

Generic role play on intersectoral collaboration

This role play can therefore easily be adapted to suit your needs, since the roles should be tailored to the judicial system of each country.

Objectives:

To practice trauma-informed, collaborative responses when a survivor is hesitant to testify in a legal process, especially for obtaining a restraining order. Participants will explore professional responsibilities, survivor autonomy, and cross-sector support.

Duration:

- Role play: 15–20 minutes
- Debrief: 20–30 minutes

PARTICIPANTS (4 Roles):

1. Survivor – "Leila"
2. Legal Advocate / Court-Based Social Worker
3. Police Domestic Violence Liaison Officer
4. Prosecutor / Legal Aid Attorney

SCENARIO OVERVIEW

Leila, 31, has endured years of psychological abuse, occasional physical violence, and stalking from her ex-partner, who recently showed up outside her workplace and home again. She has filed police reports, and the domestic violence liaison officer encouraged her to seek a restraining order.

She meets with a legal advocate and a legal aid prosecutor to begin the process. However, once informed that she may need to testify in court, Leila becomes fearful. She worries about retaliation, losing custody of her kids, and not being believed. She begins expressing doubts and considers withdrawing the request.

ROLE DESCRIPTIONS

Leila (DV victim)

- Intelligent, cautious, overwhelmed.
- Has two young children.
- Has been emotionally manipulated to believe no one will help her.
- Terrified of court and retribution.
- Unsure if going through with the restraining order is worth the risk.
- Needs reassurance, safety planning, and control over decisions.

Legal Advocate / Court-Based Social Worker

- Trained in trauma-informed care.
- Your role is to support Leila emotionally and practically.
- You want to empower her, not pressure her.
- You know legal testimony is challenging, but you believe her safety depends on moving forward.
- You're trying to balance realism with hope.

Police DV Liaison Officer

- Familiar with Leila's case history.
- Believes the ex-partner poses a high risk of escalation.
- Wants to protect Leila but may speak in firm, procedural language.
- Has access to evidence like past incident reports, photos, text messages.
- Must not override Leila's autonomy, even if you disagree with her hesitation.

Prosecutor / Legal Aid Attorney

- Explains what's legally required to obtain the restraining order.
- Clarifies that testimony might be necessary, depending on the case strength.
- Balances legal limitations with victim-centred advocacy.
- You must explain realistic outcomes without discouraging Leila.

ROLE PLAY FLOW (Suggested Structure)

- ✓ Initial Scene (All participants in a joint meeting)
- ✓ Legal aid office or court preparation room.
- ✓ Leila expresses initial willingness but begins withdrawing.
- ✓ Escalation
- ✓ Leila hears she may have to testify and becomes emotional.
- ✓ She brings up fear of retaliation, loss of custody, and not being believed.
- ✓ Response from Others
- ✓ Advocate and police try to reassure her and support autonomy.
- ✓ Prosecutor explains her rights and options, including the possibility of protective testimony mechanisms (e.g., testifying via video).
- ✓ Decision Point
- ✓ Leila must decide whether to continue or pause the restraining order process.
- ✓ Other actors must support either decision without coercion.

FACILITATOR PROMPTS

During or after the role play, ask:

- How did each professional balance support vs. pressure?
- Did anyone speak over Leila or make assumptions?
- What cross-sector communication helped or hindered trust?
- What barriers came up (legal, emotional, systemic)?
- What are non-testimonial options that can support her case?
- How can sectors collaborate to increase Leila's sense of safety and control?

NOTES FOR SAFETY

- Let participants "tap out" of the role if distressed.
- Offer grounding exercises or a short break if emotions run high.
- Remind participants that the goal is skill-building, not perfect performance.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Use brief pre-briefs: provide each participant with a character summary.
- Debrief after each scenario with sector-specific and shared reflection.
- Rotate roles between sessions so participants see multiple perspectives.