

Family Intervention Competencies: competency descriptions

1. NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION WITH THE FAMILY

The helper uses non-verbal communication and active listening skills in the family session.

The helper uses culturally appropriate non-verbal skills to show active listening. The helper sits at a comfortable distance from the family and arranges seating in a non-intimidating and inviting way (e.g. at an angle, not directly opposite the family or behind a desk). The helper maintains an open posture (e.g. shoulders back, arms uncrossed), avoids turning their back to any member, and turns toward the family members speaking. The helper shows interest through attentive gestures like leaning in and brief verbal cues (e.g. ‘uh-huh’, ‘hmm’, or ‘I see’). The helper accepts and allows for silences, giving the family space to process information or emotions. The helper matches the family’s communication style through responsive tone and pacing (e.g. a softer voice with a family whose members speak softly).

SINGLE COMPETENCY ROLE PLAY

Instructions to helper: Your role is to demonstrate non-verbal communication and active listening while facilitating a family session. Pay attention to each family member as they share their feelings and reasons for being here today. The family members will pretend you have already welcomed them and start by explaining why they are here.

Trainer, supervisor or another trained actor should act as the family members for this role play.

Role play features *Family Member 1 describes why the family is seeking help (e.g. We have been arguing a lot lately and are here to see if you could help us.)*

Role play should “stop” once competency has been rated below OR 5 minutes has been reached.

Should *not* do

- Turning back towards any family members
- Using a harsh, sarcastic, or cold tone
- Showing inappropriate facial expressions
- Having inappropriate physical contact

Should do

- Use body language to show interest in all members; sit at appropriate angle
- Make supportive non-verbal motions throughout (e.g. nodding)
- Use culturally appropriate eye contact
- Allow for silences and time for family to complete statements

2. VERBAL COMMUNICATION WITH THE FAMILY

The helper uses verbal communication skills in the family session.

The helper uses verbal communication skills to facilitate open conversation among all family members. They should prioritize open-ended questions to invite detail and clarification (e.g. ‘Would you tell me more about that?’, ‘What happened?’) and use summarizing and reflective statements (re-stating verbalized emotions) to show supportive listening and understanding. Close-ended questions (e.g. yes/no, ‘Are you ready to start?’) are only used when necessary. The helper should use culturally appropriate and familiar language and avoid harsh language or statements. The helper avoids disruptions (e.g. speaking over a member, finishing their sentences). If an interruption is necessary (e.g. to ensure inclusivity), the helper should ask for permission to interrupt before doing so.

SINGLE COMPETENCY ROLE PLAY

Instructions to helper: Your role is to discuss some reasons the family members are here today using your verbal communication skills. Remember to show the family you are engaged and ask questions for clarification and understanding.

Trainer, supervisor, or another trained actor should act as the family members for this role play.

Role play features *Family Member 1 describes reasons why the family seeks help (e.g. “We are frustrated. We keep having the same fights. We need to learn a better way.”)*

Role play should “stop” once competency has been rated below OR 5 minutes has been reached.

Should *not* do

- Judgmental, accusatory, or overly complicated language
- Interrupting without a purpose
- Only using closed-ended questions
- Using culturally or age-inappropriate language

Should do

- Use open-ended questions
- Use summarizing and paraphrasing statements to demonstrate understanding
- Use simple language understandable for all family members
- Use encouragement, clarifying, and probing to gather more detail

3. ADDRESSING CONFIDENTIALITY WITH THE FAMILY

The helper addresses confidentiality at the helper and family levels.

The helper addresses confidentiality by ensuring a private and comfortable space for the family sessions. They explain how information will be kept confidential/private and not shared outside the session (e.g. with community members, other non-participating members) without the family’s permission. The helper clarifies the limits of confidentiality, including when confidentiality may be broken (e.g. harm to self/others, harm from others) and the reporting process in those situations (e.g. when s/he will report to supervisor vs. when s/he will report to authorities). The helper encourages family members not to share session content or discussion outside the session. The helper explains how confidentiality is maintained during separate conversations with individual members (e.g. talks with child/youth apart from parents). The helper adjusts conversation topics in public settings to avoid others overhearing personal information. The helper checks in to ensure each family member fully understands confidentiality and its limitations.

