

Concise Guide for Running Communication Skills Session Online using ALOBA

In this document we provide guidance on conducting small group communication skills sessions using ALOBA as a framework. The guide focuses on using Zoom and its accompanying tools for these sessions (similar features are available on several other virtual meeting applications such as Webex, Microsoft teams, Jitsi etc). More detailed guidance is available [here](#).

I. DESIGN AND PREPARATION OF ONLINE COMMUNICATION SESSIONS		
	PRINCIPLES FOR IN PERSON OR ONLINE COMMUNICATION SKILLS SESSION	ONLINE ADAPTATIONS AND TOOLS
Session objectives	Learning objectives help identify the expected outcomes of the session and guide the teaching methods you plan to use	Online learning should ideally be no longer than 2 hours at most to maintain attention. You may need to condense your objectives to just those that can be reasonably achieved using virtual methods.
Supplemental materials		Consider supplemental materials (Documents, PPT slides, video examples) that can be reviewed outside of the sessions to enhance learning. This can either be for learners to review prior to the session or for learners unable to join the session
Session participants and group size	For experiential learning, group size should allow each participant time to learn through practicing and receiving feedback. For example, 5-6 students per session	Online, the larger the group the less engagement and chance for individual practice. Because time needs to be limited consider learner groups no larger than 5-6 . If you usually work with larger groups, then consider dividing your groups and running consecutive sessions.
Accessibility and technology	For in-person groups, make sure all materials (handouts, skills cards) and necessary technology (computer, projector, flipchart/pens, video recording) are available. Test them before session starts.	Consider with what devices your learners (and facilitator and SP) will be connecting to the session. Encourage participants to join by computer rather than phone or tablet to be able to use full Zoom features more easily. Have learners test use of technology including video, microphone, headphones beforehand to allow problem solving prior to session.
Co-facilitators	If using co-facilitators, these persons should discuss ahead of time how they will divide session tasks.	Co-facilitators are especially helpful when teaching online, where one person leads the session and the other monitors such things as waiting room, chat comments, etc. Person with these tasks could even be a learner
Security		See detailed information for security including pre-settings for no private chats in chat function and no recording of session without explicit attendee permission.
Facilitator and simulated patient (SP) training and preparation	Meeting with facilitators and SPs is important to discuss what is expected and questions and especially to practice key steps before a real session. Facilitator(s) and SP should plan to meet at least briefly before a session begins to discuss any questions about the session.	Providing online training for facilitators and SPs in addition to written guides can be important for increasing their skill and confidence in transferring this teaching online. It is recommended that facilitators and SPs meet online at least 15-20 minutes before the students join. This not only helps to identify any potential technical difficulties but also allows time for discussion and answering any questions about the day's learning
Before session starts	Facilitators make sure and review session guide and that room is set up appropriately	Get on Zoom early to make sure audio, video etc is working. Facilitator try to have non-distracting background, be somewhere without distracting noises. Check your video image is clear and you are positioned with light on face, looking directly at the screen.

II. INITIATING A COMMUNICATION SKILLS SESSION			
STEPS	PRINCIPLES FOR IN PERSON OR ONLINE COMMUNICATION SKILLS SESSION	ONLINE ADAPTATIONS AND TOOLS	ZOOM INSTRUCTION LINKS
Introductions and checking in	<p>If new group, everyone (you, learners, SP) introduce themselves.</p> <p>If SP there from beginning, have them introduce themselves out of role</p> <p>Some facilitators recommend a brief check-in such as “<i>How is the week going</i>” or “<i>How is school going</i>” as a way to gain participants full attention.</p>	<p>Introduce yourself. Make sure learners’ names appear on their Zoom profiles. Have learners introduce themselves if not already known to you.</p> <p>Check that all participants can see and hear effectively. During Covid19 in particular, can be helpful to briefly check in with “<i>how are you coping in the current crisis</i>” or <i>How is Covid19 impacting you</i>. This could be done verbally or using the Chat function, where students enter their thoughts.</p> <p>If recording session, inform participants of how it will be used (e.g. shared with students who could not attend) and gain consent.</p>	<p>How to change profile name</p> <p>- can hover over your video tile and right click to see rename option</p> <p>Participants should use gallery view so they can see everyone</p> <p>Using Zoom Chat function</p> <p>How to record a Zoom session</p>
Orientation to session/ground rules	<p>Provide an outline of session objectives and how the session will run (Identify challenges, everyone will practice briefly, get feedback and re-rehearse)</p> <p>Discuss the ground rules for session including confidentiality, respect, participation and the principles of constructive feedback.</p>	<p>Additional ground rules for Zoom sessions:</p> <p>Using headphones will decrease outside noise and echoes</p> <p>Encourage everyone to keep their video on and unmuted – unless otherwise instructed – as this will increase engagement and ability to see student reactions.</p> <p>When they want to contribute, encourage raising of hands (physically or using nonverbal reactions in participants tab in Zoom)</p>	<p>Either at bottom of zoom screen or in participants/chat window can click video on/off and mute/unmute</p> <p>Using the non-verbal reaction tools in Zoom</p>
Beginning session content	<p>Prior to beginning the roleplays it can be useful to engage the group in reflection about the communication topic for the session (e.g. history taking, responding to emotions, etc.).</p> <p>Options for doing this include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learner experience with topic - Anticipated challenges with communication task - Presentation or co-creation of a framework for addressing issue (e.g. SPIKES for bad news telling) 	<p>For online reflection/discussion several tools can be used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pair/Share – break students into smaller groups to discuss issues and then return to large group to share. - Use white board function to write down and save group ideas or framework - Use chat function for learners to write ideas/challenges/etc - Show PPTs with content/framework information - Show a video as a trigger that learners can analyze - Poll learners about their experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting up Breakout rooms • Sharing a whiteboard • Chat function • Sharing your PPT screen sharing • Maximizing video viewing • Using Zoom polling

