

**Role Playing in the
Group Counseling Setting**
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Role Playing is especially effective in group therapy when a member describes conflict, or unfinished business with a significant family member, friend, lover, or authority figure with whom he or she has not found the courage or words to express his or her feelings. In order to keep this structured activity from becoming “merely” an individual therapeutic exercise, follow these guidelines:

- 1) Ask the member, “If that person were here right now, who would he/she resemble the most in our group?”
- 2) Have the member ask the person who resembles the absent party to serve as a “stand in” for the role playing exercise. Make sure the person is willing to do so; if not, ask the member to ask someone else.
- 3) If the member immediately says that someone resembles the absent party, have the member ask the other person to participate.
- 4) Then ask the member, “Imagine that (the “stand in”) is the one you have conflict with. What do you want to say to him/her?”
- 5) Facilitate the member’s expression by using these questions/requests, whenever it’s timely:
 - a) Tell what you want/need (from him/her).
 - b) What are you aware of?
 - c) What are you feeling right now?
 - d) What do you want to do?
- 6) Avoid asking “Why?” or “What do you think?”
- 7) Once the member has expressed him/herself, ask them, “Do you want to respond as the other person, or would you rather have (the chosen stand in) respond?”
- 8) Have the stand in respond, and then have the member react to him/her. Continue with as many exchanges as seems necessary.
- 9) There should be no goal in mind -- only the facilitation of the member’s expression of honest feelings. Let any insight come from the member.
- 10) Once the exchange has ended, facilitate group process by asking the group, “How were you relating to this exchange? Did you feel particularly close to either party?” Give the group a chance to make this structured activity a group activity by insisting that they talk about their feelings and associations to the role play. Don’t let them simply analyze the member’s experience. If you do, then the process will deteriorate into individual therapy.