SINGLE COMPETENCY ROLE PLAY

Instructions to helper: We will act as family members in this session. We have already done introductions. Your role is to address confidentiality. Please start by explaining confidentiality and how information is shared.

Trainer, supervisor or another trained actor should act as the family members for this role play.

This role play features *one family member being skeptical, concerned, or dismissive about confidentiality, e.g. “This is a bit formal. We’re a family—we don’t keep secrets,” or “But, if I tell you something private, everyone here will know anyway, right?”*

The role play should “stop” once competency has been rated below OR 5 minutes has been reached.

Should not do

- Neglects explaining confidentiality
- Abuses family's trust / confidentiality
- Conducts session in open, non-private setting

Should do

- Clearly explain confidentiality to family
- Explains times when confidentiality may be broken and chain of communication for reporting
- Encourages family members to keep information confidential
- Discusses what is confidentiality when the helper has conversations with individual family members

4. DEMONSTRATION OF EMPATHY, WARMTH & GENUINENESS WITH THE FAMILY

The helper demonstrates empathy, warmth, and genuineness with the family throughout the session. The helper demonstrates that s/he understands the experiences of the family members in a genuine, sincere manner. The helper should respect each family member's perspectives and try to understand the family's situation, including the emotions they are experiencing. The helper should express warmth in a culturally appropriate way, setting aside their own beliefs, attitudes, and judgments to 'see the world through the family members' eyes.'

SINGLE COMPETENCY ROLE PLAY

Instructions to helper: Your role is to demonstrate empathy, warmth, and genuineness with the family, build rapport, and try to understand their emotions. You may start the role play by making small talk, such as commenting on the weather, and then asking how the family is feeling.

Trainer, supervisor or another trained actor should act as the family members for this role play.

Role play features *small talk with the helper, then when asked how family is feeling or after one minute, one family member describes discomfort with the session, e.g. "I worry about what we're supposed to share today. No one here understands me."*

Role play should "stop" once competency has been rated below OR 5 minutes has been reached.

Should not do

- Judges or dismisses concerns
- Displays inappropriate or fake emotional responses

Should do

- Demonstrates understanding and concern in a sincere manner
- Asks about and respects family members' perspectives and emotions
- Expresses warmth, setting aside own judgments/beliefs

5. EXPLORATION OF FAMILY MEMBERS' THOUGHTS OR FEELINGS

The helper helps family members understand and express individual and other members' thoughts or feelings. The helper promotes each family member's awareness and expression of their own thoughts or feelings and their understanding of what other family members think or feel. The helper effectively summarizes statements and interpretations to explore and normalize feelings. The helper encourages family members to notice what triggers

intense emotions for themselves and for others. The helper reframes problems and statements to reduce blame and demonstrate shared feelings across members. When needed, the helper reminds the family members that multiple valid perspectives can co-exist.

SINGLE COMPETENCY ROLE PLAY

Instructions to helper: You are facilitating a session between two family members. Your role is to help the family members express and understand each other's feelings. Begin by inviting them to share their thoughts and feelings about a recent disagreement or challenge in the family.

Trainer, supervisor or another trained actor should act as the family members for this role play.

Role play features *family member 1* says, "Every week it is the same. I ask how s/he is feeling, and s/he responds, "Not now." It hurts s/he doesn't want to tell me how they feel." *Family member 2* is sharing that it is never good timing.

Role play should "stop" once competency has been rated below OR 5 minutes has been reached.

