

Module 1 – Becoming a WIC Peer Counselor

Overview

This first module helps a new WIC peer counselor gain confidence and feel comfortable with her new job responsibilities. It also affirms the significant contributions she will make for WIC mothers and babies through her role as a peer counselor.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module, peer counselors will know their two primary roles in the WIC Program, including:

- Supporting WIC breastfeeding mothers and their babies.
- Supplementing the WIC breastfeeding team.

Time Allowed: 1 hour

Background Information

Becoming a peer counselor is an exciting time for a WIC mother, but it may also have some unsettling moments, particularly if the mother has never held a job before or is unsure about the job requirements and her ability to perform.

This module addresses:

- The role of the peer counselor in the WIC Program.
- A typical day and common experiences of WIC peer counselors.
- How to affirm the positive contributions that peer counselors make to WIC mothers and their babies.
- How to assist peer counselors to deal with issues related to the new responsibilities of their jobs and transitional issues related to becoming peer counselors.
- How to establish a strong emotional foundation for peer counselors upon which successful training can occur.

Checklist

- AV Equipment
 - PowerPoint or Overhead Projector
 - TV/VCR
- Teaching Tools
 - Flip chart and markers
- Handouts
 - Handout #1A – My Stars
 - Handout #1B – Job Description: WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor
 - Handout #1C – Who Can Help Me in My Job
 - Peer Counselor Skills Checklist Card

- Resources
 - Video – *The Peer Counselor: A Loving Link in a Caring Team*
(Developed by Texas WIC and available through: Allied Vaughn,
350 E Royal Lane #111, Irving, TX 75039, (972) 869-0100,
e-mail: debi.anoatubby@alliedvaughn.com)

Additional Learning Opportunities

- For agencies currently using peer counselors, establish a mentoring program that matches experienced peer counselors with trainees.
- Have trainees “shadow” experienced peer counselors through a typical workday.
- Refer to the guide for observational learning provided in “Continuing Education of Peer Counselors” in this curriculum.
- Have experienced peer counselors participate in training events to lead discussions about typical work situations and to help answer questions about peer counseling.

Module 1 – Trainer Notes

Slide #1

Module 1: Becoming a WIC Peer Counselor

Greet warmly all peer counselors as they arrive. Welcome and introduce trainers, program coordinators/supervisors, WIC staff, and experienced peer counselors who may be available to participate in the training.

Slide #2

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module, peer counselors will know their two primary roles in the WIC Program, including:

- Supporting WIC breastfeeding mothers and their babies.
- Supplementing the WIC breastfeeding team.

[Activity]

Learning Objective: Provide peer counselors an opportunity to get to know one another.

Time: Allow 2 to 3 minutes per peer counselor.

Directions:

- Ask participants to introduce themselves and share something about their children that brings them joy.
- Ask peer counselors to bring photos of their children that can be shared with the entire group.
- *For large training groups:* Incorporate photos into a PowerPoint presentation, if provided by peer counselors in advance.

[Key Talking Points]

- Each peer counselor has a different background and life experience; however, all peer counselors share the common experience of successfully breastfeeding one or more of their children.
- All peer counselors want to help other mothers have the positive experience with breastfeeding that they have enjoyed.
- Every mother you help as a peer counselor may not be as passionate about breastfeeding as you are, but she still wants to be a good mother. This means you and the mothers you help have much in common. That common ground is the basis for your ability to successfully help mothers with their breastfeeding needs.

Slide #3

What is a Peer Counselor?

Peer counselors are mothers in the community with personal breastfeeding experience who provide information and support to other mothers.

[Key Talking Points]

- They become friends with the mothers they help.
- Their primary roles are to provide support and encouragement.
- They help answer questions and address common concerns.
- They call on WIC designated breastfeeding experts for help, for mothers with more difficult or complex breastfeeding problems.

Slide #4

The Power of Mother-to-Mother Connection

People discuss the issues in their lives with others who have similar experiences and knowledge.

[Key Talking Points]

- People naturally seek out people with similar life experiences.
- Women are drawn to other women with whom they share life experiences, particularly those experiences related to parenting.
- Most women remember what it felt like to be a new mother and how much they had to learn.
- Many women want a connection with other mothers to help them get ready for parenthood.
- Peer counselors are invaluable partners who help women gain confidence in their abilities to breastfeed.

