

WIC Program Nutrition Education Guidance

This guidance identifies the elements of nutrition education contacts/interventions that have been determined by research to be effective. The guidance is intended to assist State agencies in incorporating these elements into the design of nutrition education, thereby maximizing the nutrition education benefit provided to participants of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). Appendix A, *Criteria for the Development and Evaluation of Electronic-Based Nutrition Education for WIC Participants*, is designed to provide specific guidance as an assessment tool regarding electronic-based WIC nutrition education.

Background and Purpose: WIC Nutrition Education

Nutrition education is the program benefit that sets WIC apart from the other Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) nutrition assistance programs. The WIC Program is the only FNS nutrition assistance program with legislative and regulatory requirements to provide nutrition education to participants, as specified in sections 17(b)(7), 17(f)(1)(C)(x), and 17(j) of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966, as amended, and the Federal WIC regulations in sections 246.2 and 246.11. Federal regulations require that WIC nutrition education be a benefit that is available at no cost to participants, be easily understood by participants, bear a practical relationship to the participant's nutritional needs, household situation and cultural preferences, and be designed to achieve the regulatory nutrition education goals.

The goals of WIC nutrition education, as explained in section 246.11(b) of the Federal WIC regulations, are to: 1) emphasize the relationship between nutrition, physical activity, and health with special emphasis on the nutritional needs of pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, infants and children under five years of age; and 2) assist the individual who is at nutritional risk in achieving a positive change in dietary and physical activity habits, resulting in improved nutritional status and in the prevention of nutrition-related problems through optimal use of the WIC supplemental foods and other nutritious foods. WIC nutrition education also raises the awareness about the dangers of using drugs and other harmful substances during pregnancy and while breastfeeding. WIC State agencies are responsible for developing nutrition education plans that support these nutrition education goals. Finding ways to deliver effective nutrition education and achieve the nutrition education goals are critical for the continued success of the Program and supports the ongoing process of Revitalizing Quality Nutrition Services (RQNS) in WIC.

RQNS is designed to enhance and strengthen the effectiveness of WIC nutrition services. Studies have shown that WIC needs to: 1) strengthen its nutrition education component; 2) adopt a more behavioral approach in nutrition counseling; 3) be more client-oriented; and 4) focus on healthy behavior for life.¹

Providing Effective Nutrition Education

WIC nutrition education is effective when it results in a positive nutrition-related behavior change. Typically, the traditional WIC nutrition education contact/intervention has been a face-to-face meeting between the participant and the WIC staff. Interaction between WIC staff and participants is important because the interaction encourages participants to ask questions and to receive reliable nutrition advice that addresses their special nutrition needs. However, advances in technology coupled with limited clinic/staff resources and an increasingly diverse WIC population have resulted in Federal, State and local agencies exploring the use of emerging technology and multifaceted methods to support effective nutrition education. In the 2001 GAO report titled “Food Assistance: WIC Faces Challenges in Providing Nutrition Services”, GAO recognizes the challenges in WIC for improving the use of information technology to enhance service delivery and program management.²

