

Role plays in domestic violence trainings

In this general guidance you will find information on how to use role plays in trainings on domestic violence and what needs to be considered.

➤ **Psychological Safety & Trauma Awareness**

- **Role plays on domestic violence can be triggering** – for participants and observers alike.
- Inform participants that role plays can be traumatic and that **they can leave the role play if they suddenly feel it is affecting them too much.**
- Offer **content warnings** before each scenario.
- Work in a trainer-tandem.
- Have a **mental health professional or support resource** available, especially in longer or more intensive sessions.

➤ **Clear Learning Objectives per Sector**

In case of multisector trainings, each sector has a different role and perspective. Tailor scenarios so they:

- Reflect **realistic dilemmas** participants would face in practice.
- Highlight **intersections** (e.g., how medical records support prosecution, awareness-raising activities by social workers to enable police officers to better understand certain situations).
- Support **interdisciplinary collaboration**.

For example:

- **Police** → risk assessment, trauma-informed interviewing, evidence gathering.
- **Social workers** → identifying signs of abuse, safety planning, ensuring the victim's safety by liaising with emergency shelters.
- **Medical professionals** → documentation, recognizing physical/psychological symptoms, mandated reporting.
- **Justice sector** → legal protections, restraining orders, victim support during court processes.

➤ **Realism & Accuracy**

- Use **scenarios based on real cases** (anonymized).
- Reflect **different forms of abuse**:
 - Physical
 - Emotional/psychological
 - Financial
 - Coercive control
 - Technological abuse
- Include **cultural, gender, or immigration status complexity** where relevant.
- Involve **actors or trained facilitators** who can portray trauma responses accurately.

➤ **Role Clarity and Guidance**

- Provide **brief role descriptions** in writing (e.g., “You’re a survivor who doesn’t want the abuser arrested”; “You’re a paramedic who noticed signs of fear”).
- Clarify **boundaries**: what participants can and can’t do in character.

- Encourage empathy, **not just procedure**—you’re training responders to *see the person*, not just the problem.
 - Provide time for participants to find into their roles
 - Use a clear signal for the start of the role and the end
 - Allow for time for the participants to disengage from their roles
- **Debriefing is Non-Negotiable**
- Hold structured **debriefs immediately after each role play**:
 - What went well?
 - What was hard?
 - What could have been done differently?
 - Discuss both **technical actions** (e.g., did the police follow protocol? (if this role play was used in police training)) and **relational dynamics** (e.g., was the survivor treated with dignity?).
 - Use debriefs to correct **myths**, challenge **biases**, and build **shared understanding**.
- **Interdisciplinary Insight**
- Use role play to highlight where communication breaks down between services.
 - Let participants observe each other’s methods (e.g., how police interviews differ from social worker conversations).
 - Include moments of transferrals – these are often where victims of domestic violence fall through the cracks.
- **Structure and Facilitation**
- Keep role plays structured:
 - Introduction → Role play → Debrief
 - Assign skilled facilitators to guide, stop, or re-direct as needed.
 - Consider using “pause and reflect” techniques during intense scenarios.
- **Ethical Framing**
- Reinforce that this is not theatre; the goal is professional growth.
 - Avoid sensationalism or over-dramatization.
 - Use inclusive language (e.g., not all victims are women, and not all abusers are men, though gender dynamics do matter).
- **Optional: Recording or Observation**
- With consent, consider recording role plays for educational review.
 - Or use observers who note behaviours, strengths, and missed opportunities during the scenario.