

**We all get
a little surly at times.**



**We just have to remember not to
growl at others!**



**We serve
our customers better,
when we remember
that we are all customers!**

The ultimate lesson all of us have to learn is unconditional love,
which includes not only others, but ourselves as well.
Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

The test of good manners,
is to be patient with bad ones.
Solomon Ibn Gabiral

A few kind words take only seconds to say,
but their echos can go on for years.
Unknown

Laughter is the shortest distance
between two people.
Victor Borge

It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life
that no man can sincerely try to help another
without helping himself.
Ralph Waldo Emerson

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**Best Practices Recommendations
For Optimal Customer Service in the WV WIC Program**

The following pages reflect recommendations that may help staff provide caring, efficient, and consistent service to WIC Program customers. Recommendations were submitted by WIC staff from all West Virginia WIC Local Agencies. Many thanks to the Customer Service Team, representing each Local Agency who worked together to develop the focus of these recommendations.

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In the following pages WIC participants will be referred to as “customers.”

What is WIC?

Mission Statement:

The mission of the West Virginia WIC Program is to improve the health of women, infants and children in West Virginia by providing quality nutrition and breastfeeding counseling and education, as well as health monitoring and nutritious foods.

Vision:

West Virginia WIC - A smart choice for healthy families.

Goals:

The main goal from this initiative was to improve the image of the WIC Program, both internally and with the public. One goal remains - to create a clinic environment that maintains the highest levels of courtesy, respect and helpfulness. This should affect our overall caseload by setting up an ideal base for caseload increase by improving the interaction between staff and participants and improving the public image. Active participants should be easier to retain by improving customer service in all areas of participant contact. Staff retention should be improved by creating a working environment that fosters employee satisfaction and by training the WIC Directors in the best methods of staff motivation.

History:

This project is the result of a need recognized by WIC management at state and local levels. It was funded through the USDA Mid-Atlantic Regional Office's Operational Adjustment funds in Federal Fiscal Year 2000. Increased awareness of customer service and employee satisfaction had us concerned about the clinic atmosphere. It led us to develop a workshop designed to improve the work environment through close introspection of our behaviors and recognition of what talents and qualities we could draw from for this improvement. From this two day workshop we developed a number of goals. One of these was the development of a "Best Practices" booklet.

Why the focus on Customer Service?

Caseload most assuredly is related to customer service. People are more likely to participate in the WIC Program when they feel they are treated fairly and respectfully, and when they feel the benefits are worth their efforts. Surveys reveal the customers do not leave the WIC Program solely because they don't value the food package. They often leave the Program because they don't feel "valued" or "respected". Customer service directly impacts the number of initial enrollees as well as those retained in the program. Customer Service is everyone's job.

Creating a CARING atmosphere in our WIC clinics. How can managers encourage caring?

The answer is no secret. Create an environment where people feel cared for, where people feel valued, personal growth is encouraged and nourished, and every effort is made to build self-esteem and self-worth. Customers are looking for a caring environment and attitudes. You, as staff, are WIC's internal customers. The attitudes of feeling "respected" and "valued" begins with the staff. The staff will want to cultivate the attitude of respect and value among themselves before extending this attitude to their external customers.

How can we give our external customers a caring experience that will keep them satisfied and coming back? There are two ways:

- Create an environment where employees (internal customers) are treated as well as we want to treat the external customers.
- Reframe our thinking. What is it we are here to do? Improve the health of families in our community and care for our customers.

**One generation plants the trees;
another gets the shade.
Ancient Chinese Proverb**

Client Courtesy & Respect

Greeting:

Greet everyone as they enter the clinic with a smile and a verbal statement if possible. Example: “Good morning, Mr. Jones.”, “Hello, Ms. Smith. Nice to see you again.” “Hello, my name is Mary. How may I help you?”

Introduce yourself. Wear a name tag that shows your first name and title.

Display a poster board with staff pictures and first names and title.

Address customer by name. NEVER AS “honey” or “sweetie” etc.

Address co-workers with courtesy and a smile.

Make sure customer’s name is spelled and pronounced correctly. If necessary ask how to spell or pronounce their name.