Should *not* do

- Reinforces negative thoughts and feelings
- Allow family members to invalidate one another's feelings
- Passes judgement on family members' emotions e.g. as wrong or unusual
- Forces someone to share thoughts/feelings

Should do

- Encourages family members to share thoughts and feelings
- Validates emotional responses
- Uses reflective and summarizing statements.
- Help family members understand others' feelings

6. SUPPORT FOR FAMILY'S JOINT UNDERSTANDING AND SHARED GOALS

The helper supports family members to share perspectives, build a joint understanding of the problems, and agree on goals.

Building on the family's strengths, the helper supports all family members in sharing concerns, hopes, or values and collaborates with them to create a joint understanding of their problems and identify goals to work towards. The helper supports collaborative goal setting among the members, invites all to share expectations, and helps the family define a realistic goal within the scope of the intervention. The helper helps the family identify realistic, achievable, and agreeable goals for all members. The helper should clearly explain how the goals fit within the scope or content of the intervention and should not dictate any goals without family input.

SINGLE COMPETENCY ROLE PLAY

Instructions to helper: Your role in this family session is to support a shared understanding of the family's problems and identify goals. Begin by asking the family what they want to address in the session.

Trainer, supervisor or another trained actor should act as the family members for this role play.

Role play features *family member 1* responding to the helper, “I think discipline is why we are here. We need to be more organized and set rules as a family.” *Family member 2* adds, “I don’t think it is only about rules. I want us to feel like we actually enjoy spending time together.”

Role play should “stop” once competency has been rated below OR 5 minutes has been reached.

Should not do

- Dictate goals to the family
- Ignore family strengths
- Give incorrect information about how goals match intervention

Should do

- Ask perspectives on problems and goals of all family members
- Help family identify goals that fit the scope/content of intervention
- Link goals to family’s existing strengths
- Help family come to an agreement on goals

7. SUPPORT FOR FAMILY SOLUTIONS AND PROGRESS ON GOALS

The helper supports the family to find their own solutions and work towards goals.

The helper helps the family generate their own solutions and avoids giving advice. They help family members to identify specific, actionable ways to apply the content of the intervention and work towards their specific goals. The helper reinforces progress, helps the family to notice and track changes, helps the family identify ways to overcome barriers to change, and instills hope that change is possible. If needed, the helper provides relevant, appropriate suggestions consistent with the intervention content and promotes the well-being of all family members. When suggesting solutions or action steps, the helper encourages family members to add their ideas and to lead the action planning process.

SINGLE COMPETENCY ROLE PLAY

Instructions to helper: Your role in this family session is to help the family reflect on their progress towards their goals and help them identify practical solutions to continue working towards reaching those goals. You can start by asking the family for their ideas on how they will meet their goals.

Trainer, supervisor or another trained actor should act as the family members for this role play.

Role play features *family member 1* responding to the helper, “We agreed we’d try to show more respect, but I still feel like we fight all the time, we haven’t changed.” *Family member 2* adds: “Yes, we always fight. I just spend more time at work or outside the house, so I don’t get upset.”

Role play should “stop” once competency has been rated below OR 5 minutes has been reached.

Should not do

- Lecture family
- Give too much direct advice rather than encouraging family to identify own solutions
- Give irrelevant suggestions
- Make negative statements about family’s attempts to solve problems

Should do

- Ask family members for their ideas for solutions and specific behaviors they want to change
- Discuss action planning to implement solutions
- Praise the family’s attempts to implement solutions
- Track progress towards solutions and behavior change
- Provide appropriate suggestions when needed.

8. MANAGEMENT OF FAMILY SESSION PROCESS

The helper effectively manages the session process with the family.

The helper effectively manages the family session and intervention procedures. They set clear expectations, appropriately maintain time and pace, and keep materials organized. The helper balances flexibility by keeping the session focused, using transitions to connect content, and managing distractions or interruptions. The helper clearly explains intervention or session procedures (e.g. scheduling and materials needed), their role, and communication expectations while maintaining professional boundaries. The helper addresses any challenges or misunderstandings related to the process or the helper's role.

SINGLE COMPETENCY ROLE PLAY

Instructions to helper: You are facilitating a session on a topic with the family. We will act as the participants. Begin by welcoming the family members and providing an overview of the plan.

