

SOCIAL SKILLS FOR CHALLENGED INMATES

Group Description: The Social Skills for Challenged Inmates group provides inmates with the opportunity to develop new social skills or redevelop skills that have been lost due to events such as incarceration, limited social contact and/or hospitalization.

Many inmates with serious mental illnesses and/or cognitive impairment lack appropriate social skills due to lack of exposure to normal social situations; limited reinforcement of appropriate skills; or limited motivation to interact with others. Social skills serve as a protective factor against exacerbation of symptoms by increasing the ability to recover quickly from setbacks. Strengthening these inmates' social skills may result in reduced vulnerability to further deterioration as well as improved quality of life and improved ability to get their needs met.

Group Objectives:

At the end of this group, participants will be able to:

- Understand how nonverbal signals affect communication
- Start a conversation with someone they do not know
- Enter into an ongoing conversation
- Get their point across
- End a conversation
- Make requests of others
- Make complaints appropriately
- Ask for help from others
- Say no when they need to
- Resolve conflicts without getting into trouble
- Ask for privacy
- Share community space and resources
- Understand and maintain boundaries in relationships
- Use humor to communicate
- Ask for help with medical needs
- Improve personal hygiene and grooming

Group Structure:

Each group module is designed to last for 45 minutes to one hour; however, this length can be modified based on level of functioning of the participants. If the material in a module cannot be covered within one session, the module can be continued in the next session.

It is recommended that a group session is conducted once a week and that group size is limited to ten participants. It is also recommended that the group is "closed" with the participants joining at the beginning of the group and not missing more than two sessions. Consistent group attendance provides a therapeutic environment in which participants become comfortable sharing personal experiences.

An outline for the group leader is provided, which describes the structure and content of each group. Given the target population for the group is inmates compromised by serious mental illness or limited cognitive functioning, the content of the group may have to be slightly modified to account for varying levels of functioning (e.g. actively psychotic). Depending on participants' symptomatology, the group leader may have to be aware of redirecting participants who may have tangential or disorganized thinking, or encourage participants to remain grounded within the group. The target population for this group will likely be lower-functioning than the average

symptomatology, the group leader may have to be aware of redirecting participants who may have tangential or disorganized thinking, or encourage participants to remain grounded within the group. The target population for this group will likely be lower-functioning than the average inmate. To ensure the handouts are interesting and visually stimulating, illustrative pictures and quotes have been included. These can also be used to facilitate discussion during the group and engage the participants.

Each module will begin with a review of the previously assigned homework. Homework will consist of practicing skills learned in the group, or reviewing knowledge provided during group. Activities are integrated into the group in order to allow skill rehearsal and to make the group is interesting and enjoyable for participants.

Behavioral and knowledge pre- and post-tests are completed to permit comparison and assess the effectiveness of group participation in promoting positive treatment outcomes.

The content of the group is as follows:

- Module 1: Introduction and Self Assessment
- Module 2: Basic Communication Skills
- Module 3: Assertiveness Skills
- Module 4: Conflict Resolution Skills
- Module 5: Friendship Skills
- Module 6: Self-Care
- Module 7: Wrap Up and Self Assessment

Materials to Facilitate Group Process

- Handout: Goals of the Group
- Handout: Participation Agreement
- Handout: Self-Assessment

- Handout: Activity: Nonverbal Communication
- Handout: Using Nonverbal Communication
- Handout: Conversational Skills
- Handout: Conversational Skills Homework

- Handout: The Three Styles of Interaction
- Handout: Assertiveness Skills
- Handout: Assertiveness Skills Homework

- Handout: Conflict Resolution Vocabulary
- Handout: Steps to Conflict Resolution
- Handout: Homework - Conflict Resolution Activity

- Handout: Establishing Friendships
- Handout: Boundaries and Self-Disclosure
- Handout: Establishing Friendships Homework

- Handout: Self-Care Tips
- Handout: Activities of Daily Living Homework

- Handout: Self-Assessment Post Group

References:

Bellack, A., Mueser, K., Gingerich, S., & Agresta, J. (2004). Social skills training for schizophrenia a step-by-step guide. New York: The Guilford Press.

Kopelowicz, A., Liberman, R. P., & Zarate (2006). Recent advances in social skills training for schizophrenia. *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, 32, S12-S23.

Korb-Khalsa, K. L., Leutenberg, E. A., & Azok, S. D. (1993). Life management skills II. Wilkes-Barre: Wellness Reproductions & Publishing.