



IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT NUTRITION ASSESSMENT
MEANINGFUL CLIENT CONNECTIONS: THE HEART OF WIC SERVICES

2007 WASHINGTON STATE WIC CONFERENCE

Presented by: Heidi Helsley
Training Consultant, State WIC Office
Washington State WIC Conference
October 22, 2007



It's Not Just About Nutrition Assessment: Meaningful Client Connections, The Heart of WIC Services

Engagement begins when the person first arrives at the clinic.
A warm welcome sets the stage for successful counseling.
~The Touching Hearts, Touching Minds Project

Session Description:

Meaningful client connections are at the heart of WIC services. This session allows participants to practice a client centered communication style using scenarios including check education and appointment scheduling. Participants will demonstrate active listening skills and identify benefits of positive client interactions. The important role clerks play in setting the stage for the success of VENA and client centered education will also be highlighted.

Objectives:

During this session participants will:

1. Discover factors that contribute to both effective and unsuccessful client education.
2. Explore the potential benefits of using active listening skills.
3. Apply this client centered communication style to at least one WIC service scenario.

Learning Tasks:

- Share what our experiences teach us about approaching interactions with our clients, and apply those lessons to how we provide education.
- Identify ways to make our interactions with clients more centered on their interests, knowledge, and feelings.
- Consider advice clients have shared with staff.
- Review aspects of active listening skills.
- Apply and practice aspects of active listening skills.

Tools and Materials:

- Writing utensil
- Video clip
- Notebook materials



It's Not Just About Nutrition Assessment: Meaningful Client Connections, The Heart of WIC Services

TASK 1: ICE BREAKER

Before we begin, let's do an activity that will help energizes us and recognize the levels of WIC experience that people bring to this session.

Instructions:

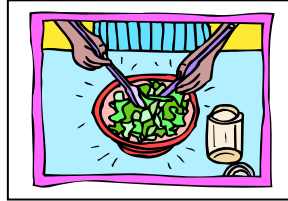
1. Please stand.
2. Listen as the following statements are read.
If the statement rings true to you, please clap your hands against your legs twice.

Statements:

- I have been working for WIC more than 10 years.
 - I have been working for WIC 5 to 10 years.
 - I have been working for WIC 1 to 5 years.
 - I have been working for WIC less than 1 year.
 - I am a Clerk.
 - I am a Certifier
 - I am an RD.
 - I am a Coordinator.
 - I work in Administration.
 - I am a parent.
 - I am not a parent.
 - We may have differing levels of WIC experience, but we all have something important to bring to the table.
 - I'm ready to get started!
3. You may have a seat. Thank you for sharing!

TASK 2

HOW TO MAKE A SALAD



Instructions:

1. **Partner with someone at your table. Introduce yourself.**
2. **Decide** who will be “Partner 1” and who will be “Partner 2” for this activity.
3. **“Partner 1”** -
Tell your partner how to make a salad and convince your partner that salads are good.

“Partner 2” - Listen to the information your partner shares.
4. **When instructed, stop the conversation.**
5. **Next, share the answers to the following questions with your partner.**

Partner 1 – What did you experience and observe during this activity?

Some things to consider...

- What did you notice about your partner’s body language and attention level during this interaction?
- Describe how you felt during the interaction.
- Do you feel you were successful in educating your partner?

Partner 2 – What did you experience and observe during this activity?

Some things to consider...

- Describe how your partner came to understand your level of interest, feelings, and knowledge about salads.
- How effective do you feel your partner was in teaching you how to make salads and in convincing you they are good? Why?

Both partners – What can this experience teach us about approaching interactions with our clients, especially when it comes to providing education?

6. **Let’s hear a sampling of responses.**



It's Not Just About Nutrition Assessment: Meaningful Client Connections, The Heart of WIC Services

WHAT'S THIS GOT TO DO WITH VENA?

Communication between staff and clients is very important to the success of VENA.

Building Positive Client Relations (Rapport Building), understanding more about our client's cultural beliefs and practices (Multi-Cultural Awareness), and using Active Listening skills (Open Communication) are just a few skill areas that are involved. These all play a part of Client Centered Services.

It's not just about nutrition assessment!

You have the chance to make a meaningful client connection each time you provide any type of service to a client. Whether you are scheduling an appointment, providing a much needed referral, or sharing information that could help your client make healthy choices for her family, you have the opportunity to make your clients to feel heard, respected, and valued.

THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF THE WIC CLERK

The WIC clerk has an important role in setting the stage for the client's success in WIC, and for future interactions with WIC staff. A client's first experience with WIC usually occurs when they call or walk in to ask about the program.

If the client feels heard, respected, and cared about, they will be more comfortable when they meet with the WIC certifier. Clients will more readily share information about their food intake, medical issues, and situation at home and will be more receptive to suggestions that staff offer.

About Task 2:

The "how to make a salad" activity (Task 2) helps demonstrate how we risk making our client education ineffective if we do not take time to recognize our clients' level of knowledge, interests, and experiences about a topic.

When we jump right into education based on what we know and want the client to know, we're focusing on what's important to us, rather than the client. We are being more "staff centered" than "client centered".



It's Not Just About Nutrition Assessment: Meaningful Client Connections, The Heart of WIC Services

TASK 3: CHECK EDUCATION EVALUATION

In WIC, we are mandated to provide specific pieces of information to our clients, and let's face it, during client interactions, it's pretty easy to jump right into those things we need to make sure to tell them.

Let's observe a staff person as she provides check education. She will inform the client about required, key pieces of information. After we've watched the video, we'll evaluate the effectiveness of the interaction.

Instructions:

- 1. Watch the video clip.**
- 2. After you've seen the video, partner with someone at your table.**
- 3. With your partner, answer the following questions.**
 - How would you describe the staff person's level of friendliness and willingness to help?
 - What did you observe about the staff person's body language? (Eye contact, facial expressions, etc.)
 - How well would you say the staff person did in providing required, key pieces of check education? Why?
 - What did you observe about the client's body language?
 - How well do you think the client understood the information provided? Why?
 - How successful do you think the client's first shopping experience will be? Why?
 - What, if anything, could the staff have done to differently to help the client better understand how to shop for the WIC foods and how to use the checks?
- 4. Let's hear a sampling of responses.**



It's Not Just About Nutrition Assessment: Meaningful Client Connections, The Heart of WIC Services

About Task 3

As the video demonstrates, we can run through checklists of information and share facts in a friendly way, but that doesn't always mean we are being effective. When we stay focused on what we have to share instead of truly helping the client understand the information, we take a chance of disconnecting with the client, and risk building barriers.

ADVICE FROM CLIENTS

The Massachusetts WIC Program asked groups of WIC moms to share advice with WIC staff. We can learn from their clients' advice and apply it to how we work with our WIC clients. Here's the advice these moms shared:

Be warm and caring. I'll listen better.
Respect my culture. I may not think like you, and we both may be right.
Treat me like a person, not a number.
Don't make me feel like you are judging or criticizing me.
Always have a smile for me and my kids.
Talk WITH me, not AT me.

TASK 4 A PIECE OF ADVICE

Instructions:

1. From the list of advice above, choose one piece of advice that you think would have helped the staff person in the video activity.
2. Which piece of advice might be helpful for you to remember when you return to your clinic and provide services? Please circle it. Keep this piece of advice in mind as we continue.

ACTIVE LISTENING: THE CLIENT CENTERED COMMUNICATION MODEL

Active listening is a method of client centered communication that involves listening and responding.

- The majority of talking and information sharing is done by the speaker (the client).
- During the conversation, the listener (staff) holds back from giving information in order to fully attend to the speaker.
- The listener (staff) checks for meaning and understanding.

The ultimate goal of this client centered communication technique is for the listener and speaker to have a mutual understanding by the end of the conversation.

When using active listening skills, the listener stops...



Seeing themselves as the expert that must be obeyed



Telling or dictating what is best to do



Sharing their own perspective first



Controlling the conversation

TASK 5 BENEFITS OF ACTIVE LISTENING

Active listening leads staff to establish a mutual understanding with their clients.

Instructions:

1. Jot down your answers to these questions
2. What might be potential benefits to WIC staff when they use active listening skills.
3. What might be potential benefits to clients when WIC staff use active listening skills.
4. We'll hear a sampling of responses.



It's Not Just About Nutrition Assessment: Meaningful Client Connections, The Heart of WIC Services

OPENING THE ACTIVE CONVERSATION

The style of question you ask can either limit or expand the amount of information the client provides to you in response. The question can help the client share more about their needs and concerns, or it can direct the client to respond with a brief answer. During conversations, a mix between question styles is helpful.