Encourage the customer to feel welcome. Give a sincere compliment or create light conversation to make customer feel more at ease. If it is a new customer suggest they have a seat, give them directions to the restrooms. Tell them the children can play with the toys and suggest literature they could look at and take with them. Never assume that customers can read.

Thank the customer whenever possible for bringing necessary items such as income documentation or diet sheets. Thank them for being on time and for the opportunity to serve them.

Know the sex of baby before seeing family, if possible.

Explain to customers what to expect. Explain why forms, questions and procedures are important. Explain how the information you get is used and stored. Explain confidentiality.

Ask customer if they understand what you have told them and ask if they have any questions.

Quick & Easy Tip You May Use:

Tip - Customer Greeting:

A study measured the number of seconds people had to wait to be greeted in several businesses. The researchers then ask customers how long they had been waiting. In every case, the customer’s estimate of the time elapsed was higher than the actual time. A customer waiting 30 - 40 seconds often thought 3 or 4 minutes had passed. Time drags when you’re waiting to be noticed. A prompt greeting reassures a customer. Even if you’re busy with another customer or on the phone, please pause to say “hello” and let them know that you’ll be with them as soon as possible.

In many cases, customers need a non-threatening ice-breaker. They need to be reassured that WIC is a friendly and encouraging place. They need to know their concern that they may be put down is not going to happen.

Tip - Get the Customer Doing Something:

Ask them to begin filling out paperwork. Offer a flier or information packet to review. Offer to turn on the TV-VCR for them. **Never assume the customer can read forms or literature or knows how to operate the VCR.**

Customer Departure:

Acknowledge departure from clinic with, “See you on _____ . “Do you have any questions?” “Thanks for coming today.”

Customer Confidentiality:

Discuss customer cases in areas where conversation cannot be overheard.

Often the walls are thin and easy to hear through.

NOTE: Sign-in sheets are routinely used, but they do not provide for confidentiality. Anyone coming to the desk can see who has been at the clinic as a customer. Consider developing another system for registration. A separate piece of paper with spaces for name, time of arrival, time of appointment. This paper could be completed and handed back to the clerk who keeps it behind the desk.

Customer Respect:

Explain decision/actions taken to the customer in terms they can understand and ask if they have any questions.

- Refer to customers by name rather than by appointment times. Example: Mrs. Jones is here, rather than your 1 o’clock is here.
- Offer customer choices for action whenever possible. Example: Would you prefer a morning or afternoon appointment?
- Develop tactful ways of asking sensitive questions, such as race and marital status. Often a straightforward question, asked with a nonjudgmental expression and tone of voice works the best.
- Look at customer when speaking. Make eye contact 50% of the time when speaking to the customer. Eye contact expresses interest and respect for the other person.
- Listen to your customers. Hear all of what they have to say without interrupting. Often the WIC staff is the only person the customer can talk to.

NOTE: Listening is not always hearing. One needs to focus on what the customer is saying. You can indicate that you are hearing what they are saying by using eye contact and body language. Leaning forward toward the customer and nodding is good use of body language.

- Use humor. Humor enhances learning and a sense of comfort.

NOTE: Humor needs to be appropriate and non offensive. What you think is funny may not be your customer’s idea of funny.

Infrastructure

Parking:

Have staff park in spaces away from the clinic doors. Leave the spaces closest to the doors for customers.

Have the outside area well-lit at night if evening clinics are held.

Signage:

Exterior:

Clearly identify WIC Program office.

Consider positive image signage such as “*Nutrition & Health Information*” or “*Nutrition & Lactation Services.*”

Interior:

Breastfeeding Mothers Welcome Here displayed with directions to the lactation room.

Display clearly the directions to the receptionist /sign-in location.

Display clear directions to restrooms.

Display domestic violence information both openly and discreetly, such as in restrooms.

Waiting Area:

Create a clean and safe area. Designate a staff person to monitor for clutter and safety. Instruct housekeeping staff regarding specific cleaning needs and tasks.

Review existing posters/signs making sure they are attractive and customer friendly.

Establish a child friendly atmosphere with toys, books, child-sized furniture in waiting area, away from exterior door.

