

Combining Readiness to Change Strategies into Nutrition Education for Large Groups

plans reflect reality-not all WIC clients will be able to change behaviors because of internal and external factors.

Therefore, agencies must identify clearly what changes each client might be expected to achieve. After attending nutrition education classes, precontemplators should be able to recognize personal problems. Contemplators should be able to commit to change by a certain date; preparers should be able to select methods to help them change; and maintainers should be able to lead others in change. For example, **contemplators** may commit to adding another serving of fruit after viewing a video about 5-A-Day, whereas those in **action** will do so.

- 2. Agencies can choose videos and lectures that either span the range of readiness to change reflected across the audience of WIC clients or are specific to each change stage. For example, those mothers **contemplating** weaning might need to see a video that increases their understanding about the problems associated with prolonged bottle use. For those WIC mothers who are in **preparation**, a video demonstrating some techniques to try would be more helpful.

Determining Group Readiness to Change

Often a simple "show of hands" is used. The nutrition educator starts the class by informing clients what the class will address (e.g. selecting lower-fat foods). This is followed by asking how many have **never thought** about selecting lower-fat foods (it might help if a specific food is mentioned, i.e. milk). The educator counts the raised hands. The next questions would address how many have **thought** about trying 1% milk, how many are **planning to try** using 1% milk within the next few months, how many are **already using it**, and finally how many have been **using it for over 6 months**. Following each question, the educator would record the results. This simple method does provide a level of assessment, although educators must acknowledge that peer

influence and reporting bias may very well affect how clients respond in group settings.

Determining Change in Readiness

This is perhaps the most difficult part of large group classes. In fact, any evaluation for impact during large classes is hard to conduct. The biggest issue is what do you want to know: changes in readiness for **individuals** or for the **group**.

- To evaluate **group** change in readiness, the educator would re-ask the above questions and record the hand counts after the lecture or video is presented. This is not a very reliable or accurate way to assess change but provides some level of evaluating education efforts.

Individual readiness change is best determined during certifications. In other words, the nutrition counselor would determine readiness to change for a mutually selected goal, e.g. selecting lower-fat foods. Hopefully, subsequent large group classes would address this goal. **Evaluation of change in individual readiness** would be done upon recertification. The nutrition counselor would reassess stage using class attendance as part of the assessment. In other words, the counselor would know if the client did not attend classes specific to considering lower-fat food selection, such behavior change might not have occurred. If the client did attend such classes and did not move from contemplation to preparation or action, than behavior change did not occur. Why this didn't occur may be unknown-perhaps WIC classes were ineffective, the client made no attempt to change, or the client's life did not accommodate change.

- A way to determine change in individual readiness within the group setting is to conduct a survey. If you are interested in agency level changes, you can omit

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names; however, if you are interested in individual change, written, labeled responses are needed. The **pre-post approach** is typically used for this assessment. This approach requires two questionnaires, one given before the class starts and one given at the end of class. Some agencies use a single sheet (labeled pre on one side and post on the other), printed with identical questions on both sides. Questions usually address changes in knowledge but can be used to determine readiness to change (using the same questions as in the hand-raising group technique).

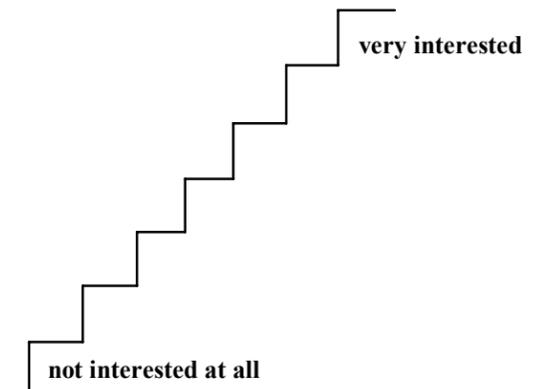
Another twist on this approach is to conduct a post-pre survey. This involves only *one* questionnaire. It asks clients to respond to a question as they would have **before** the class and as they would **now**, after the class. This technique may not work very well with knowledge questions but does work in determining change in level of confidence and interest. *Establishing levels of interest and confidence helps to determine readiness to change-the more interested, the greater the potential for change.*

Here are several examples of the post-pre questionnaire technique.