Slide #5

[Activity]

My Stars

Learning Objective: Help peer counselors understand ways WIC peer counselors can provide positive support for new mothers.

Time: 10 to 15 minutes

Handout: #1A – My Stars

Directions:

- Ask each trainee to describe someone who helped make breastfeeding a positive experience and how he or she did it. This could be a health professional, a peer counselor, lactation consultant, a family member, or friend.
- Write the responses on a flip chart for everyone to see.
- *For small training groups:* Ask each participant to share the ways that the “star” in her life made a difference.

- *For large training groups:* Divide trainees into small groups to discuss how others helped them and report to the larger group after the discussion.

Discussion:

- How can you use these ideas/experiences in your work?

[Key Talking Points]

- Peer counselors:
 - Provide information to help mothers make educated decisions about how they will feed their babies.
 - Help with common breastfeeding questions.
 - Help new mothers learn how to fit breastfeeding into their busy lives.
 - Provide encouragement if breastfeeding is challenging.
 - Make appropriate referrals for special needs.
 - Are positive and enthusiastic.
 - Support other family members.
 - Are good listeners for mothers who want to talk about breastfeeding.
 - Help mothers learn strategies for successful breastfeeding.
- You will be a wonderful support person for the WIC mothers in your community.
- Be patient with yourself in your new job.
- All new peer counselors need a little time to learn the job and feel comfortable in this role.
- All of us in the WIC Program are here to help you succeed.

Slide #6

Basic Peer Counselor Duties

Your job as a peer counselor is to support breastfeeding for new mothers and babies.

Handout: #1B – Job Description: WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor

[Key Talking Points]

- Your job as a peer counselor is to support breastfeeding for new mothers and babies.
- Your primary duties are:
 - Giving new mothers basic information about breastfeeding.
 - Offering them encouragement and support.
- You are not expected to learn everything all at once.
- Everyone needs time to learn to be a peer counselor and become comfortable.
- We are a team. WIC staff members are here to help you learn your job.

- WIC staff will provide many opportunities to learn about your new job and to practice new skills.
- WIC staff will answer any questions. You will not have to figure out your job's responsibilities on your own.
- Provide a list of the main job duties for WIC peer counselors:
 - Attend peer counselor breastfeeding training classes.
 - Maintain contact with the provided list of WIC pregnant and breastfeeding mothers on a routine basis.
 - Provide basic breastfeeding information and support to pregnant and breastfeeding mothers.
 - Talk with WIC pregnant and breastfeeding mothers by telephone, make home visits, and/or visit with mothers at the WIC clinic or hospital (*as determined by each WIC Program's protocol*).
 - Be available outside normal WIC clinic hours to new mothers who require breastfeeding support.
 - Maintain strict confidentiality about all mothers.
 - Keep accurate records of all contacts with WIC mothers.
 - Refer mothers to WIC designated breastfeeding specialists as needed.
 - Participate in continuing education in breastfeeding.
 - Participate in independent study by reading assigned books and materials on breastfeeding.
 - Provide support, when requested, to WIC staff for special breastfeeding projects or community events.

Discussion:

- Which duties do you feel will be easy?
- Which duties do you feel will be hard?
- Why do you think these jobs seem easy or hard?

[Instructional Guidance]

- Provide peer counselors with a copy of the WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Job Description or the State's or local agency's job description for peer counselors. Review the basic duties with peer counselors and explain what each duty entails.
- Ask peer counselors to identify respective duties as EASY or HARD by noting an "E" or "H" beside each duty.
- Consider having experienced peer counselors lead this discussion.

Slide #7

A Typical Day for a Peer Counselor

Since peer counselors deal with many types of situations, a typical day may be hard to describe. However, over the course of your work, you will have some experiences that will become familiar.

Discussion:

- Describe a typical day for a beginning peer counselor.
- Review the key job duties from the agency’s job description.
- Use open-ended questions, like those below, to address key activities in which a peer counselor is likely to participate:
 - How do you think your children or partner might react if you’re on the telephone with a mom who needs help?
 - What ideas do you have for calming your children when you take telephone calls at home? What do you do now if someone calls at a bad time?
 - What is the best time of day for making calls in your home?
 - What things have you thought of that might make working at the WIC clinic easier for you and your children when they come?
 - When you hear really “juicy” personal information about someone you know, how hard is it to keep it to yourself?
[*Note that the issue of confidentiality will be discussed in more depth in later modules.*]

[Instructional Guidance]

- If you have experienced peer counselors on staff, ask one to help with this module by discussing what she did as a peer counselor during the past week.
- Have the experienced peer counselor share family and life situations to provide a context for understanding the competing demands trainees may face.
- Ask trainees to discuss how they may have to adjust their schedules to fit peer counseling among their existing responsibilities.
- Discuss tactics for handling competing demands.
- Have trainees sign and date the job description to reinforce the information covered during this session and to confirm that they are willing to take on the job duties.