Provide TV-VCR for entertainment and for use with health and nutrition information videos.

Provide take home educational materials in a centrally located place.

Display framed photos/images on walls reflecting WIC’s goals-- healthy children/families, breastfeeding pairs/families, healthy eating, etc.

Display and label a suggestion box in public area.

Display breastfeeding area welcome sign.

Establish a book shelf as a lending library for materials people can bring in to trade.

Clinic Area:

Establish private/confidential areas for interviews, and breastfeeding assistance. If no separate rooms are available consider privacy screens with soft background music playing.

Maintain personal office space in an organized manner for efficiency and professional image.

Tip - Check the appearance of your work area:

A cluttered work area conveys a sense of disorganization and lack of professionalism. Check for interpersonal barriers in your office. Try seating customers beside your desk, rather than across from you. Try using a small round table, especially when customers need to read materials or sign papers.

Breastfeeding Counseling:

Establish a private space available for breastfeeding assistance and pumping demonstrations.

Establish a breastfeeding assistance area with a comfortable chair, pillow/s and a footstool to demonstrate optimal positioning for mother and nursing infant.

Display any incentive gifts for breastfeeding families such as infant shirt, bib, certificate, etc.

Offer soft background music.

Offer a shawl for shoulders or lap cover for legs to provide warmth .

Decorate with an arrangement of artificial flowers, quilts, soft colors on walls, mother-baby pictures and a rocking chair with a seat cushion for a comfortable, welcoming atmosphere.

**Life is what you make it,
always has been,
always will be.
Grandma Moses**

**What sunshine is to flowers,
smiles are to humanity.
Joseph Addison**

Clinic Flow/Scheduling

Keeping Appointments/On time arrival:

Stress importance of keeping appointments and being on time. Explain that being on time helps them and other customers and shows courtesy and respect for others. Explain the difficulty they may encounter if they miss an appointment or are late.

Schedule family members together to meet individual needs.

When scheduling appointment, write down the date and time for the customer and tell them of the auto-dialer reminder.

Offer breastfeeding support groups as a substitute for a nutrition education class for breastfeeding women.

Offer extended/flexible service hours to accommodate needs of customers.

Develop a plan to encourage WIC customers to immediately report the birth of their baby.

- Colored stickers on ID folders to remind participant to call WIC office within 5 days of baby's birth.
- Stress immediate return of Documentation of Birth form to WIC office.
- Provide addressed envelope for return to WIC.
- Use bright labels on ID folders imprinted with "Please report your baby's birth within 5 days after delivery."

Decisions about scheduling of participants to staffing patterns, walk-in participants, missed appointments and late arrivals are decisions to be made by the local agency.

**We always admire the other fellow more
after we have tried to do his job.
William Feather**

**It is not true that nice guys finish last,
nice guys are winners before the game even starts.
Addison Walker**

**After the verb to love ,
to help is the most beautiful verb in the world.
Bertha Von Sutter**

Setting Expectations/Explaining Procedures

Premise: When customers understand, they are more cooperative and feel respected.

Customers:

- Explain all procedures before starting and ask if customer has questions.
- Explain the reason why we require certain items such as income documentation, social security number etc. Understanding increases compliance.
- Explain importance of notifying WIC of a change in address or phone number.

Nutrition Promotion:

Explain at initial visit that:

- WIC Program offers health and nutrition information to help parents raise healthy, well developed children and to monitor for nutritional risk factors.
- WIC offers information and ideas to assist parents with parenting skills.
- WIC provides specific foods as supplements to the diet, not as a total food supply.

Explain at certification appointment that:

- WIC is for health and nutrition information.
- Children are better prepared for school when they are well-nourished and healthy.
- WIC will work with their health care providers to coordinate health, nutrition assessment and guidance.
- Nutrition information and nutritious WIC foods can reduce low birth weight.
- WIC is a five year plan and works best if children remain on for the entire program.
- Explain that grocer staff are trained to follow WIC mandated procedures regarding use of drafts. Store employees must follow the same procedures as the WIC customers. If there is a disagreement at the store check-out, ask for explanation of the problem and how best to resolve it.