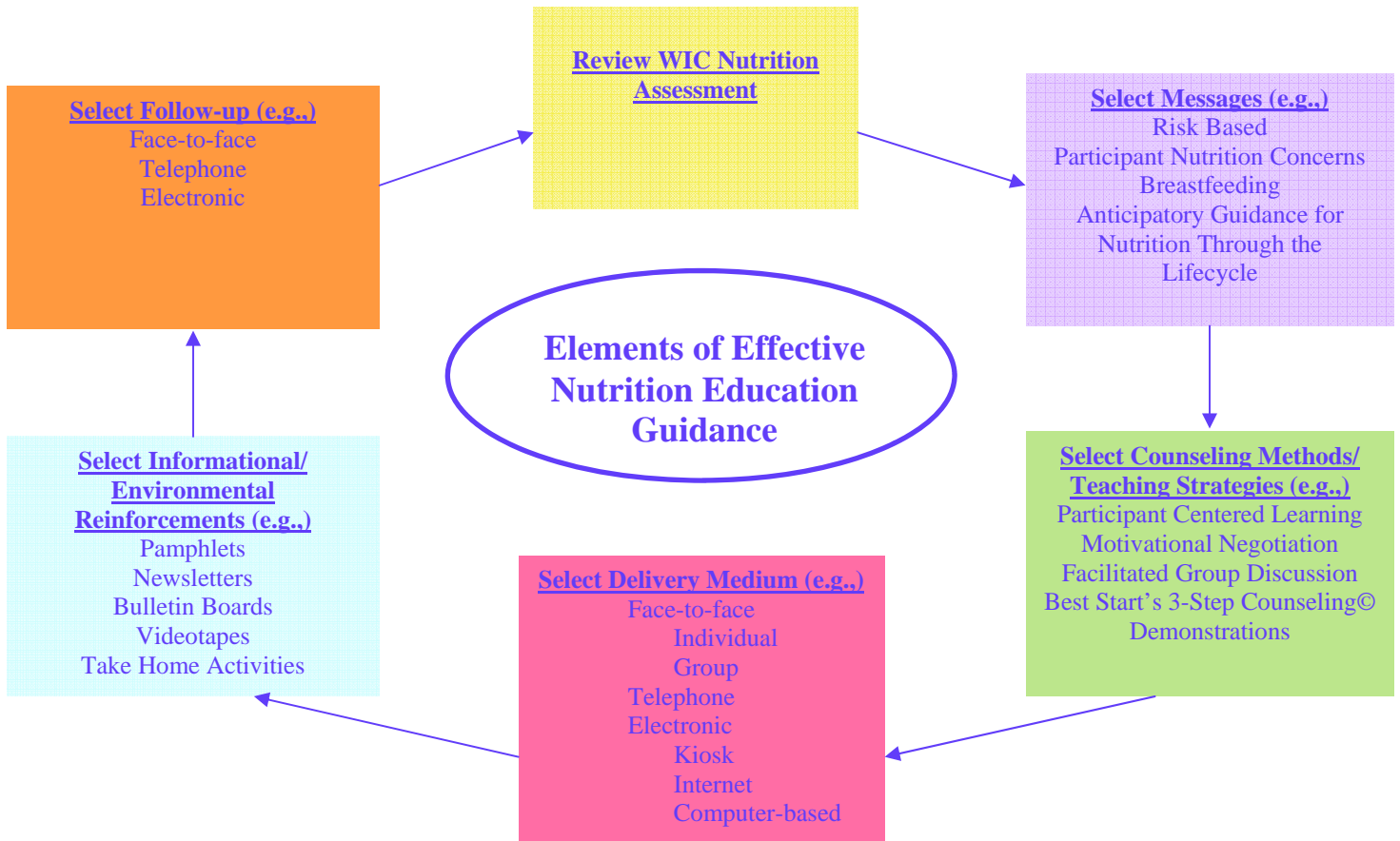
Research consistently shows that nutrition education interventions that use education methods directed at behavioral change are more likely to achieve positive results than interventions focused on dissemination of information only (i.e., lectures, handouts).³ Behavior change also serves as an outcome measure for evaluating the effectiveness of a nutrition education contact/intervention. Although behavior change is an end goal, it is important to not underestimate the value of affecting the precursors of behavioral changes and measuring those in evaluation of nutrition education in the WIC program. Follow-up is also necessary to determine whether a change has occurred and to further assist participants in achieving and maintaining nutrition-related behavior change.⁴ Current research suggests that the most effective nutrition education interventions contain components from several educational theories and/or models regardless of the delivery method or medium used.⁵ (see Figure 1 for examples)

WIC Nutrition Assessment

The WIC nutrition assessment is the first step in providing quality nutrition services. The WIC nutrition assessment is used for two purposes: (1) to determine eligibility of the applicant; and (2) to serve as the basis from which all subsequent WIC nutrition services are provided. More specifically, the information gathered during the assessment process is used to assess the applicant’s nutritional status and risk (associated with an increased likelihood of poor outcomes), tailor the food package, design appropriate nutrition education, and make referrals to health and social services.

