

## **Becoming Comfortable With Role Play**

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"Oh no, not role play! I don't do that!" Is this your reaction, or have you heard it from someone else?

Perhaps it's a feeling of pressure or discomfort with what can feel artificial or fear of a poor "performance," but many of us shy away from role play. When we do, we lose an excellent opportunity to learn and to help someone else learn. For example, role playing a meeting situation can help us develop/enhance skills of facilitating discussion, providing information based on LLL philosophy, interpreting and using body language effectively, and handling the unexpected. Playing a phone call can help us practice thinking on our feet, employing active listening, using resources, offering information and suggestions, and writing notes for our phone log--all while keeping an eye on what the kids are doing. Doing this much at once can keep us both physically and mentally active. With practice we become more competent, relaxed, and efficient; leading meetings and helping over the phone become easier and more fun.

Role play is an outstanding way of helping a Leader Applicant become comfortable, confident, and competent with some basic Leader skills. Let's look at some ways we can help both of us be comfortable with role play and thus maximize its benefits.

- Plan your situation in advance. Choose something basic and straightforward to start with. Make some notes or the beginnings of a "script" for yourself and the other participants. (For a phone call there will be two of you; for a meeting situation there could be any number.)
- Since you've designed the basic plan, play the role of the Leader yourself. As the person with more experience, you will model the important aspects you want to stress in this learning situation.
- Feel free to stop the role play at any point and discuss. Can you think of a different or better way you could have responded? Explore some "what ifs . . ." What might you do or say differently?
- Ask the Leader Applicant if she would like to use the same situation and switch roles. When she plays the role of the Leader, she could respond similarly to you--or she could try something different. Which do the two of you think works better?
- Plan to do more role play over the course of the application. For your next session ask the Applicant if she would like to choose a situation and play the part of the Leader. Researching and planning her approach can help her feel in control and confident.
- Over a period of time introduce increasingly more challenging situations. Try out responding to something unexpected, surprising, or shocking. Plan some role play sessions as in-person meetings and others as phone calls.

- Remember that everyone--from Leader Applicant to experienced Leader--who participates will learn. Your discussions about the situations you play can give you new insights and ideas. We can always fine-tune our skills.
- Above all, relax and have fun with role play. Laugh a little; try some outlandish situations, if you like. Remind yourself that nobody chooses a "best" response all the time and that making "mistakes" can be an effective way to learn. Watch everyone's confidence level rise!

Leading LLL meetings and helping mothers one-to-one require complex skills. Practicing these skills in situations which simulate "the real thing" is a highly effective way to master them. Role play can be fun, exciting, and rewarding.