Staff:

- Explain to staff the importance of how to communicate with a physician's office and other health care providers.
- Change name of "Nutrition Education Class" to reflect the idea of information sharing. An example of such a renamed class might be "Nutrition Information Sharing" or "Healthy Parenting Discussions".

Med/Lab:

- Explain to parent what, how, and why you do lab measures.
- Use OSHA regulations and let parent know you are doing so.
- Explain to parents they can use previous measurements from doctor's office if taken within 60 days prior to WIC visit.
- Discourage parents from using lab measurements as a threat to children.
- Explain that nutritionists will discuss all measurements taken that day.
- Give parents written record of weight, height, and hemoglobin to take home. Explain what the measurements mean and how this information is used by WIC.

Breastfeeding Promotion:

- WIC environment and staff training reflect the expectation that breastfeeding is normal, natural and accepted.
- Expectation of breastfeeding classes is that customer feels more confident about ability to breastfeed.
- Client receives a card with local peer counselor's name and phone-office & home
- Develop a list of local breastfeeding support resources, including breastfeeding peer counselors, La Leche League representatives, breastfeeding consultants, sources of nursing supplies.
- Staff is aware that ALL prenatsals are scheduled for breastfeeding class or one-on-one breastfeeding session before due date. If certified late in pregnancy, then issue 1 months drafts, then bring in for breastfeeding class.

Tip - Enjoy People and their Diversity:

The people that tend to bug us the most are the ones that are unlike ourselves. Accept diversity; enjoy it. Realize that peoples' needs are basically the same and treating them like guests will usually create the most goodwill. We will all have to practice being non judgmental at times. Accept the challenge! Remember our customers' needs are basically the same as yours. Customer service doesn't mean you can always give the customer exactly what they want. It is our job to explain to the customer what we can do for them and explain why we can't do what they are expecting.

**All doors open to courtesy.
Thomas Fuller**

Effective communication involves more than telling, it means understanding on the part of both parties involved in the conversation.

Phone:

How staff responds to and sounds on the telephone is pivotal to establishing trust and credibility with customers. Research indicates that most customers form a mental image of a business or service from the *tone of voice* of the person speaking, rather than what is actually said.

Making the Most of Phone Contacts:

- Start with a cheery greeting: “hello,” “good morning,” “good afternoon,” “good day.”
- State clearly both the office name and your name. Often the greeting and identification is mumbled or spoken too fast and the caller does not get the name. Record yourself answering the phone and listen for clarity and friendliness.
- Smile as you talk. Callers can “hear” a smile in your tone of voice.
- Invite callers to get to the point with statements such as, “How may I help you?”
- Use **Hold** only when you must. Always ask the customers if you can put them on hold. Limit the time of “holding” to no more than 30 seconds, if at all possible. If customer is on hold for longer, break in from time to time to let them know you haven’t forgotten them.
- Explain that you are currently with a customer, take a message and return the call as soon as possible.
- If transferring to a different phone, give customer the direct number in case they are disconnected.
- Maintain a local directory of resource “help” numbers near your phone.
- Explain to the customer what you will do and when you will do it. Keep your promises. Take notes and review at end of day of tasks you have promised to do.
- Give callers a final chance to ask questions or add information. Example: “Will this arrangement be okay with you?”
- Close with a sincere “Thank you for calling”.
- Include date and time when leaving phone messages.
- Provide designated phone line with answering machine/voice mail to ensure breastfeeding calls are not missed. Check voice mail in a timely manner.

Verbal/ Non-verbal:

- Voice tone is responsible for 38% of the message received. Speak with a smile.
- Body language has the greatest effect on how a message is received.
- Smile. Maintain eye contact during conversation.
- Posture: Crossing arms or legs gives the message that you are placing a barrier between you and the customer. Sit or stand with both feet on the floor. Leaning forward, toward the customer conveys your interest in interacting with them.
- Body positioning and seating: Have the customer at equal or greater height than staff person, this shows the customer he/she is important.