FNS is developing the Value Enhanced Nutrition Assessment (VENA) initiative to assist State agencies in developing and implementing assessment policies and procedures that provide the foundation for targeted and relevant nutrition education and other WIC nutrition services that guide and support families in making healthier eating and lifestyle choices. This guidance supports the VENA philosophy.

Figure 1: Process of Delivering Effective Nutrition Education in WIC



Elements of an Effective Nutrition Education Contact/Intervention

Effective nutrition education should elicit a behavior change that will help the participant achieve and maintain a positive change in dietary and physical activity habits, resulting in improved nutritional status and in the prevention of nutrition-related problems regardless of the delivery medium. Effective nutrition education contacts/interventions should also be easily understood by participants taking into consideration participants personal and cultural preferences, educational and environmental limitations, and be consistent with the WIC Nutrition Services Standards⁶ (WIC NSS). The most effective WIC nutrition education contact/intervention should incorporate the following six elements:

- A review of the WIC nutrition assessment to identify the participant’s nutritional risk factors, needs and concerns;
- Messages that engage the participant in setting individual, simple and attainable goals and provide clear and relevant “how to” actions to accomplish those goals;
- Counseling methods/teaching strategies that are relevant to the participant’s nutritional risk and are easily understood by the participant;
- A delivery medium that creates opportunities for participant interaction and feedback;
- Continuous support through informational/environmental reinforcements; and
- Follow-up to assess for behavior change and determine intervention effectiveness.

Reviewing the WIC Nutrition Assessment for Nutrition Education Purposes

The WIC nutrition assessment directs nutrition education by answering the questions: “What topic(s) is most important to cover at this time?”, “What counseling method or teaching strategy will most effectively assist the participant to improve her health status and/or achieve a positive change in dietary habits?”, “What may be the most effective way(s) to deliver the message – in person, over the phone, and/or by participating via an electronic-based lesson?”, and “What reinforcements can support the nutrition education provided?” Based on the assessment, WIC staff should use critical thinking skills and professional judgment to establish the participant’s nutrition education goal and determine how to best meet the participant’s needs and maximize the nutrition services offered to the participant.

Nutrition Education Messages

Nutrition messages should be tailored to maximize the impact and benefit for the participant and focused towards attaining WIC’s regulatory goals for nutrition education. The nutrition education offered may include a wide array of messages that are relevant to participant’s nutritional risk factors and individual nutrition needs/concerns as well as emerging health issues. WIC staff use the assessment information, critical thinking skills, and professional judgment to select the most relevant and effective tailored nutrition education message(s) for the participant.

Counseling Methods/Teaching Strategies

There is no one counseling method or teaching strategy that fits the needs of all participants. Individuals vary greatly in how they learn, process, and use information and in their readiness to change. Effective nutrition education consists of counseling methods that consider multiple learning aptitudes identified during the WIC nutrition assessment process and subsequent follow-up.

Regardless of the counseling method/teaching strategy used, a characteristic that has been shown to be effective in changing behavior is interaction that engages the participant. Interaction means a two-way exchange of information. Interactive approaches to nutrition education have been shown to be effective in changing behavior and provide participants the opportunity for questions and feedback.

Interactive nutrition education can be achieved in an individual or group session. Using strategies that engage the participants in identifying individual goals or important issues as well as creating solutions that work for them will enhance the effectiveness of nutrition education.

