TECH SUPPORT TROUBLESHOOTERS ROLE-PLAY ACTIVITY

The **Tech Support Troubleshooters role-play** is a dynamic, low-tech classroom activity that builds essential soft skills in computing students through structured, scenario-based practice. Designed for use in courses such as Introduction to IT, Networking Fundamentals, or Professional Skills in Computing, this activity immerses students in realistic tech support situations that require critical thinking, communication, and empathy.

Students alternate between the roles of Tech Support Staff and Users to simulate real-world troubleshooting encounters. Each scenario card presents a common yet complex technical issue, prompting students to engage in active listening, ask clarifying questions, explain technical concepts in plain language, and remain composed under pressure.

WHY TO IMPLEMENT

- **Bridges theory and practice:** Reinforces technical knowledge through hands-on dialogue and diagnostic reasoning.
- **Develops professional competencies:** Encourages students to cultivate patience, perseverance, and effective communication—key skills for client-facing roles.
- **Promotes empathy and user awareness:** Helps students better understand non-technical perspectives and prepares them to design user-friendly solutions.
- **Fosters collaborative learning:** Students learn not only from their own roles but also by observing and reflecting on peer interactions.

HOW TO EMBED

 Setup:
- **Divide the class:** Split the class into two groups – 'Tech Support Staff' and 'Users'. Later, the roles will be reversed so that each student experiences both sides of the situation.
- **Scenario cards:** Prepare a set of scenario cards describing various complex and frustrating tech problems. These should range from software issues, hardware malfunctions, to user misunderstandings.

Environment:
- Create a mock 'tech support center' setup in the classroom. This can include computers, phones, or just desks set apart for the activity.

Role preparation:
- Give 'Tech Support Staff' brief training on basic troubleshooting steps, customer service etiquette, and active listening skills. 'Users' should be briefed on their scenario and encouraged to stick to their role.

ACTIVITY:

- **Scenario Kick-off:** Each 'Tech Support Staff' is paired with a 'User'. The 'User' presents their problem as described in their scenario card.
- **Problem-Solving Session:** The 'Tech Support Staff' member must handle the situation, asking questions to diagnose the issue, offering solutions, and maintaining a professional demeanor throughout.
- **Switch Roles:** After a set time, or once the problem is resolved (or escalated), roles are switched, and a new scenario is presented.
- **Debriefing:** After each round, hold a brief group discussion. Discuss what strategies were effective, how

the 'Tech Support Staff' felt during the interaction, and what could be improved.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR TECH SUPPORT STAFF:

- **Listen Carefully:** Begin each interaction by actively listening to the user's issue. Let them fully explain the problem without interruption.
- **Ask Clarifying Questions:** After the user has explained the problem, ask specific questions to better understand the issue. Focus on open-ended questions that encourage detailed responses.
- **Diagnose the Problem:** Use the information provided by the user to diagnose the issue. Think about common problems related to the scenario.
- **Offer Solutions**: Based on your diagnosis, offer clear and concise solutions. Explain the steps in a way that a non-technical person can understand.
- **Maintain Professionalism:** Remain calm and professional throughout the interaction, regardless of the user's level of frustration. Remember, empathy is key.
- **Escalate if Necessary:** If you're unable to resolve the issue, explain to the user how you will escalate the problem to find a solution.
- **Provide Preventive Advice:** Offer advice on how similar issues can be prevented in the future.
- **End the Call Politely:** Once the issue is resolved or escalated, conclude the interaction on a positive note, thanking the user for their patience.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USERS:

- **Describe the Problem:** Clearly explain the issue you're facing. Include any relevant details about what you were doing when the problem occurred and any error messages you saw.
- **Respond to Questions:** Answer the IT support staff's questions to the best of your ability. Your responses should help them understand the issue more clearly.
- **Follow Instructions:** Carefully follow the steps provided by the IT support staff. Ask for clarification if you don't understand something.
- **Express Your Frustration Appropriately:** While you should express frustration or confusion if it's part of your scenario, remain respectful and cooperative throughout the interaction.
- **Provide Feedback:** At the end of the interaction, give feedback on the support received, whether the issue was resolved or not.

TECH SUPPORT SCENARIO CARDS SET

- **Scenario Card 1 - The Phantom Printer:**

The user is frustrated because their computer seems to send print jobs, but the printer isn't printing. The printer shows no error messages.

- **Scenario Card 2 - The Disappearing Files:**

A user calls in panic because some important files they were working on yesterday have disappeared from their computer. They insist they saved them, but can't recall where.

- **Scenario Card 3 - The Persistent Error Message:**

Every time the user starts their computer, an error message appears, stating, "System Error: Code 404." The message disappears after clicking 'OK', but it's annoying and worrying for the user.

- **Scenario Card 4 - The Uncooperative Email Client:**

A user is unable to send emails through their email client. They receive a "Failed to Send" message, but they can receive emails without any issue.

- **Scenario Card 5 - The Mysterious Internet Outage:**

The user's internet connection is frequently dropping, but only on their device. Other devices in the house are working fine.

- **Scenario Card 6 - The Slow-Running Laptop:**

The user complains that their laptop has become extremely slow over the past week. They mention it's only three months old and used for basic tasks.

- **Scenario Card 7 - The Confusing Software Installation:**

A user attempts to install a new piece of software but receives a message stating, "Installation Failed: Unknown Error."

- **Scenario Card 8 - The Unresponsive Tablet:**

The user's tablet has become completely unresponsive. It won't turn off or on, and the screen is frozen on the homepage.

- **Scenario Card 9 - The Inaccessible Cloud Data:**

The user is unable to access their files stored on a cloud service. They get an error message about insufficient permissions.

- **Scenario Card 10 - The Misunderstood Backup Process:**

A user thought they backed up their data on an external drive, but didn't follow the correct process. They're now trying to retrieve what they believe is a backup. mindset where challenges are viewed as opportunities to learn and grow, rather than insurmountable obstacles.