Tip - Break the Ice:

- Reassure customer that you are available to give information that will assist them in making good decisions regarding nutrition.
- When dealing with a problem, reassure customer that together the best solution will be found. Let the customer know that you have resources to assist in finding the best solution.
- In response to a customer ending their participation in WIC Program, a positive response might be, “It’s been our pleasure serving your family.” “Is there a reason you can’t continue?” If the customer is still eligible for WIC services, explain that WIC would like to continue providing health and nutrition information to their family. Let the customer know that you realize that getting to WIC appointments is not always easy and we appreciate their efforts. Explain that WIC is dedicated to making our services worth their time and effort.

Difficult Situations/Handling Complaints:

- Staff can start from the context that “ I’m here to assist you. Let’s talk about what your needs are and see what can be done to help you.”
- ! Determine if this is a temporary problem or a long-term problem.
- Offer choices for resolving the problem and other possible sources of help, when possible.
- Empathize and never put customer on the defensive, and don’t be tricked into arguing, it serves no purpose.
- Kindness breeds kindness. Even when it doesn’t you will know you have given your best effort.
- Accept that people may get frustrated and express it as anger even when you show empathy and you have explained why you can’t do exactly what they are wanting.

Tip - Say “Please” and “Thank You”:

“Please” and “thank you” are powerful words in building customer rapport.

Tip - Smile for your Customers:

A smile tells people they are on friendly turf. Keep in mind that a smile originates in two places, the mouth and the eyes.

Tip - Talk to Customers with Your Eyes:

Eye contact is more important than the verbal greeting. Simply looking at your customers tells them much about your willingness to help. As with the greeting, timing is important. Make eye contact within 10 seconds, even if you’re busy with another person.

Tip - Watch your Personal Appearance:

Personal credibility is the impression customers get about your trustworthiness, competence, and level of expertise.

Writing:

In form letters add handwritten message on each, such as “Please call to reschedule.” Include name of contact person in WIC office. Send birthday cards to all customers. Greeting could be: “Happy Birthday! Our WIC staff is happy to help you grow into a healthy toddler/pre-schooler.”

Communication-Phone, Verbal, Non-Verbal, Written

Promoting Image of Program

Develop new Signage:

WIC Nutrition & Lactation Services or Nutrition & Health Services.

Network with school personnel and medical staffs in the community to develop support and recognition of the WIC Program.

Establish each WIC office as a reliable breastfeeding resource in the community.

Publicize and open breastfeeding classes and support groups to the community at large to increase outreach efforts.

Promote the importance of nutrition and breastfeeding to the community through health fairs, displays at libraries, presentations at schools and day care centers, and local employers.

Use the terms “participate” or “enrolled” in WIC, instead of “being on WIC.”

Change name of nutrition education class to “*Healthy Parenting*” or “*Nutrition Information Sharing*.”

Develop and encourage each employee to adopt an attitude of “serving clients” in their time of need.

Discuss the fact that each employee is the face of WIC. How you act, react, look, speak and treat the customer reflects on the program. If you are positive, calm, and caring, the customer will feel it. WIC is not a handout or food giveaway. It is a legitimate program to teach nutrition to our customers with the added bonus of supplementing their basic food supply.

REMEMBER -YOU are WIC in your community. How do you want to be seen and recognized?

Provide a nutrition and breastfeeding reference library accessible during clinic visits or for loan.

Staff Training

Develop a system that permits nutrition information and clinical research articles to be circulated to staff for educational updates.

Provide a longer observation and support period of new staff as they begin working in WIC clinics.

Incorporate customer service/caring priority and WIC mission statement in each employee orientation and annual updates.

Develop system to permit all staff to receive inservice on breastfeeding promotion and counseling techniques. (Best Start 3-Step Counseling Technique)

Develop system to permit all nutrition staff to orient and train to counsel/promote breastfeeding enthusiastically and with confidence.

Encourage all staff to adopt “ownership” of breastfeeding as a WIC priority.

Offer educational opportunities for clerical staff.

Strive to take advantage of new nutrition training opportunities via Internet, self-learning modules. Have computer with Internet available to staff for nutrition related learning.

Schedule staff meetings to discuss difficult situations and decide as a group the best way to respond. Discuss policy interpretation situations.

Address policy interpretation with customer service bias within federal regulations.

Develop in-service training on the use of breast pumps for staff at all sites.