Trainer, supervisor or another trained actor should act as the family members for this role play.

Role play features *Family member 1 looking at the phone, watch, and other distractions while the helper talks. During or after the session plan/overview, Family member 2 says, "This doesn't feel important. I would rather we talk about our argument last night/this morning. Can we do that instead?"*

Role play should "stop" once competency has been rated below OR 5 minutes has been reached.

Should *not* do

- Be unprepared, without a plan and materials
- Rush or move through the session too slowly
- Allow the session to lose focus on the content

Should do

- Follow a structured plan with prepared materials
- Manage time, balancing completing content while remaining flexible to interruptions
- Communicate the session plan with the family
- Make smooth transitions and connections between topics and activities
- Explain the helper role and communication expectations
- Maintain professional boundaries related to contact

9. PARTICIPATION OF FAMILY MEMBERS

The helper encourages appropriate and balanced involvement of all family members.

The helper should address all family members equally, encourage quieter members to contribute, and manage interruptions to ensure everyone is heard. The helper skillfully navigates family dynamics, including roles, hierarchies, and power structures, without reinforcing unhelpful dynamics or patterns (e.g. not allowing members to dominate conversations) or disrespecting relationships. The helper recognizes and attempts to address participation barriers (e.g. ability levels) and appropriately responds to specific or sensitive topics, which may involve speaking with only a subset of family members when needed (e.g. sensitive aspects of couples' relationships).

SINGLE COMPETENCY ROLE PLAY

Instructions to helper: You are facilitating a discussion between two family members. Your role is to encourage balanced participation. Start the discussion by asking how their communication has been going this week.

Trainer, supervisor or another trained actor should function as the family members for this role play.

Role play features *family member 1* responding with frustration (e.g. “The problem is respect. When I speak, I should be listened to, and the conversation ends when I say it ends. And...”). During this, *family member 2* shows hesitation to speak (e.g. fidget, look at the helper anxiously as if also wanting to speak, then look down/avoid eye contact). *Family member 2* only starts sharing if the helper recognizes hesitance and asks them to share.

Role play should “stop” once competency has been rated below OR 5 minutes has been reached.

Should not do

- Excludes some members from discussions
- Excludes or involves family members on inappropriate topics, disregarding family dynamics

Should do

- Facilitates involvement of all family members in sessions
- Considers topic on whether/how to involve different family members in discussions

10. PROMOTION OF COMMUNICATION AMONG FAMILY MEMBERS

The helper promotes communication among family members.

The helper encourages and facilitates family members talking to each other during the session and reinforces effective communication strategies. The helper should ask family members to speak directly to each other and coaches or prompt them to use respectful communication skills. The helper encourages the family to apply communication skills during specific activities and content related to the session or intervention. The helper should praise family members for their efforts to engage with each other. When discussing thoughts and feelings, the helper should ask members to reflect or confirm what they have heard others say (e.g. Circular Questioning) and redirect communication when it is ineffective, such as by reminding members to give one another space to finish sharing. The helper should create a safe and supportive environment where families can practice and strengthen healthy communication patterns.

SINGLE COMPETENCY ROLE PLAY

Instructions to helper: You are facilitating a session between two family members. Your role is to promote effective communication with each other. Begin by inviting them to share their feelings about daily family life.

Trainer, supervisor or another trained actor should act as the family members for this role play.

Role play features *family member 1* responding to the helper, “I do so much for this family, but I feel tired and alone. No one notices all that I do.” *Family member 2* responds, but only to the helper, “That is not true.”

Role play should “stop” once competency has been rated below OR 5 minutes has been reached.

Should not do

- Forces family members to communicate with each other
- Interrupts a family conversation unnecessarily

Should do

- Ask family members to talk to one another during sessions
- Coaches the family to apply communication skills to intervention content

11. NEUTRALITY WITH THE FAMILY

The helper maintains neutrality and demonstrates respect for multiple family members' perspectives.

