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Resources for Nursing Home Professionals

Role Playing as a Learning Strategy

Role playing is an effective learning method for adult education because it increases learning retention, provides hands-on training, and enables better teamwork and communication. Also, it's fun. Adults learn more when they have fun while learning. This FastFacts describes the benefits of role playing and how to implement a role-playing training session.

Benefits of Role Play Training

- **Role play encourages hands-on training.** Role-play puts staff directly into situations that they will face in the real world. Training becomes hands-on and encourages applications of knowledge more effectively than handouts, presentations, or videotapes. Nursing staff can practice clinical skills, communication strategies, or problem-solving techniques to help them improve resident care, service, and interaction.
- **Enables brainstorming and team building.** When there is a large group watching and participating in the role playing session, everyone can brainstorm ideas to resolve conflicts or give ideas. Role-play exercises also help develop conflict resolution, team efficiency, and trust-building skills.
- **Increases empathy and tolerance.** When employees in a role-play session act as a resident or caregiver, they can see the situation from another vantage point, which will increase their empathy and tolerance.
- **Evaluate new techniques without risk.** One of the biggest benefits of role-play is that there is low-risk of injury to residents. The role-play team can try to solve situations and see the results instantly. There is no need to worry about hurting a resident when doing a bathing role-play scenario or resident transfer scenario. There may also be more than one solution for a situation.
- **Analyzes problems from various perspectives.** An effective role-play session can show various solutions to a problem. The facilitator can present situations from multiple points of view such as a resident, co-worker, or caregiver. Often seeing something from a new perspective leads to a learning opportunity.
- **Increases employees' self confidence.** Participating in role playing and simulation training increases an employee's self-confidence. Because employees will already have gone through the situation in training, they can act more confidently, especially in an emergency. Trainees can also be better emotionally prepared for challenging events
- **Low-cost training.** Role-play training is a fast, inexpensive training method that can be performed almost anywhere, with few training materials or props.

Steps to Implementing a Role Playing Learning Session

1. **Use everyday examples and situations.** Select a situation to teach. The situation should be relevant and similar to situations that students will encounter in their everyday work. Some examples include: caring for agitated residents, assessing residents' needs, dealing with angry family members, caring for a person who is dying, or handling residents' falls.
2. **Summarize the role play situation and clarify the objective.** Have an outline of the situation and know what the outcomes might be. It may help to have a rehearsal meeting to discuss what roles everyone should play. Clearly state the goals of the session.
3. **Choose actors or accept volunteers.** Select actors before the session, but it may be more effective to have volunteers. If there are volunteers, be sure to give them time to understand the scenario and get into their roles.

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4. **Facilitate the role play situation.** Act as a facilitator to jumpstart the session and keep the action moving along. Do not let the action go on too long. Stop the session when momentum begins to slow down especially if an employee gets stuck or gets out of character. Step in for a time out and discuss the action so far. This helps the role players take a breath and get back into character.
5. **Make it exciting and fun.** Participants tend to remember a positive and fun training session. If possible, try to use simple costumes or props. Encourage a good laugh.
6. **Pause or rewind the action.** At a crucial point, pause the action and ask the group questions about what's happening. Some staff tend to want to answer all of the questions so make sure to call on the quiet employees for their input. Also rewind the action to try out another solution and see what happens.
7. **Create an unexpected situation.** Pause the action and create a brand new or unexpected situation. For example, make the role players switch roles, or invite a different employee to replace an existing one. Or you can insert a crisis situation and see how the actors react.
8. **Use team role playing.** If there's a large class, use team role playing where two or more teams act out the same situation. The facilitator can compare the different approaches and lead the class in an open discussion.
9. **When finished, praise group and debrief.** When the role-play is complete, the entire team should discuss what happened and see if there were alternative scenarios possible. Ask the class what aspect of the training could be applied to their actual work.
10. **Ask for feedback and assess performances.** Ask for feedback and get evaluation to see how the group enjoyed the session. Assess both individual and/or team performances. After the session, consider what went well and what didn't work. Think of other role playing situations or improve the existing one for another training session.

References

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One Final Note. The director of staff development or director of education should be well informed of the principles of adult education. The role playing and standard in-services should incorporate these principles. Relying on video tapes to meet the in-service requirements for staff is not an effective educational approach. Send the manager in charge of education to classes if they need training regarding how adults learn. After education sessions and role plays, QI champions should go out on the units with the staff and have them immediately practice what they learned. Finally, the education schedule should be driven by the QI committee and the data they are monitoring.

For further discussion, see *FastFacts: Interactive Teaching Strategies for Staff Development*.

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