Delivery Medium

The WIC nutrition educator may use multiple delivery media during nutrition education contacts/intervention. Although face-to-face personalized contact is considered the optimal medium for providing nutrition education, new technology such as computer-based, may allow WIC nutrition education to meet the needs of participants through a variety of delivery media while still providing an effective nutrition education contact/intervention. Any medium that incorporates the elements of an effective nutrition education and engages the participant may be appropriate in WIC.

Reinforcements of Nutrition Education

Informational materials and teaching aids provide the opportunity for selected nutrition messages to be repeated. Repeated exposure to a nutrition message has been shown to facilitate adoption of the message by the client. However, the use of the following reinforcements independent of other nutrition education elements is **not considered to be effective** and should not be counted as a nutrition education contact/intervention: publications/pamphlets, take-home activities/newsletters, videotapes, posters/bulletin boards/displays/health fairs and public service announcements/radio/TV advertisements.

Follow-up and Support

Follow-up should be interactive and strengthens nutrition education but does not replace a nutrition education contact/intervention. Follow-up provides an opportunity for both the nutrition educator and the participant to examine progress toward goals, to provide positive support, to identify barriers that may be hindering the participant's progress and to reassess and refine future nutrition education plans. Follow-up provides ongoing support by reinforcing nutrition education message(s) and the participants' nutrition education goal(s).

Follow-up may be incorporated during the second nutrition education contact/intervention, may occur at recertification, or be a separate activity such as during voucher pick-up, by telephone or electronic means. Recertification is an appropriate time for WIC staff to reassess participant nutrition goals to better align the tailoring of subsequent nutrition services to current needs.

Reviewing the WIC Nutrition Assessment for Nutrition Education Purposes

Example 1:

The elements of effective nutrition education can be incorporated into WIC nutrition education through a variety of electronic delivery mediums, such as the Internet, computer software, kiosk and modules by including components that: direct the participant to appropriate topics based on the nutrition risk assessment; provide interaction, such as use of scenarios or quizzes; allow the participant to set goals, as well as provide specific examples on how to attain the goals; provide "take-home" tips and printable reinforcements; and, finally provide a method for follow-up via a face-to-face meeting, or through email or by telephone, to provide support and allow for questions.

Appendix A provides a tool for use by WIC State and local agencies to assist with the design, development and evaluation of electronic-based nutrition education through the application of standardized science-based criteria.

Example 2:

The elements of effective nutrition education can also be applied via telephone. For example, the WIC nutrition educator can assess the participant's readiness to change and determine relevant nutrition messages during a telephone conference that use participant centered learning as the counseling method/teaching strategy. This combination of delivery medium and counseling method/teaching strategy allows for participant interaction, goal setting and immediate feedback. Information that reinforces the messages can be provided via mail, electronically or at the next clinic visit. An additional phone call or an in-person consultation during the next clinic visit provide opportunities for follow-up and can be used to determine the effectiveness of the initial telephone contact.

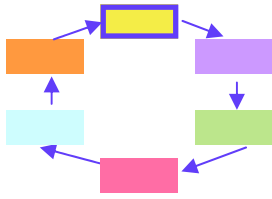
Summary

Nutrition education is the Program benefit that makes WIC a premiere public health program, setting it apart from other nutrition assistance programs. As an integral part of the WIC Program and reinforced through the process of RQNS, effective nutrition education should be designed to elicit a positive behavior change regardless of delivery method. Participant nutrition education contacts / interventions should contain all six elements described in this memorandum in order to be effective in meeting participant needs, the goals of WIC nutrition education and to be counted as a nutrition education



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Process of Delivering

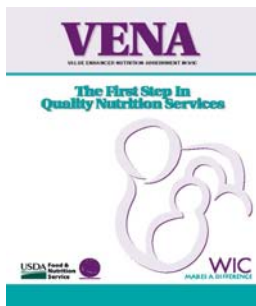


Nutrition Education in WIC

Nutrition Assessment

VENA: Value Enhanced Nutrition Assessment

VENA is an initiative developed by the Food and Nutrition Service and the National WIC Association to improve nutrition services in the WIC Program by establishing standards for the assessment process.



