

Strategies for Training Peer Counselors

Overview

Designed for potential trainers, this introductory module presents the strategic approach for the “*Loving Support*© through Peer Counseling” curriculum and reviews the general structure and content areas. It emphasizes facilitated learning techniques and skills-building learning opportunities for WIC peer counselors.

This module describes peer counselor *Core Skills* – the essential skills – that each WIC peer counselor must master before she can successfully complete her training and is prepared to counsel breastfeeding mothers. Training for peer counselors in these *Core Skills* will be addressed in subsequent training modules.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module, peer counselor trainers will be able to identify four principles of adult learning that should be incorporated into peer counselor training, including:

- Face-to-face training
- Interactive learning techniques
- Skills development
- Observational learning

Time Allowed: 1 hour

Background Information

Research with WIC peer counselors shows that adult learning techniques are desirable and effective in building the needed knowledge base, confidence, and skills among WIC peer counselors. The following techniques are used:

- Interactive study
- Small group discussions
- Skills building that employs practice sessions in a safe setting

For trainers less familiar with adult learning techniques, this module provides helpful aids to guide trainers in leading discussions and conducting activities that will help improve the trainer’s comfort level with the implementation of all training modules.

Checklist:

- AV Equipment
 - PowerPoint or Overhead Projector
- Teaching Tools
 - Memory game tray of items

- Handouts
 - How Adults Learn – Memory Game
 - How Adults Learn

- Resources
 - Best Start Social Marketing. (2004). *Using Loving Support© to Implement Best Practices in Peer Counseling: Research Brief*. Submitted to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service. Tampa, FL: Best Start Social Marketing. Available online at: http://www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/Learning_Center/support_peer.html.

Strategies for Training Peer Counselors – Trainer Notes

Slide #1 **Strategies for Training Peer Counselors**

Slide #2 **Learning Objectives**

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- Interactive learning techniques
- Skills development
- Observational learning

Slide #3 **Training is Essential**

Training peer counselors in consistent, appropriate counseling techniques is a critical success factor in peer counseling programs.

[Key Talking Points]

- Successful peer counseling programs:
 - Are science based.
 - Have higher retention among peer counselors.
 - Are more likely to be sustainable.
 - Have higher breastfeeding rates among the WIC population.
- Training peer counselors can:
 - Correct their personal myths and misconceptions about breastfeeding.
 - Broaden their knowledge base.
 - Increase confidence in ability to answer questions.
 - Help them provide appropriate and accurate information to WIC participants.
 - Improve their communication skills.
 - Enhance referrals to WIC Program services.

Slide #4 **Types of Training**

Peer counselors prefer a variety of training experiences to learn the core skills needed to be successful in their jobs.

[Key Talking Points]

- Initial formal training is most effective when it is:
 - Provided in person.
 - Oriented toward skills building.
 - Based on discussion and interactive learning.
- Independent study should be provided to reinforce formal training.

- Shadowing opportunities (observational learning with skilled counselors and breastfeeding experts) enhance learning.
- Continuing education should be provided on an ongoing basis.
- Peer counselors need independent access to additional resources to help when special situations arise.

Slide #5

Who Should Train Peer Counselors?

Breastfeeding management and the science of breastfeeding should be taught by WIC staff or WIC-designated partners who are trained and highly skilled in lactation management.

[Key Talking Points]

- Lactation management experts may be:
 - WIC agency breastfeeding coordinator
 - WIC peer counselor coordinator
 - Other community resources
 - Physician
 - Nurse
 - IBCLC
 - LLL leader
- Topics typically covered by lactation experts include:
 - Reasons to breastfeed.
 - Getting a good start with breastfeeding.
 - Dealing with common concerns.
 - Counseling techniques.
- WIC policy may be taught by:
 - WIC supervisors
 - Program coordinators
- Topics typically covered by WIC supervisors and program coordinators include:
 - Understanding the role of peer counselors.
 - Reviewing the processing of paperwork.
 - Becoming part of the WIC team.
 - Learning how to effectively communicate.

Slide #6

The WIC Designated Breastfeeding Expert

In addition to the trainers, each local WIC agency will need to designate at least one WIC breastfeeding expert for peer counselors to call upon when facing situations outside their scopes of practice. Keeping within this clearly defined scope of practice is critical for a peer counselor to feel confident and supported. It also ensures that mothers receive the appropriate, necessary care.