Open ended questions

- Work best to start a client centered conversation,
- Allow the clients to respond with an answer of more than one or two words,
- Help the client reveal more helpful information to you, or clarify information they have shared,
- Help you establish trust with the client,
- Often start with words including, “how”, “what”, and “why”, “tell me about”, and “describe for me”,
- Can be used throughout the conversation, and
- Get you information to better target educational messages and/or better meet the client’s needs.

Open ended question example:

“Tell me what you know and how you feel about breastfeeding.”

Open ended questions often begin with...

- How?
- What?
- Why?
- Tell me about...
- Describe for me...

Closed ended questions

- limit the client’s response when used to start a conversation,
- usually end with a one or two word response such as “yes” or “no”,
- usually work best to clarify information, and
- can be used throughout the conversation.

Closed ended question example:

“Do you want an afternoon appointment?”



**It's Not Just About Nutrition Assessment:
Meaningful Client Connections, The Heart of WIC Services**

**TASK 6
POP THE QUESTION**

This fast paced activity gives us a chance to test our recognition of closed ended and open ended questions. Remember, closed ended questions usually allow a response of only one or two words, while open ended question allow a lengthier, more informative response.

Instructions:

1. When the question is read, determine if it is an open ended or closed ended question.
2. If it is an open ended question, raise both arms up in the air quickly, and then lower them quickly.
3. If it is a closed ended question, fold your arms across the front of you.

Questions	Open ended or closed ended question?
1. What appointment times work best for you?	
2. Will a 10:15 a.m. appointment work for you?	
3. Tell me about the types and amounts of income each of your family members receive per month.	
4. What is your income?	
5. Describe the experience you had at the store.	
6. Did everything go ok at the store?	
7. Do you have any questions?	



It's Not Just About Nutrition Assessment:
Meaningful Client Connections, The Heart of WIC Services

TASK 7
BACK AT THE CLINIC...

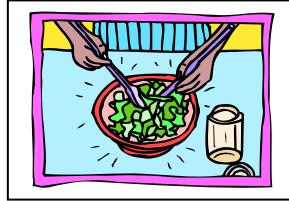
This activity gives us a chance to develop open ended questions that can be used back at the clinic.

Instructions:

1. With your partner, develop open ended questions for the following common WIC situations.
2. We'll hear examples from a sampling of participants.
3. When you return to the clinic and facing this situation, try using these questions with your clients.

SITUATION	OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS I CAN USE
Help your client choose the best time and day to schedule an appointment.	
You are providing check education, and want to help your client understand where she can use WIC checks.	
A breastfeeding mom mentions she is going back to school in a month. You want to find out her breastfeeding plans.	
You are checking a client's income eligibility and need her to inform you about her household's monthly income.	

TASK 8
LET'S TALK ABOUT SALADS



Instructions:

1. **Join your partner again.**
2. **Decide** who will be “Partner 1” and who will be “Partner 2” for this activity.
3. **“Partner 1”** will open the conversation using an open ended question.
4. **Then, Partners 1 and 2, talk about salads.**
5. **Compare the difference between Task 2 (How to make a salad) and Task 8 (Let’s talk about salads).**

Partner 1 – What did you experience and observe during this activity?
Some things to consider...

- What did you notice about your partner’s body language and attention level during this interaction?
- Describe how you felt during the interaction.

Partner 2 – What did you experience and observe during this activity?
Some things to consider...

- Describe how your partner came to understand your level of interest, feelings, and knowledge about salads.

Both partners – What can this experience teach us about approaching interactions with our clients, especially when it comes to providing education?

6. **Let’s hear a sampling of responses.**



ADDITIONAL TASKS

TASK 9: MEANINGFUL CLIENT CONNECTIONS

Consider and capture what meaningful client connections look like to you, and list ways that you can help create meaningful client connections.

TASK 10: RECONSTRUCT THE QUESTION

Change close ended questions into open ended questions.

TASK 11: EXPERIENCE THE DIFFERENCE

Contrast the amount of information you receive when you ask open ended questions and closed ended questions.

TASK 12: TAKE HOME TIPS

Review this list of tips, and consider how you will apply them in the clinic when interacting with clients.