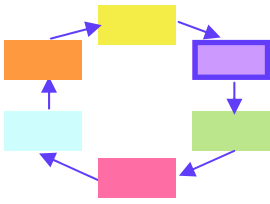
A value enhanced WIC nutrition assessment involves:

- Collecting relevant information
- Clarifying the information that has been collected
- Identifying risks and issues
- Documenting the assessment
- Following up as needed

WIC staff should be competent in six skill and knowledge areas to perform a nutrition assessment. Complete the chart below to see how you are doing in meeting these areas:

Rate yourself in the 6 areas for WIC nutrition assessment			
	I'm Feeling Strong	I'm Making Good Progress	I Need More Practice
Principles of life-cycle nutrition			
Nutrition assessment process			
Anthropometric and hematological data techniques			
Communication			
Multicultural awareness			
Critical thinking			

Process of Delivering



Nutrition Education in WIC

Select Messages

Cover just two, or maybe three main points



Do you ever stop to think about how many topics you cover in a nutrition education session?

Sometimes we have so much information to share and our “to do” list is so long that we forget to think about how much the participant can actively use and apply.

Try the ideas below to get you thinking about how you can better select and manage the nutrition and health messages you share with participants.

1. Think about how you feel during sessions:

What do you think of this statement? “Few staff are trained to handle the emotional problems which are encountered in a public health program. Many compensate for this by ‘over-counseling,’ offering too much advice for the participant to handle at one time.”

⇒ **Do you think this might apply to you?**

⇒ **Are you aware sometimes of being overwhelmed by the number of things people need help with?**

It may help to cut back on how much you tell people if you are aware that this tendency we have to tell people everything we know comes from a great desire to help in some way. Maybe the way we can help best is by being more self-disciplined in limiting our messages.

A nutrition education message is more likely to be effective if it:

- ⇒ addresses the most pressing nutritional problem or the problem the participant is most interested in
- ⇒ is simple
- ⇒ is specific (answers what? how? when?)
- ⇒ relates to the participant’s knowledge, skills, and suggests small changes in habits
- ⇒ repeats important points
- ⇒ is consistent with previous counseling and with what other health care providers are saying

Source: Idaho WIC Aide Training Manual

2. Keep track of the points you want to make:

Make checks on a scrap of paper as you make points you want the participant to remember or to do. What is your average number of checks? In your next session, try stopping at 3 checks. Is it awkward? Do you still have more to say? If so, where can you cut back? What points are your highest priority?

Use this worksheet to help you plan your session:



- How many check marks or points did you make on average for one participant?
- List the types of appointments or topics when you may provide the participant with too much information:
- What have you done to limit the information you provide participants?
- List three ways you have found to identify the two or three most important nutrition issues after completing a quality nutrition assessment?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

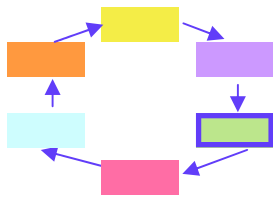
Give examples of how and when you have changed the main issues after listening to the participant's issues or concerns?

3. Think about the messages you shared

It's hard to really analyze your messages as you say them to participants. Try tape recording yourself in clinic and then comparing your messages to the guidelines. Make sure to tell the participant and get permission if you decide to record your session.

Source: Adapted from Unit 5 in Bright Ideas! Nutrition Education Skills Module by Susan Miller. The full text of Unit 5 is available on the CD accompanying this mailing as well as at www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/Sharing_Center/gallery/certprogramlevel3.htm.