EXAMPLE 1

Please place a (1) on the step signifying how interested you were in learning about weaning your child from the bottle, **before** class.

Place a (2) on the step indicating how interested you are **now** about weaning your child.



EXAMPLE 2

Circle the answer that describes your level of confidence in selecting low-fat milk **BEFORE** you attended this class.

Not very confident	somewhat confident	confident	not very confident	not confident at all
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Circle the answer that describes your level of confidence in selecting low-fat milk **AFTER** you attended this class.

Not very confident	somewhat confident	confident	not very confident	not confident at all
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How can large WIC sites support behavior change education?

We have two suggestions:

1. Change administrative WIC practices.
2. Incorporate innovative teaching techniques for large group classes.

In last month's issue, the focus was on changing WIC environment in order to accommodate smaller group sessions, the preferred way to conduct effective behavior change education. However, many WIC agencies are faced with the reality that such change is not possible. How then do these agencies conduct effective group nutrition education geared to participants' readiness to change? What innovative behavior change techniques can be incorporated into large education groups?

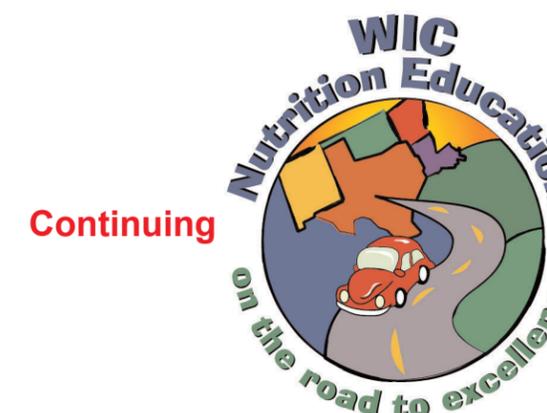
Unfortunately, we have no simple, easy or direct answers to these questions. In fact, we **challenge** WIC nutrition educators to **experiment** and **share** their results with us and with your colleagues.

What we can assist agencies in doing, is contemplating ways to integrate **current** large class nutrition education **techniques** with **expectations** for change (nutrition education outcomes).

Favorite Nutrition Education Techniques

Most WIC agencies use **videos and lectures** for **teaching large groups**. These methods provide consistency between clinics, are convenient, coordinate with the time needed for voucher issuance, and cover knowledge dissemination most agencies list in their nutrition education plans. They also work well when staffing is limited.

If **chosen** appropriately, **videos** can communicate knowledge, address barriers, provide skills and other action-oriented advice,



and even help certain viewers through both the thinking and feeling processes of change. If appropriately **designed**, **lectures** also can address the components needed for clients to change behaviors.

However, no one video or lecture will address all the needs of **EACH INDIVIDUAL** WIC client within the class. Furthermore, **alone** they do not facilitate the entire spectrum required for individual behavior change. Being able to recognize these limitations will help WIC staff and administrators understand the impact of nutrition education efforts when large group sessions are necessary.

These observations suggest several possible avenues to follow in order to create a behavior change supportive WIC environment.

1. Agencies can alter **their** nutrition education outcome expectations for changes by WIC clients. However, since most agencies are expected to assist their clients in making changes, this suggestion may not be acceptable. Nonetheless, it is imperative that nutrition education

EXAMPLE 3

Circle how many servings of fruit and vegetables you thought your child needed BEFORE you attended this class. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Circle how many servings of fruit and vegetables you thought your child needed AFTER you attended this class. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Next Issue: Newsletter #6 will be the final issue in this series. Whereas previous newsletters have focused on nutrition education issues of WIC clients and WIC agencies, the final issue will discuss future expectations of WIC nutrition education given some environmental realities.