- Self-management
- Peer relations
Social Learning Theory

Developed by Bandura (1969) by building on the work of Skinner (1938, 1953)

Refers to a set of principles concerning the development and learning of social behaviors

Says social behaviors are acquired through a combination of observing others’ actions and consequences of one’s own actions

SST Formats

Most take place in a group setting, where modeling and feedback can come from peers as well as therapist

Individual is usually used as a supplement to group or to prepare someone for a group

Use of significant others or families can often supplement a group and help in generalization

SLT Principles

Each of these principles is heavily used and guides social skills training

Modeling

A person learns a new social skill by watching someone else use that skill

Therapist modeling or peer modeling in SS group
SLT PRINCIPLES

Reinforcement
Consequences following a behavior that increase the likelihood of that behavior occurring again
Positive and negative types can occur in SS training

Shaping
Reinforcing successive steps toward a desired goal
Most SS skills are too complex to teach in a single trial, but they can be broken down and shaped

SLT PRINCIPLES

Overlearning
Repeatedly practicing a skill to the point where it becomes automatic
Not just becoming familiar with a skill, but practicing until it becomes second nature

Generalization
Transferring skills acquired in one setting to another, new setting
Can take place by using homework assignments or by in vivo prompting

STEPS OF SST

1. Establish a rationale
   Gives the learning of the skill meaning
   Can come from the therapist or clients
   Usually a mixture of the two
   Should be as brief as possible, and repeated back by the clients
2. Discuss the steps of the skill
   Breaks down the skill into smaller steps, allowing for shaping of complex skills
   Should be written out and displayed
   Refer to display when discussing each step

3. Modeling the skill in a role play and reviewing that role play
   Therapist(s) model the skill to assist in observational learning
   Translates abstract steps into concrete actions
   Should be brief and to the point, with high relevance to the clients

Start by asking clients to observe the role play and which steps the therapist uses
Afterwards, immediately review the steps and have them tell you if it was performed
Then, ask clients if therapist was effective and how s/he could improve
**Steps of SST**

4. Engaging client in a role play

   After modeling, immediately engage group members in same role play, then move to a new role play

   Begin with those most likely to be able to do the skill, so others have more chances for observational learning

**Steps of SST**

5. Providing positive feedback

   Even for really bad role plays, give praise for something that person did well

   Can be given from therapist or elicited from the other clients

   No negative or corrective feedback is allowed

**Steps of SST**

6. Provide corrective feedback

   Should be brief, *non-critical*, and as behaviorally specific as possible

   Provided by therapist and other clients, but focus on only one or two critical pieces of the skills
STEPS OF SST

7. Engaging the client in another role play of same situation

Client makes changes based on corrective feedback at the instruction of the therapist

Allows client to practice skill again and improve performance

8. Provide additional feedback

Should include both positive and corrective feedback

Praise improvements for Step 7’s targeted components first, then praise other parts

Can repeat steps 7-8 as needed to insure adequate learning of skill

9. Engaging other clients in role plays and providing feedback

Repeat steps 4-8 with each other client in the group

Try to randomize the order in which clients take turns
**Steps of SST**

10. Assign homework

- Use those skills we learned in the “Homework” section to assign activities to perform
- Make it concrete, doable, and easily tracked
- Review it at the start of next session

**Pacing**

- No hard and fast rules of how long to spend with each skill to be taught
- Before moving to a new skill, consider
  - Have all clients demonstrated some improvement?
  - Are the clients becoming bored with this skill?
  - What is the ability level of the clients?

**Following the Steps**

- Critical to follow the steps in order, as they follow SLT principles to maximize effectiveness of therapy
- Difficult at first, but practice and feedback from supervisor(s) makes perfect
**ADDITIONAL TEACHING STRATEGIES**

Supplementary modeling
- Provided for individual clients during their role plays, when verbal prompts alone don’t cut it

Discrimination modeling
- Highlights a specific component of a skill by modeling it twice: once poorly and once well

**ADDITIONAL TEACHING STRATEGIES**

Coaching
- Use of verbal prompts as needed during role plays to perform specific components of a skill

Prompting
- Use of non-verbal signals to improve a component of a skill
  - Discussed *prior* to role play so that client understands what signals mean

**IMPORTANCE OF GENERALIZATION**

Without generalizing skills from in-session to the real world, therapy is not effective

- Includes maintenance, situational generalization, and response generalization

- These are all crucial to improvement of skills, so transfer training should be paid careful attention
TRANSFER TRAINING

Several strategies facilitate the transfer of skills from therapy to the real world

- Homework
- Involving other people
- Maintaining effects of reinforcement
- Self-management strategies

HOMEWORK

Essential way to establish generalization

- Plan it out concretely
- Use imaginal rehearsal to help prepare for it

*In vivo* practice can give patients extra support provided by therapists or family

INVOLVING OTHER PEOPLE

Family members, friends, coworkers, or other frequently interacted with persons can greatly help in generalization

Educating these people about symptoms and treatment can help them to shape desired behaviors in clients
MAINTAINING REINFORCEMENT

While SLT helps clients gain skills in therapy, operant conditioning keeps it going in the real world

This can be done with token economies, if used on a variable reinforcement schedule

Best ones are natural occurrences, which therapists should highlight if possible

SELF-MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Have clients make and manage their own reinforcement programs if cognitively able

Self-monitoring is similar to A-B-C logs

Self-evaluation makes them critique their own performance

Self-reinforcement can be covert or overt

TYPICAL SST TOPICS

Listening to others
Making requests
Expressing positive feelings
Expressing unpleasant feelings
Conversation skills
Assertiveness training
Conflict management