[Key Talking Points]

- It is up to each State or local WIC agency to determine a chain of command for making referrals and to identify the experts within this chain of command. The goal is to make sure the needs of mothers are addressed in a timely and appropriate manner.
- The WIC designated breastfeeding experts might include:
 - Breastfeeding experts (such as WIC breastfeeding coordinators, peer counselor coordinators, or IBCLCs, CLCs, or CLEs in the community).
 - WIC staff (such as nutritionists or nurses who can help with nutrition and WIC-related questions).
 - Medical staff (such as physicians or nurses).
 - Social services staff.
- The training will reinforce the need for peer counselors to refer to their WIC designated breastfeeding experts.

Slide #7

YIELD!

The concept of referrals is communicated to peer counselors in this training through a Yield System that provides a visual trigger to help peer counselors understand the importance of making referrals and their continued roles in supporting mothers.

[Key Talking Points]

- The Yield System is similar to the yield signs peer counselors encounter when driving through traffic.
 - Occasions arise when it is important to yield to other traffic.
 - This ensures traffic flows more smoothly, and everyone is safe.
 - The driver does not stop forever at a yield sign. They continue on once the way is clear.
- Peer counselors need to know when to yield to others who have more expertise dealing with complicated breastfeeding or medical issues.
- A driver in traffic does not stay at the yield sign forever or turn around and go back. After allowing others to go through, the driver continues moving through traffic side-by-side with other drivers.
- Peer counselors, as well, will continue to provide support to new mothers while the WIC designated breastfeeding expert and other health professionals are helping the mother.
- To reinforce the concept, the training curriculum provides a YIELD poster to hang on the wall throughout the training and a similar YIELD handout for peer counselors to include in their reference notebooks. Whenever situations arise that should be

referred to their WIC designated breastfeeding expert, peer counselors should note these situations on their YIELD handout for ongoing reference.

Slide #8

Who Should Attend Training?

An eclectic collection of trainee participants is an effective means for helping peer counselors develop their skills and gain confidence. These trainees include:

- New peer counselors.
- Experienced peer counselors when available.
- WIC staff who will interface with and/or supervise peer counselors.

[Key Talking Points]

- Experienced peer counselors can share personal experiences.
- Experienced peer counselors can assist with activities and discussions.
- WIC staff members can help peer counselors understand the clinic environment.
- WIC staff members need to be introduced to new peer counselors and encouraged to welcome them as part of the WIC breastfeeding team.
- Avoid including other health care professionals as training participants to prevent issues of intimidation or shyness among new peer counselors.

Slide #9

Training Structure

WIC Programs vary in the way they structure their trainings, depending on many factors related to the needs of peer counselors and the WIC agency.

[Key Talking Points]

- Factors to consider in structuring peer counseling trainings include:
 - Number of trainees.
 - Number of children and babies who may accompany trainees.
 - Needs of school-aged children of peer counselors.
 - Travel distance to the training site.
 - Transportation availability.
 - Competing life demands of peer counselors.
- “*Loving Support*© through Peer Counseling” has 12 modules.
 - Most modules are one hour in length.
 - Module 4, Counseling and Communication Skills, is around three hours in length.
- Limit training sessions to four hours per day.

- Time limitation helps prevent peer counselors from being overwhelmed and allows time to process new information.
- The modules should be taught in their numerical sequence. Peer counselor skills development is a progressive process that builds on the previous instructional modules.
- One way to set up the training blocks might be:
 - Session 1: Modules 1 through 3
 - Session 2: Module 4
 - Session 3: Modules 5 through 6
 - Session 4: Modules 7 through 10
 - Session 5: Modules 11 and 12
- Module 4, Counseling and Communication Skills, should be taught before the breastfeeding management modules. Counseling skills will be reinforced throughout the management modules.
- Shortened educational blocks enhance a peer counselor's ability to retain new information.
- WIC Programs report having successful training from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Slide #10

What to Teach

“*Loving Support*© through Peer Counseling” focuses on teaching core skills required by peer counselors to be successful in their jobs.

[Key Talking Points]

- Core skills are woven throughout the 12 modules.
- A complete listing of all core skills and the module in which these skills are taught is provided in the introduction to this session.
- Core skills include:
 - Counseling skills.
 - Reasons to breastfeed (including uniqueness of human milk and exceptions to breastfeeding).
 - Addressing barriers to breastfeeding (including gaining family support).
 - Basic anatomy of the breast.
 - Prenatal preparation for breastfeeding.
 - Basic positioning and latch of the baby.
 - Tips for early success.
 - Preventing and dealing with common concerns.

