Facilitating Role Plays

Why use role plays?

Role plays allow trainees to apply new technical knowledge and skills in situations that simulate those they encounter at work, which helps facilitate transfer of learning to the workplace for improved on-the-job performance. Unlike case studies, in which trainees carefully analyze a situation before responding, role plays require trainees to react to situations in the moment when applying technical information and procedures they have learned.

In addition, role plays help facilitate transfer of learning by giving trainees 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 trainee demonstrate the provider role, which helps trainees to be comfortable trying out new approaches
- Become confident using job aids and tools to facilitate performance of work tasks
- Receive targeted feedback and support after each time they role-play a provider; such immediate feedback is crucial for trainees to achieve a high level of proficiency and attain workplace performance expectations

Note: *Many learning activities in the modules involve brief role-playing. These instructions apply to activities involving multiple role plays conducted in small groups of three trainees.*

Preparing for the activity

1. **Read the role-play scenarios.** Carefully review the details on the client and observer information sheets for each role play and become familiar with the key issues. Select the role plays that suit the objectives of your training session and represent situations that are most similar to what trainees will encounter at their workplaces.
2. **Adapt the activity to make it relevant**. If necessary, adapt role plays to make them more consistent with the situations that providers are likely to encounter in their workplace (e.g., type of facility, titles of job aids, cultural practices and names of clients). For example, if most of the trainees work in a hospital, the scenario should reflect this. It is also important to keep the cultural practices of clients in mind. For example, if women tend to come to appointments with their husbands or mothers-in-law, make sure that the scenarios provide for this.
3. **Anticipate and know how to address issues**. Study the relevant technical information in *Family Planning: A Global Handbook for Providers* (CCP and WHO, updated 2011) so that you are ready to address issues that trainees might raise during the role-playing activities. For CHWs, keep explanations simple as well as accurate.
4. **Familiarize yourself with relevant tools and job aids**. Will trainees be practicing using a checklist for screening clients who want to initiate a particular contraceptive method? Will they be working with pages from the counseling tool? Will they share

an informational brochure with a new method user? Be prepared to demonstrate proper use of counseling tools or other job aids.

5. **Decide how you will introduce and use the role plays.** If it is the first time that the trainees are taking part in a multiple role-playing activity, conduct a demonstration so that they become familiar with the expectations related to the roles and support materials. Choose one role play to use for the demonstration. Practice playing the role of the provider and prepare two other facilitators (or trainees) to take on the supporting roles of the client and observer during the demonstration. Also practice explaining how to conduct the role plays. Ensure that there are at least three role play scenarios so that the trainees in a small group will not need to repeat a role play during a round.
6. **Prepare copies of resources.** Make enough copies of the provider, observer, and client instructions and the role play observation checklist for each small group. Ensure that trainees have copies of the counseling tools or job aid(s).

Conducting the activity

1. **Introduce the activity using role-play instructions found on the handout**. Emphasize that role-playing provides trainees with an opportunity to apply their new knowledge, skills, and tools in situations that simulate actual client interactions.
2. **Ask trainees to break into groups of three**. Direct the members of each group to choose who will play the role of client, provider, or observer. Remind the groups that each trainee will play each role during the activity. Distribute copies of the instructions for the client, provider, and observer roles, or create flip charts that describe the general expectations for each role. Review the expectations for each role with the trainees.
3. **Provide a demonstration.** In addition to showing how the activity is conducted, the demonstration will help trainees feel more comfortable trying out new approaches. Prepare for the demonstration as suggested in item 5 above.
4. **Distribute role-play materials to trainees taking on the client and observer roles.** Give each "client" a copy of the scenario information sheet that includes the client description and responses to share with the provider. Give the "observer" a scenario information sheet describing the case-specific issues they should watch for and a role play observation checklist. Ask the clients and observers not to share any information about the role play with the person who is playing the provider, except the client's name, age, and gender.

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 provider (self-assessment), the client (personal satisfaction with the interaction), and the observer (objective assessment using the Role Play Observation Checklist). The groups should discuss the following questions among themselves:

- What was going on between the provider and client?
- What did the provider do in this situation that was effective?
- What might the provider consider doing differently?
- How well did the provider attend to the items on the Role Play Observation Checklist and the case specific observations included in the role play description?

Post a prepared flip chart of the discussion questions where each small group can see it, or display the PowerPoint slide that shows these questions. Encourage trainees to provide constructive criticism during their discussions and to take breaks as needed between role plays.

8. **Rotate roles and substitute new role plays.** Trainees 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.
9. **Process the activity**. After the groups have completed three rounds of role plays (each team member has had an opportunity to play each role once), conduct a discussion in the large group using the following questions:

   While playing the role of the provider:

   - How did it feel to integrate new content, techniques, and job aids into your interaction?
   - What worked well? What still feels awkward and requires more practice?
   - What did you think about the length of the counseling sessions?
   - Did the client raise issues or questions that you did not know how to answer?

While playing the role of the client

- Did the provider adequately address your main reason for coming to the clinic?
- Were you able to understand and use the information the provider gave you?
- Did the provider address all of your concerns?
- Were you comfortable asking questions?
- After being a client, what changes will you make the next time you role-play the provider?

While playing the role of the observer

- Did the provider create a comfortable environment? Did the provider build adequate rapport with his/her client?
- Can you share some examples of interesting interactions and creative solutions that you observed in the role plays?

10. **If desired and time allows, ask the trainees to form new small groups** and complete another set of role plays, using different role-play scenarios and switching roles after the first and second rounds.
11. **After the final round of role-plays (**each team member has had an opportunity to play each role twice)**, repeat the large group discussion.** Use the questions in step 9 to conduct another debriefing with the trainees.
12. **Conclude the activity by reminding trainees of the importance of their interactions with clients.** Counseling is an essential component of FP services. When done well, FP counseling sessions can ensure that providers meet the needs of their clients.