The helper should ensure all voices are heard and valued by inviting differing points of view, for example, by asking questions (e.g. "What do you think about that? Does anyone see this differently?"). The helper remains neutral and impartial and should not take the side of any family member or show favoritism. The helper demonstrates understanding of different viewpoints among the family members and validates perspectives without judgment (e.g. "So, X sees the situation this way, and Z sees it differently"). To deepen dialogue, the helper should ask questions that help members explore differences and similarities in their perspectives (e.g. "What parts do you agree on? Where do you disagree?").

SINGLE COMPETENCY ROLE PLAY

Instructions to helper: You are facilitating a discussion with a parent/caregiver and child. Your role is to demonstrate neutrality and understand family members' perspectives. Please begin by asking them to share their thoughts on household rules.

Trainer, supervisor or another trained actor should act as the family members for this role play.

Role play features a *child saying, "My chores list never seems fair. I have so much homework because my responsibilities at home keep growing."* The caregiver does not agree and explains why the child has to contribute to doing chores in the house.

Role play should "stop" once competency has been rated below OR 5 minutes has been reached.

Should not do

- Taking sides of one or more family members
- Focusing too much on some members' perspectives over others

Should do

- Eliciting all points of view
- Summarize and validate different points of view

12. RESPECT FOR FAMILY VALUES, BELIEFS & CULTURES

The helper navigates family values and beliefs and does not impose personal beliefs (e.g. cultural, political, religious, and related power structures).

The helper uses neutral language and does not show prejudice. The helper uses expressions, examples, and metaphors that respect the family's values and beliefs when appropriate. When family members express their values or beliefs, including those related to existing hierarchies or power dynamics, the helper acknowledges these are important. The helper avoids reinforcing behaviors/beliefs/power dynamics that ignore or harm any family member and avoids criticism or disrespect. When the helper recognizes that values/beliefs may harm or prevent progress towards goals, they encourage the family to explore and consider change without imposing personal beliefs.

SINGLE COMPETENCY ROLE PLAY

Instructions to helper: You are facilitating a session with a parent/caregiver and child. Your role is to demonstrate consideration of the family's values, culture, and beliefs. Please begin by asking the family about their perspectives on respect.

Trainer, supervisor or another trained actor should act as the family members for this role play.

Role play features *the parent/caregiver speaking first, with judgment, e.g. "Our child is forgetting our ways. S/he prefers foreign styles, her/his phone, and friends outside of our community. It brings shame and is disrespectful to our traditions."*

Role play should "stop" once competency has been rated below OR 5 minutes has been reached.

Should *not* do

- Criticizes values or beliefs of family
- Imposes own beliefs
- Uses potentially harmful cultural examples or lessons
- Reinforces harmful cultural values/beliefs/behaviors

Should do

- Shows respect for family's beliefs and values
- Uses relevant culturally based lessons and examples consistent with family beliefs
- Works to understand family's values and beliefs
- Helps family explore values/beliefs that are harmful or counterproductive

13. MANAGEMENT OF FAMILY CONFLICT IN SESSION

The helper manages and explores family conflict in session and promotes resolution or de-escalation.

The helper tolerates and manages conflict amongst family members when it occurs. The helper remains calm and balances exploring and containing the conflict. If possible, the helper helps the family work through the conflict through effective resolution skills (e.g. communication or coping skills). To do this, the helper uses other areas of competency related to promoting communication, raising awareness of emotions or thoughts, and maintaining neutrality. If exploring and working towards a resolution is not possible, the helper uses de-escalation techniques (e.g. interrupting to redirect the conversation) or, in extreme situations, separates the family members safely.

SINGLE COMPETENCY ROLE PLAY

Instructions to helper: You are facilitating a session where family members share their feelings and/or problems. During this session, two members started arguing. Your role is to manage this conflict and promote resolution as needed. The family members will pretend the session is halfway and will begin with arguments.

Trainer, supervisor or another trained actor should act as the family members for this role play.