Slide #11**What to Teach**

[Key Talking Points]

- Core skills also include:
 - Breastfeeding frequency and duration.
 - Signs of adequate intake.
 - Normal infant growth.
 - Being part of the WIC team.
 - When to make appropriate referrals.

Slide #12**Training Logistics**

Training sites should be centrally located for the convenience of peer counselor trainees.

[Key Talking Points]

- Sites on a bus route are preferable.
- Location should accommodate nursing mothers.
- Libraries and community centers are often convenient locations.
- Rooms should be large enough to comfortably move about and engage in interactive and skills building activities.
- Tables should be arranged in small groupings to encourage interaction and relationship building.

Slide #13**Use Adult Learning Techniques**

Small-group, interactive instructional approaches are effective teaching techniques for adult learners and, specifically, WIC peer counselors. Traditional, classroom lecture instructional approaches should be minimized with WIC peer counselors.

[Key Talking Points]

- Skills building and interactive learning is well suited for peer counselors.
- Adult learning techniques allow WIC peer counselor trainees to learn at a comfortable pace.
- Confidence is fostered by interactive teaching that allows for demonstrated successes among trainees.
- Be sensitive to trainees with low literacy skills or who may associate classroom learning with previous negative educational experiences.
- Training should help peer counselors gain confidence by offering opportunities for practicing skills and demonstrating progressive successes in their educations.

Slide #14
[Activity]

Appeal to Varied Learning Styles

Learning Objective: Trainers will understand the value of providing varied, interactive learning opportunities.

Time: 5 to 7 minutes

Handout: How Adults Learn: Memory Game

Directions:

- Assemble a tray of the 30 items listed on the handout. (Substitute items if needed. Remember to change the handout to reflect any changes.)
- Cover the tray until ready to lead this activity.
- Divide class into three groups.
- Ask training groups to memorize a set of items in three different ways.
 - Group 1 – Has a list of items to read. (Make enough copies for each person to have her own.)
 - Group 2 – Has a list read to them out of hearing range of other trainees.
 - Group 3 – Has a tray of the items, the list of items to read, and is allowed to touch and group the items in any way they choose.
- At the end of two minutes, the groups should stop.
- Give trainees two minutes to write down all the items they can remember.
- Ask each group to report the highest and lowest number remembered.

[Key Talking Points]

- The group able to look at the actual items and handle them usually remembers the most items. This occurs because both sides of the brain and more senses were involved in the learning process.
- A few individuals may do well in all groups as a result of different learning preferences (auditory, visual, kinesthetic, interactive, etc.).
- The ability to remember has everything to do with how group members were allowed to learn and nothing to do with individual ability.
- Effective trainings provide a variety of teaching techniques and learning opportunities.
- The more ways information is provided, the more likely it is learning will occur.
- Many activities and hands-on learning opportunities are provided in this curriculum.

- The wide variety of teaching methods appeals to different types of adult learners.
- This training includes:
 - Group discussion
 - Small group activities
 - Video instruction
 - Independent learning
 - Reading
 - Lecture

Slide #15
[Activity]

How Adults Learn

Learning Objective: To help participants embrace key educational approaches that will enhance adult learning.

Time: 15 minutes

Handout: How Adults Learn

Directions:

- Divide trainees into seven groups.
- Assign each group one of the principles found on the handout.
- Ask each group to identify reasons they believe their principle would enhance learning.
- Ask each group to identify one example that could be used at a training event using that principle.
- Ask each group to report before you discuss each principle.
- Add only comments that are not covered by the group as you reveal each principle on the slide.

Slide #16

Keep the Pace Moving

[Key Talking Points]

- Most adults have an attention span of eight minutes.
- The presence of babies and children adds to the distraction.
- Changing the kinds of activities you offer frequently brings attention back to your subject matter.

Slide #17

Make Your Point as Visual as Possible

[Key Talking Points]

- Today's generation relies strongly on visual images.
- Visual images help many adults retain information.
- Modeling the techniques and skills gives an added dimension to learning.

Slide #18

Provide Skills-Building Opportunities

The “*Loving Support*© through Peer Counseling” curriculum provides a Peer Counselor Skills Checklist to allow peer counselors to monitor their progress in building new skills.