III. ROLE PLAY SET-UP			
STEPS	PRINCIPLES FOR IN PERSON OR ONLINE COMMUNICATION SKILLS SESSION	ONLINE ADAPTATIONS AND TOOLS	ZOOM INSTRUCTION LINKS
Setting the scene	Describe details of how practice will work including that all will get to practice for (approximate amount of time), have feedback discussion, retry some aspect of what they have done. Remind learner they can “timeout” if needed and otherwise you will stop them when enough to talk about.	Consider having all learners except the one conducting the role play turn off video during roleplay to make it more authentic Acknowledge that especially virtually it may feel less than authentic Clarify if this encounter is meant to simulate an in-person encounter or a telehealth visit	Either at bottom of zoom screen or in participants/chat window can click video on/off and mute/unmute
Case information	Describe patient case: Either facilitator or SP “I have come to clinic to be seen about my foot”. Describe student role: Are they a student interviewing patient or pretending to be a qualified physician?	The facilitator or simulated patient can change the screen name of the ‘patient’ being interviewed to avoid confusion Provide any additional information such as letter for referring GP electronically beforehand or share document on screen	How to change profile name - can hover over your video tile and right click to see rename option screen sharing
Recruiting learners to role play	Can ask for volunteers or pick people based on challenges identified earlier or order in which they are sitting	Same as in person. Can use list on chat function as a way to go through the group in order.	Chat function
Identify learner’s initial agenda	Given the assigned task, for example, start the first few minutes of the interview, ask learner what they want to try and what they might want feedback about	Consider using whiteboard function to write down learner’s agenda	Sharing a whiteboard
Prepare group to watch the encounter	Encourage all learners to take notes on what they observe in terms of effective behaviors and ones they have questions about or could benefit from change Can assign specific observation tasks to learners including those on role player’s agenda and common skills such as non-verbal, questioning style, developing rapport, etc.	To enhance online engagement and participation in feedback, assigning specific observation tasks is particularly helpful to maintain learner engagement during roleplay and subsequent discussion – facilitator should note what task is assigned to each student. If relevant, acknowledge that not all will give feedback every time so as not to overwhelm learner	
Watch the encounter	Take notes during encounter and encourage students to note specific communication behaviors. Watch timing and stop at appropriate moment which may have been decided on ahead of time	Have all but the SP and student role player turn off their videos and mute themselves. Encourage all learners to have their screens in speaker view so that just the simulated patient and role-playing student are on the screen.	Either at bottom of zoom screen or in participants/chat window can click video on/off and mute/unmute Zoom view

IV. FEEDBACK AND RE-REHEARSAL			
STEPS	PRINCIPLES FOR ANY SESSION	ONLINE ADAPTATIONS	ZOOM INSTRUCTION LINKS
Acknowledge learner's feelings	Start by asking learner their feelings about the encounter	Could include how they felt it worked doing it online?	
Refine learner's agenda and desired outcomes	Help learner now that it is done to refine agenda as a way to guide feedback. Question options include: What in particular they would like feedback about? What they did effectively and what they would change? What parts were particularly tricky? What they were trying to accomplish?	Same as in-person	
Feedback and discussion of alternative approaches	In response to learner agenda, options for starting feedback include: - Asking SP first if issues raised were about SP reactions	Have all turn video on and unmute for this portion Encourage turning to SP first for what they noticed and using group in particular for brainstorming other approaches May be particularly important to watch for cues from role player and check in explicitly about how they are feeling about feedback	Either at bottom of zoom screen or in participants/chat window can click video on/off and mute/unmute
Re-rehearsal and feedback	Set time limit on learner choosing some aspect to try again	For brief re-rehearsal ask learner if they prefer videos off or not	
Sequential role play for multiple learners	Using steps described above, another student can either re-start the role play case or the learner-SP encounter can continue from where it stopped with the new learner summarizing to SP what they know so far and then moving from there.	Same as in-person	

V. CLOSING THE SESSION			
STEPS	PRINCIPLES FOR ANY SESSION	ONLINE ADAPTATIONS	ZOOM INSTRUCTION LINKS
Generalizing learning and skills	Add any additional insights from your practice, course objectives, etc Revisit list of challenges if this was generated at beginning of session and discuss any gaps	Add any additional insights including any substantive information on PPT etc Return to white board to review challenges and discuss	Zoom screen sharing Sharing a whiteboard
Take home points	Ask learners to identify one take home point to enhance their retention	Learners can give take home points online either verbally (in round using list in chat function order) or writing in chat	Zoom Chat function
Evaluation	Evaluating sessions can always provide insight into session impact, strengths and areas for improvement	Consider having group complete evaluation – either through polling or embedded link with particular emphasis on what worked and what could be improved with online approach	