It's Not Just About Nutrition Assessment: Meaningful Client Connections, The Heart of WIC Services

TASK 9 MEANINGFUL CLIENT CONNECTIONS

Instructions:

1. Think about your experiences during this session and experiences in the clinic.
2. Consider what a meaningful client connection looks like to you.
3. In the “Meaningful Client Connections” box below, either :
 - Jot down some of the words that describe a meaningful client connection.
 - Describe a specific meaningful interaction you had with a client.
 - Draw a picture that depicts a meaningful client connection.

♥ MEANINGFUL CLIENT CONNECTIONS ♥

4. List ways that you can help create meaningful client connections for your clients.



It's Not Just About Nutrition Assessment:
Meaningful Client Connections, The Heart of WIC Services

TASK 10
RECONSTRUCT THE QUESTION

This activity gives us a chance to reconstruct closed ended questions into open ended questions.

Instructions:

1. By yourself or with a partner, change the following closed ended questions into open ended questions.

Closed ended question	Open ended question
Do you have any questions?	
Do you like to eat vegetables?	
Do you need help with something?	



It's Not Just About Nutrition Assessment: Meaningful Client Connections, The Heart of WIC Services

TASK 11 EXPERIENCE THE DIFFERENCE

This activity allows you and a partner to contrast the amount of information received when asking close ended question and open ended questions.

Instructions:

1. Partner with someone. Decide who will be “Partner 1” and “Partner 2”. Partners will each be assigned discussion topics and goals to accomplish by the end of the conversation.
2. Partners will take turns trying to accomplish their goals. Partner 1 will go first, then after 5 minutes, stop the conversation and allow Partner 2 to try.
3. After both partners have taken their turn, discuss what you noticed about the amount of information that was shared when using closed ended and when using open ended questions.

Partner 1: Your discussion topic is **Breakfast**.

Your goals are:

- 1) by the end of the conversation, to learn about your partner’s interest, knowledge, and experience about the topic,
- 2) to start the conversation with an open ended question,
- 3) to use both open ended questions & close ended questions as part of the conversation
- 4) to notice the amount of information shared depending on the type of question you asked.

Partner 2: Your discussion topic is **Exercise**.

Your goals are:

- 1) by the end of the conversation, to learn about your partner’s interest, knowledge, and experience about the topic,
- 2) to start the conversation with an open ended question,
- 3) to use both open ended questions & close ended questions as part of the conversation
- 4) to notice the amount of information shared depending on the type of question you asked.

Open ended questions often begin with...

- How?
- What?
- Why?
- Tell me about...
- Describe for me...



It's Not Just About Nutrition Assessment: Meaningful Client Connections, The Heart of WIC Services

TASK 12 TAKE HOME TIPS

Review this list of tips. Consider how you can apply them when interacting with clients.

Tip 1: Consider your powerful communication tools. Your body language, tone of voice, and the words you use can make the client feel welcome and important, or unimportant and ignored.

Positive Body Language	Negative Body Language
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Smile	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Frowning, rolling eyes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eye contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not looking at the client, being distracted
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relaxed arms, open palm gesturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Folded arms, tenseness
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nodding to show understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fidgeting

Best practice: Smile, make eye contact, have a cheerful voice, and greet the client with sincerity. When you're on the phone, smile! It elevates your tone of voice; your client can "hear" it.

Tip 2: Try to find out what is important to the client before jumping into education or what you need to accomplish during the interaction. Ask questions that will help the client provide useful information. Use open ended questions. Reflect back to the client what you heard. This will help the client clarify the meaning of her response. It also allows you to dig a little deeper to reach a mutual understanding.

Tip 3: Practice makes a difference. Active listening takes practice. Just remember the benefits of using this client centered communication style. Active listening can be used with coworkers, family, friends, as well as clients. Remember, it's all about reaching a mutual understanding.

Tip 4: Take the opportunity to acknowledge the positive things your client focuses on when she shares information with you or demonstrates a positive action in your presence. How about complimenting her on the way her children look to her for protection and comfort? How about thanking her for arriving on time? Recognizing these things helps build meaningful client connections.

Presenter Contact Information:

Heidi Helsley
WA State WIC Office
Heidi.Helsley@doh.wa.gov
360-236-3718
1-800-841-1410 x 3718