Note: Professional education is a personal responsibility. State and Local WIC agencies are obligated to provide initial training and updating of staff. Individuals need to read and study to stay current in their profession.

Counseling Practices

Include parenting skills topics in “*Health & Nutrition Information Sharing*.”

Initially, ask what questions customer has before you get started. Listen. Ask parents what concerns they have about their child’s eating habits, weight, or growth.

Use the 3-Step counseling technique (also used in breastfeeding counseling) as basis for nutrition counseling. This starts with open-ended questions to the customer to assess her concerns and knowledge. (Training on the 3-Step Counseling Technique is included in the Breastfeeding Counselor Training Course. This counseling technique is effective for all nutrition counseling.)

The three steps in counseling are:

1. Start with **open-ended questions** to elicit the customers specific concerns.
2. **Acknowledge** the customers feelings and let him/her know their concerns are normal.
3. **Educate** by addressing her specific concerns. Feed information in small understandable bites.

Review each chart before seeing customer so that you are familiar with names, sex, age, previous visit information.

Help customer set small achievable goals for their next WIC visit.

Write out goals to follow-up with what you have discussed. Utilize handouts. Circle statements on printed materials to emphasize points.

Reinforce what the parents are doing correctly with their own or their child’s diet.

Praise positive behaviors such as having the food intake sheet filled out.

Give customer reinforcement materials or items to take home reflecting what you have discussed that day.

On departure ask:

parent(s) to suggest one thing they can do to improve their child’s eating habits.

what questions they have before leaving.; if they would like to speak to a breastfeeding peer counselor, if pregnant or breastfeeding.

Nutrition message is most effective if you:

- address a problem the customer is interested in.
- recommend small changes in habits.
- repeat important points.
- discourage the use of words such as should, never, must, fat, short and skinny.
- offer information as something the customer may want to consider.
- make the problem seem common and share what has worked for others.
- offer more than one way to reach a goal and offer ideas to share with parent.
- don’t overwhelm with too much information at one time.

Breastfeeding Promotion and counseling is most effective if you:

- offer breastfeeding incentives/recognition for 6 months breastfeeding duration and 1 year duration.
- counsel in the context of empowering a woman with this information, without overwhelming her with too much information.
- follow-up with breastfeeding concerns as often as needed until concerns are resolved.

**Adopt the pace of nature,
her secret is patience.
Ralph Waldo Emerson**

**Endeavor to be always patient
of the faults and imperfections of others,
for thou hast many faults and imperfections of thy own
that require a reciprocation of forbearance.
Thomas Kempis**

Customer Service Commandments

Thou shall **recognize** the customer promptly,
using their name whenever possible.

Thou shall **smile**, both when the customer can
see you or only hear you.

Thou shall **show**, by your actions, that you are
there to assist.

Thou shall **ask questions** of the customer – then
listen – to find out what the customer
really wants.

Thou shall really want to **assist** the customer and
be willing to do something extra.

Thou shall tell the customer what you **can do** –
not what you cannot do.

Thou shall **build a relationship** with the customers
and assist them in anticipating future needs.

Thou shall sincerely **care** about the
customer.

There is one premiss which permeates all of the major religions:

The Universal Golden Rule

Brahmanism

This is the sum of duty:
do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you.
[Mahabharata 5,1517]

Buddhism

Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.
[Udana-Varga 5,18]

Christianity

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you,
do ye even so to them: for this is the law of the prophets.
[Matthew 7:12]

Confucianism

Surely it is the maxim of loving-kindness:
Do not unto others that you would not have them do unto you.
[Analects 15,23]

Islam

No one of you is a believer
until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.
[Sunnah]

Judaism

What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow men.
That is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary.
[Talmud Shabbat 31a]

Taoism

Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain and your neighbor's loss as your own loss.
[T'ai Shang Kan Ying P'ien]

Zoroastrianism

That nature alone is good
which refrains from doing unto another whatsoever is not good for itself.
[Dadistan-i-dinik 94-5]

And... George Bernard Shaw

Do not do unto others as you would that they should do unto you.
Their tastes may not be the same.
[1903]

Can there be any better guide for treating our customers!