Process of Delivering



Nutrition Education in WIC

Nutrition Counseling

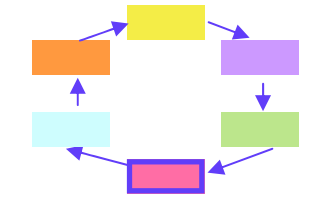
Nutrition Education Approaches and Methods

There is no one counseling method or teaching strategy that fits the needs of all participants. However, approaches that include interaction, a two-way exchange of information between the participant and the educator, have been shown to be effective in achieving positive behavior change. The following are interactive approaches that could be used with your participants.

Approach and Description	Benefits	Limitations
Facilitated Group Discussion (FGD) is an interactive form of learner-centered group education where the learners discuss a specific topic and share their questions and knowledge with other group members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on the learners' needs • Establishes relationships between learners • Gives learners opportunity to learn from one another 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires a topic that members are familiar with • Requires skill development of staff (to keep group on track, deal with misinformation, etc.) • Group may get "side-tracked"
Learner-Centered Education is a counseling approach that focuses on the learners' needs and involves the learner in decision-making and problem solving.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on the learner's needs • Often uses the Stages of Change model for behavior change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires time to establish rapport with learner • Most effective when interaction with learner is ongoing
Interactive Activities engage learners in various activities for learning. Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Games • Art projects • Word puzzles • Storytelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses multiple levels of intelligence • Develops skills • Fun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some learners may NOT feel comfortable interacting
Demonstrations provide participants with hands-on reinforcement or follow-up.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attracts and holds attention • Easily understood • Convincing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to avoid mishaps. • Learners must be present to benefit from the experience
Motivational Interviewing is a learner-centered, counseling approach aimed at eliciting behavior change by helping the learner explore and resolve uncertainty.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on the learner's needs • Uses the Stages of Change model for behavior change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires time to establish rapport with learner • Most effective when interaction with learner is ongoing

Adapted from: "Nutrition Education Approaches and Methods," California WIC Program, July 2002, and "Training Needs for Nutrition Education: Guidelines for In-service Training of Nutrition Educators" in *Nutrition Education for the Public: Discussion Papers of the FAO Expert Consultation*, 1995

Process of Delivering



Nutrition Education in WIC

Delivery Medium

Look Like You Are an Especially Nice Person!

Human dynamics are fascinating! For instance, why do I like you?

For starters, it's the fact that I feel like you like ME! When you start off with "I like you" written all over you, you're starting out in a positive spot.

People decide if they like the messenger before they even hear the message! Therefore, how nice the client perceives you to be has a lot to do with how effective you are and, ultimately, how much satisfaction you get out of doing the session.

Sure, you're a nice person . . . but is it clear just by looking at you? You will get tangible results from clearly projecting how nice you really are!

In clinic, you make subconscious and conscious evaluations constantly throughout each session. The same thing happens deep inside the participant. A client who feels positively about you will be more likely to open up to you and explore their situation.

If you appear too professional (the one in charge, the one with the answers) or too

emotionally distant, the climate will be much less conducive to learning. You will be much less effective. If you are someone participants feel they can talk with and explore things with, you will have set the stage for learning and progress.

Lighten up! Both you and your message will be SO much more attractive! People react positively to positive people and positive expectations. Good nutrition may be serious business to us but a serious approach does not make our messages especially appealing.

Why do people respond better to a light approach? Because it takes a lot of pressure off them. People are more receptive if they feel the pressure is off. More of their attention is available for listening, thinking, and exploring options. Lighten up a little and you will probably find that people give you more feedback that you've been really helpful. And that's the kind of feedback we can all use more of!

Do you sometimes find that

you are talking with someone whose face is blank and who looks like she refuses to interact with you? You don't think she's angry, it just looks like she is tuning you out.

A face that's blank does not mean the mind is blank! It could be a posture. It could be a pose or protection. This person is not necessarily hostile.

Maybe they had a bad experience at the front counter or with another staff member. Maybe they just don't know what to expect and they want to check it all out before they share a smile with you. Perhaps this is someone from a culture that reserves smiles for people already known and trusted.

