First Rule of Role Play: Never talk about “role play”! (Instead, “try” “practice” or “rehearse”)

First question: Is this the right exercise to support your learning objectives?
- Types of learning objectives that lend themselves to role play:
  - Learning communication skills (e.g., getting informed consent, disclosing errors)
  - Taking a history (combines clinical and communication skills)
  - Conflict resolution (e.g., talking with a superior, coordinating team on complicated issues)
  - Nonverbal skills (e.g., self presentation, proprioception)
  - Physical coordination of teams (e.g., codes, surgery)

Second question: Is the timing right?
- Is the role play just before or after a major stressor (e.g., exam, OSCE)? If so, is the role play highly relevant and time-critical?
- Do you have to work in a large group? Try for a small group session instead.
- How can you adjust your scenario and activity to the level of learner?
  - How well do the group members know each other and the facilitator?
    - Warm-up activities can build rapport (see below)

Third question: How do I design and write a role play exercise?
- What is the central skill or process, nonverbal or verbal, that you want them to practice?
- Be as limited as necessary in your focus for a single role play (consider your time constraints, skill-level of the learner, skill to be practiced); smallest rehearseable element
- Decide on a warm-up that is right for your role play activity
- Determine how you will debrief—return to the goal: what did you want them to practice? Work with them to connect the dots.
- Provide clear instructions, including time length, in a handout, on board, or projected during the exercise (see example below)
Examples of Easy Warm-up Activities

1. Have participants stand (as they are able) and tell them that as you count to 3 aloud, they should take in a deep breath. Tell them that after “1, 2, 3,” you will say “Release” and they should drop from the waist so that they are bent forward (again, as able) with arms and head hanging. On their own time, they should slowly roll up to a standing position again. This can be done from a sitting position as well.

2. Participants should try to say 4 short, ambiguous statements—I love you, I hate you, I’m sorry, she’s gone—to imply as many different meanings as possible. You can try many different variations, such as: 1) going rapidly around the group on one statement, 2) having one participant say the same statement as many different ways as possible, 3) going around the group but letting participants choose the statement.

3. Everyone holds hands in a circle. One participant begins by using their right hand to squeeze the left hand of the person next to him/her. The second person passes the squeeze to the next, and so on. There will be a delay in responses at first, but soon the squeeze should pass quickly around the room like an electrical current.

For further questions, help, and enthusiasm for theater-based learning:

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