[Key Talking Points]

- Skills-building opportunities allow new peer counselors to practice what they have learned before having to counsel new mothers.
- Counseling principles are especially important to practice.
- Practice skills are woven throughout the curriculum so that skills can be reinforced while applying them to specific breastfeeding support situations.
- The Peer Counselor Skills Checklist Card should be given to each peer counselor so she can monitor her progress in building new skills.
 - At least one skill per module will be completed.
 - When the skill is mastered, the card is signed and dated by the trainer.
 - The Skills Checklist helps peer counselors see their progress throughout the training.
 - Mastering each skill builds confidence.
 - Upon completion of the cards, peer counselors should be provided a reward for successfully mastering the basic skills of the training.
 - Allow peer counselors to keep their cards as a permanent reminder of their accomplishments.

[Instructional Guidance]

- Determine reward options that can be provided to peer counselors upon completion of all items on the Skills Checklist Card including:
 - Awarding local merchant gift certificates.
 - Offering informal social event with snacks.
 - Participation in specialized training provided by WIC.
 - Providing other options as appropriate for WIC sites.
- During the initial training session, have each peer counselor trainee identify her:
 - Special acknowledgement for successfully checking off an item on the Skills Checklist Card, for example:
 - Ringing a bell.
 - Announcement to the group.
 - Round of applause.
 - Blowing a whistle.
 - Preferred reward for successful completion of all items on the Skills Checklist Card.

Slide #19**Teach Small Amounts**

Training is best when it focuses on basic information that peer counselors need to initiate contacts with new mothers.

[Key Talking Points]

- Focus on the core information and skills that peer counselors need to provide support to WIC mothers.
- Avoid unnecessary, advanced-level breastfeeding management concepts.
- Build on basic WIC peer counseling skills during continuing education after peer counselors are comfortable with new mothers.

Slide #20**Repeat the Information**

Repetition and practice are key ingredients for peer counselors' success in retaining information.

[Key Talking Points]

- Use role plays, case studies, and independent study to reinforce instruction and accomplish the following:
 - Role play techniques throughout the curriculum help to review the communication and counseling techniques taught in Module 4.
 - Case studies help peer counselors develop problem-solving skills associated with breastfeeding support issues.

Slide #21**Reward Participants When Learning is Occurring**

Regardless of age, role, or professional status, adults want affirmation for their accomplishments.

[Key Talking Points]

- Reward learning with private and public affirmations:
 - “I couldn’t have said it better myself!”
 - “You are catching on so quickly!”
 - “You will make such a difference in the lives of our families.”
- Rewarding with small, simple snacks or acknowledgements breaks up the training and provides tangible evidence of progress and successes:
 - Use small gold nugget bars to represent “Breastfeeding, the gold standard.”
 - Use individually wrapped LifeSavers to represent the life changing work they will be doing.

Slide #22

Make It Funny...and Fun

Mark Twain said, “The human race has only one really effective weapon and that is laughter.”

[Key Talking Points]

- Physiological evidence exists that laughter is healing. Cells are invigorated by the endorphins released and oxygen intake increases.
- Laughter relieves stress.
- Laughter and fun:
 - Enhance learning.
 - Improve retention.
 - Increase creativity.
 - Promote positive decision-making.
- Ask peer counselor trainees to make up skits to reinforce learning experiences.

Slide #23

Building the Peer Counselor Reference Binder

Central to the “learn by doing” approach to this training is for peer counselors to build their own WIC peer counselor reference binders. This process allows the core information and skills that peer counselors acquire to be assimilated and individualized additions to the binders to be included.

[Key Talking Points]

- Handouts are included as a part of each module.
- Handouts serve as an ongoing reference and reinforcement of all the information in the curriculum.
- To build a peer counselor binder, WIC Programs should provide each trainee with:
 - A 1-inch, 3-ring binder.
 - A set of 12 numbered tabs, one for each module.
 - A pocket divider to hold WIC pamphlets that are used by the State or local agency.
- At the beginning of instruction for each module, provide curriculum and PowerPoint handouts, found on the provided CD-ROM. Copy on 3-hole punched paper.
- WIC agencies should also provide WIC materials and resources appropriate for their agency to include:
 - Clinic policies.
 - WIC protocols.
 - Handouts and other literature used by the agency, including breastfeeding information that is typically provided to WIC participants.
- Other desired resources listed in the Optional Resources section of each module.