Role play features *family member 1, frustrated, loudly voices, "Talking about every little feeling is weak! How can we get work done if we're always sharing our feelings? We should discuss problems privately."* Family member 2, *argumentatively, responds, "Calling it weakness is why no one here knows how to talk to each other! We always yell!"*

Role play should “stop” once competency has been rated below OR 5 minutes has been reached.

Should not do

- Shows anger or agitation during conflict
- Allows conflict to become very intense without actively managing it
- Ignore conflict

Should do

- Remains calm and attentive
- Explores different points of view in the conflict
- Encourages family to use skills to resolve conflict
- De-escalates when needed

14. [RESPONSE TO INDIVIDUAL DISTRESS IN FAMILY SESSIONS](#)

The helper responds to an individual family member’s distress within the family-based session.

The helper recognizes and validates all family members’ feelings of distress. The helper uses and offers family members techniques to manage distress. The helper actively checks in with family members about their emotional state and allows them space and opportunity to process their emotions, either within the family session or individually as appropriate. When an individual family member is distressed, the helper shows empathy (e.g. ‘I can see this is painful for you.’). The helper acknowledges and normalizes any potentially distressing material related to the session content and encourages family members to share and process it throughout or in future sessions.

SINGLE COMPETENCY ROLE PLAY

Instructions to helper: You are facilitating a family session on feelings and/or problems. During sharing, one of the family members becomes visibly distressed. Your role is to acknowledge and respond to this distress. The session is halfway through and will start with one of the family members sharing their feelings and/or problems.

Trainer, supervisor or another trained actor should act as the family members for this role play.

Role play features *family member 1, in a low, soft voice, saying, “When the farm/business failed, it wasn’t only income that we lost. It was our name, our history. That failure haunts us--it separates us.” Family member 2 shows non-verbal signs of distress, e.g. slumping shoulders, looking distant, clenching hands, shaking head rapidly side-to-side.*

Role play should “stop” once competency has been rated below OR 5 minutes has been reached.

Should not do

- Ignore an individual’s distress
- Blame anyone for the distress
- Demonstrate discomfort with the expression of distress

Should do

- Check in with distressed individual
- Validate distress
- Offer ways to cope with the distress in the moment
- Offer ways to minimize negative reactions from other family members

15. [ASSESSMENT & RESPONSE TO SAFETY CONCERNS IN FAMILY SESSIONS](#)

Helper assesses and responds to safety concerns brought up by the family and navigates referrals where necessary. The helper remains attentive to signs of abuse, self-harm, harm to others, and other risks. The helper sensitively asks about risk and/or protective factors and provides appropriate referrals and resources. The helper creates an open environment to discuss and assess safety while recognizing when further assessment within the session or

with the whole family may put someone at risk. With consent, the helper follows up privately with individuals or specific family members as needed. The helper promptly addresses all safety concerns, offers the family practical tools to manage risks and safety concerns, and communicates available emergency resources and support options.

SINGLE COMPETENCY ROLE PLAY

Instructions to helper: You are facilitating a family session on the topic of [e.g. managing stress, big emotions, feelings]. Your role is to guide the discussion and support the family. You may start by asking them what they have been feeling lately or what challenges they have been facing.

Trainer, supervisor or another trained actor should act as the family members for this role play.

Role play features a *family member sharing feelings related to harm to self, others, or from others e.g. "Sometimes I feel like hitting [myself/someone else] when I get really angry" or "Nothing is getting better. I wish I could go to sleep and never wake up" or "I stay alone/in my room as much as possible."*

Role play should "stop" once competency has been rated below OR 5 minutes has been reached.

Should *not* do

- Ignores risk of harm
- Expresses disbelief of the presence of risk
- Assesses individual risk in front of family
- Discourages family members from telling others about the risk

Should do

- Creates a supportive environment for talking about risk of harm
- Pay attention to signs of harm
- Asks about risk and protective factors
- Follow up on suspected risk of harm in a way that is safe
- Offers appropriate referral information and linkage to resources