"Who you are speaks so loudly I can't hear what you're saying."

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Next time you see a blank face, think of it as a vulnerable face and then be your warmest self. Your genuine warmth can break through barriers fast.

You may find it unnatural to maintain genuine warmth when you don't feel any in return, but think of it as a challenge. Your smile doesn't have to be focused on the adult, either. If you smile as you look at the baby or children, the parent notices right away. (Don't you find that if you show that you like somebody's kids, they are automatically more comfortable with you?)

Desmond Morris, the anthropologist, has done some fascinating work on the messages our faces send.

He has demonstrated very clearly how we have a primitive and instinctual response to the cues on the faces of the people we meet. We read each others' faces almost unconsciously. For many thousands of years, humans have used the smile to defuse hostility and signal peaceful intentions.

Have you ever thought about how the genuine smile looks? After reading this, you will become really conscious of when people are giving you a genuine smile and when they're just giving you a business-like smile. The genuine smile is one that gives us "apple-cheeks" and pulls those muscles around our eyes so that we get little

bags under our eyes. Look for it! When the area around a person's eyes crinkles up, you're getting their warmest welcome. The eyes are half of a genuine smile.

A genuine smile and a caring attitude set the stage for a good session. If it's the end of a long day and you can't muster a warm, genuine smile, at least look each person directly in the eye and smile a business-like smile!

And the next time a fellow staff member complains that nobody listens to her, watch how she greets her participants. Is there a genuine smile in sight?

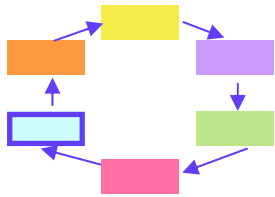
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http://www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/Sharing_Center/gallery/certprogramlevel3.htm

Other articles include

- [Accept That It's Natural for All of Us to Think "What's in it for Me?"](#)
- [Avoid Making a Participant Feel Defensive](#)
- [Help People Solve or Prevent Problems. Don't "Teach Nutrition"](#)
- [Cover Just Two, or Maybe Three, Main Points](#)
- [Find Out the Participant's Solution. Provide Each Person with Frequent, Positive Feedback and Support](#)
- [Let the Participant Wrap It Up by Telling You What She Plans to Do](#)
- [Become an Even Better Listener](#)



Process of Delivering



Nutrition Education in WIC

Reinforcing Messages

Using Bulletin Boards to Reinforce Selected Nutrition Messages



Deliver WIC materials, publications and information to clients



Remind people about upcoming events



Allow staff to exercise creativity



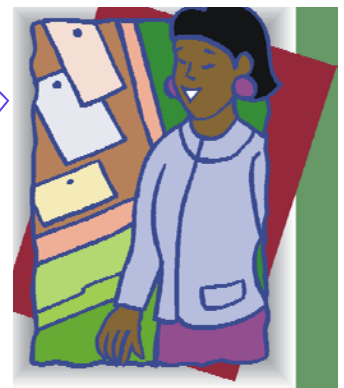
Encourage staff and clients to make healthy behavior changes

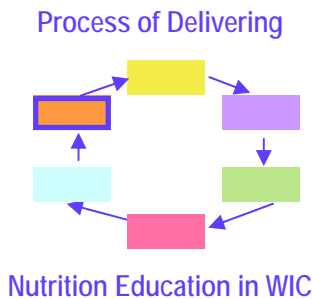
The purpose of a bulletin board is to:

AROUSE interest...**STIMULATE** thought...encourage **ACTION**

I think I'll put together a bulletin board, I better remember to:

- ⇒ Put up information that my clients want and need
- ⇒ Brainstorm with my co-workers for ideas
- ⇒ Keep my title short and simple, and the text concise
- ⇒ Stay with a central theme
- ⇒ Limit the design to no more than four main points of interest
- ⇒ Use cool colors (green, blue, gray) for backgrounds and warm colors (red, yellow, orange) to emphasize my message
- ⇒ Make the letters easy to read and use a variety of sizes and types to highlight my points
- ⇒ Add graphics that match the theme





Follow Up

Tips for Telephone Counseling

Sometimes, a telephone call or an email is the best way to follow up with a participant. These sessions are low cost and do not require transportation. Also, some participants may be more open talking with you when you are not face-to-face in the WIC office. Here are some tips to make these sessions successful.