Slide #8

Sharing Breastfeeding Information

The role of a peer counselor is to support breastfeeding. This means helping mothers get off to a good start with accurate information that is specific to the needs of each mother.

[Key Talking Points]

- Information that peer counselors will share with WIC mothers includes:
 - How breastfeeding helps babies and mothers.
 - How breastfeeding can work in a mother’s life.
 - How to get off to a good start with breastfeeding, including how to properly position and latch the baby.

- Easy tips to make breastfeeding go more smoothly.
- How to know if the baby is getting enough to eat.
- Ways to counsel mothers with common issues such as breast fullness, sore nipples, and making enough milk.
- How to handle common situations that may occur, such as breast fullness or a fussy baby.
- When to ask for help from a WIC designated breastfeeding expert. This is one of a peer counselor's most important responsibilities.
- WIC provides breastfeeding experts who can help mothers with problems that are outside of a peer counselor's responsibility, such as:
 - A sick baby or mother.
 - Babies not gaining enough weight.
 - Mothers who develop a breast infection.
 - Other medical problems such as jaundice or premature babies.
- Obtaining help from a WIC designated breastfeeding expert will be discussed later in more detail. You are part of a team of caring people who help mothers with breastfeeding. When you need help, someone will be there.

Slide #9

Who is Here to Help You?

Many people are available through the WIC Program to help you with your job.

Handout: #1C – Who Can Help Me In My Job

[Key Talking Points]

- Peer counselor supervisor
- Peer counselor coordinator
- Breastfeeding coordinator
- WIC nutritionist
- Physicians
- Nurses
- International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs)
- Certified Lactation Counselors (CLCs) or Certified Lactation Educators (CLEs)
- La Leche League Leaders
- Local WIC agency through established referral policies

[Instructional Guidance]

- Show the Texas WIC video, *The Peer Counselor: A Loving Link in a Caring Team*. This video features short interviews with peer counselors discussing the relief they feel in knowing people can help when problems arise. Show either the entire

13-minute video or select a shorter snippet from the video that demonstrates the satisfaction peer counselors feel when making appropriate referrals.

- After showing the video, provide peer counselors with a list of the WIC designated breastfeeding experts. You can use Handout #1C – Who Can Help Me In My Job, as a guide.

Slide #10

Peer Counselors Benefit From Their Jobs

WIC peer counselors everywhere say that they feel a sense of accomplishment and pride because they are making a difference in the lives of other people.

[Key Talking Points]

- Learn new job skills in a health field.
- Receive preparation that can lead to career paths and other jobs.
- Learn life skills that have long lasting positive impact.

Slide #11

Peer Counselor Skills Checklist

The Peer Counselor Skills Checklist Card enables peer counselors to track their acquisition of new knowledge and the development of new skills throughout their training. Instructions for each module's skills activity will be provided in the appropriate module.

Handout: Peer Counselor Skills Checklist Card

[Instructional Guidance]

- To demonstrate that they understand and accept their job responsibilities as a peer counselor, ask new peer counselors to sign their job description.
- Provide each trainee with a Peer Counselor Skills Checklist Card. The supervisor will sign and date the card for Module 1 once the peer counselors sign their job description. This acknowledges to the peer counselor that they have completed the first skill in their training process.
- Have trainees keep the checklist in their training notebooks and keep it throughout the training to record their training accomplishments.
- Give students having trouble mastering a skill additional guidance and perhaps one-on-one attention through gentle instruction and affirmation.
- Note: Skills can only be checked off by the instructor or by an experienced peer counselor as a result of personal observation to ensure that the peer counselor has mastered the skills.

Slide #12

Final Thought:

“I never expected to reap so many gratifying experiences from my work as a peer counselor. I have been able to assist so many mothers to successfully breastfeed their babies. I love the opportunity to positively influence a mother and her child’s life. It is definitely the most valuable work I have ever done.”

WIC Peer Counselor