Prepare for the telephone call.

- Ask other colleagues about their experiences with telephone counseling.
- Prepare your work space and eliminate distractions.
- Review the participant’s information and have it in front of you during the call.
- Remember to use skills similar to those you use in face-to-face counseling.

Make the call.

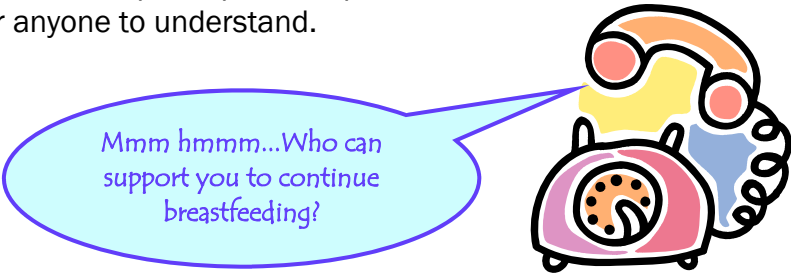
- Introduce yourself warmly.
- Welcome in a way that conveys your willingness to listen in an unhurried manner.
- Ask if this is a good time to talk and whether the participant can speak freely.
- Pretend the participant can see you.
- Pay attention to the tone of your voice, breathing patterns, pauses, and speaking pace.

Pay attention.

- Listen actively to the participant’s words and overall message.
- Value the participant as a human being.
- Listen with an open mind and heart. Don’t interrupt.
- Acknowledge the participant’s feelings to continue the conversation.
- Make an effort to understand in a non-judgmental way.

Consider your words.

- Show you’re listening. Use verbal cues, e.g., “Yes, I see...,” “Uh huh...”
- Say the participant’s name and the child’s name often.
- Describe concrete examples that fit the participant’s experience.
- Use language easy enough for anyone to understand.



Use your best counseling skills even though you are not face-to-face.

- Let the participant choose the most pressing problem they wish to discuss.
- Address other issues as time permits.
- Ask open-ended questions to draw out more feelings, concerns, and difficulties.
- Probe for more information when a superficial answer is not enough.
- Congratulate and compliment small positive steps.
- Paraphrase key content and feelings from what the participant says.
- Verify what you heard and correct misunderstandings.
- Allow for thinking with pauses and silences. These may foster more discussion.

Close the call.

- Summarize the main points of the conversation.
- PRAISE the participant and help the person feel confident for taking action.
- Set a time for the next visit with the participant.
- Limit calls to 15 minutes.

Take care with answering machines.

- Follow your WIC agency policy on leaving messages. They may compromise privacy.

Guard the participant's confidentiality.

- Keep information quiet according to WIC policy.
- Select a time and place to make your call so others will not overhear you.
- Store contact logs safely and securely.
- Assume any information is confidential if you are unsure.

Document contacts with WIC participants.

- Record the date you talked with the mother.
- Specify the type of contact you had with her.
- Note any referrals you made.
- Summarize the things you talked about.
- Follow your agency policy for documentation.



Adapted from:

Loving Support Through Peer Counseling, "Module 4: Counseling and Communications Skills," 2005. http://www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/Learning_Center/loving_support.html

"Telephone Counseling Skills Training Module" from Johns Hopkins University, Bloomberg School of Public Health/Center for Communication Programs and the Academy for Educational Development (2000), *AIDS helpline counselor training: Trainer's manual*. Johannesburg, South Africa.