

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH WIC PROGRAM

Customer Service

Training





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Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module, trainees will have:

- Identified what customers commonly expect from customer service providers.
- Noted two ways to meet and possibly exceed customers' expectations.
- Prepared for dealing with negative situations in the clinic by reviewing steps to take when confronted with difficult clients or situations.
- Practiced changing negative responses into positive responses.
- Taken steps to build their “nerve to serve” by exploring ways of handling difficult situations that could occur in the clinic.

WIC Customer Service

WIC recognizes the importance of customer service. The manner in which customer service is provided impacts how effective WIC staff can be at improving the lifelong health and nutrition of the clients we serve.

When WIC staff provide good customer service, clients will likely continue to participate on the program and get the most from the benefits WIC has to offer including nutrition education, referrals, and access to food.

Messages customer service convey

The manner in which we provide customer service should convey these messages to our clients:

- ♥ WIC cares
- ♥ You are important to us
- ♥ We know you care about your family
- ♥ Let's work together
- ♥ WIC is here to help
- ♥ We want to serve you
- ♥ You have choices
- ♥ We believe in you

Attitude of service

To convey these messages, WIC staff provide services to clients in a positive way and demonstrate an attitude of service. This attitude is not something you put on and take off. Someone with an attitude of service tends to naturally want to help others whether they are at work, or not.

Activity 1: Can you recognize an attitude of service?

Circle any of the following situations you have ever witnessed.

Someone:

- Holds a door open for someone else
- Picks up something dropped by another person
- Allows another person in line to cut in front of them

If have witnessed any of these before,
you have recognized an attitude of service.
Do you have an attitude of service?

Learning from experiences

We are customers of utility companies, grocery stores, medical facilities, and more. Our personal experiences from receiving customer service can help remind us about the way customer service should and should not be provided, based on whether our expectations were met and how we were treated.

Activity 2 Part 1:

A lesson learned from an *unsatisfactory* experience

1. Think about a situation when you were provided with *unsatisfactory* customer service.
2. Answer the following questions:
 - What type of assistance were you seeking from the customer service provider?
 - What actions were you expecting the person to take?
 - How do you expect to be treated?
 - How did you feel when your expectations were not met?
3. What could this customer service provider have done differently to change the *unsatisfactory* situation into a *satisfactory* one?
4. What lesson does this experience teach you about providing customer service?

Activity 2 Part 2:**A lesson learned from an *excellent* customer service experience**

1. Think about a time when you were provided with *excellent* customer service.
2. Answer the following questions:
 - What type of assistance were you seeking from the customer service provider?
 - What actions were you expecting the person to take?
 - How do you expect to be treated?
 - How did you feel when your expectations were met?
3. What lesson does this experience teach you about providing customer service?

Customer satisfaction

Meeting customers' expectations results in customer satisfaction. How do we know what our customers expect?

There are common expectations that all customers have about the way they should be treated and the actions they expect the customer service provider to take to assist them.

Activity 3: What customers want and expect

1. Review your answers from Activity 2 – parts 1 and 2.
2. Based on your experiences, you may be able to identify what customers in general expect from those serving them, and how they want to be treated.
3. On the next page, place an X next to the things you think customers, in general, want and expect when being provided customer service.

Customers expect to be:

	Listened to		Taken seriously
	Shown empathy		Treated with respect
	Attended to immediately		Helped, especially when trying to solve a problem
	Offered choices		Appreciated

Customers expect customer service providers to be:

	Courteous		Knowledgeable
	Caring		Reliable
	Concerned		Helpful
	Honest		Interested
	Non-judgmental		Respectful

It starts with respect. If you respect the customer as a human being, and truly honor their right to be treated fairly and honestly, every thing else is much easier.

Doug Smith

How to meet (and even exceed) customer expectations

To meet and even exceed customers' expectations, routinely provide good customer service. Follow these best practices:

1. Acknowledge clients when they arrive

Clients understand staff are busy, but still want to be acknowledged. Even when you are helping another client in person or on the phone, acknowledge the arrival of clients. This may be done simply by smiling and gesturing that you will be with her shortly.

2. Find out what your customers expects

Greet the client with a smile and find out what the customer expects by using a simple phrase, "Hi, how can I help you today?" This also conveys your attitude of service.

3. Recognize how the client might feel

Our customers can feel overwhelmed with the amount of information we provide. They may be worried they will not be able to remember everything. Be empathetic, recognize how the client might be feeling, and offer assistance.

Example: "Using your checks the first time can be confusing and can feel overwhelming. I can offer some helpful tips, if you would like."

4. Put yourself "in the client's shoes"

Clients often feel comfortable sharing exciting events happening in their lives. Other times, clients need help dealing with a difficult situation. When talking with a client, learn how they feel and consider how you would feel if you were in that situation.

5. Listen, without interrupting or finishing the sentence.

Let the customer talk. Listen attentively. Simply focus on what the person is telling you. You should not interrupt or finish the sentence for the person.

6. Check for understanding by using reflective listening skills.

Make sure you understand what the client is asking for and how you can help her. In turn, make sure clients understand the information that you are providing. Use reflective listening skills to help.

- Start by stating that you want to make sure that you understand.
- Next, reflect back what it is you think the person asked about or told you.
- Finish by asking if you understood correctly.

The customer will assure you have understood or will provide more information.

Example: “Let me make sure I understand. Your household’s income is from your husband’s employment and these are his pay stubs. You baby-sit for your neighbor twice a week, but she does not pay you. Instead, she provides you with transportation to school and to the store twice a week. Did I get that right?”

7. Use body language that shows respect.

In face to face conversations, use eye contact and avoid distractions. Rolling your eyes, huffing, and continuing to do things without looking at the client are all examples of disrespectful body language.

Additional information about body language is included in section 4.

Although clients on the phone cannot see your body language, smiling elevates your voice and your tone of voice will be more natural and friendly sounding. Try smiling during phone conversations.

8. Take responsibility for handling the issue or request.

Taking responsibility might be the most valued aspect of customer service. Customers want to know that someone will help handle the issue, or will look into their request.

Even when you are not sure about an answer or when the requested task is not typically part of your job, take responsibility. Make it your personal mission to find someone who can follow through to answer the customer’s question or find someone who can look into the client’s request.

Learning Check Point

When a customer receives what he or she *expects*, the customer is satisfied. List 3 things that our customers want and expect from us.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

List 2 ways we can meet, and even exceed, our customers' expectations.

- 1.
- 2.

Coworkers are customers too

Coworkers who consider themselves part of a team working together towards reaching a common goal are more efficient and tend to have a more pleasant work environment. These individuals understand how they fit in, and can envision the outcome of the teamwork.

When we support our WIC coworkers, we are providing customer service. Our coworkers are our customers too. There are simple ways that team members can support each other. Examples:

- While the certifier continues to ask a mom assessment questions, the RD can weigh and measure her child who also is being certified that day.
- The clerk can generate and print end of day reports for the Coordinator.
- The certifier can work with the clerk to determine the number of materials that need to be ordered for the clinic.

Activity 4: How can I help?

Note ways you can support your coworkers here:

Members of WIC teams who show initiative provide excellent customer service to their clients and to each other. They demonstrate an attitude of service.

I show initiative.

No clients now? Maybe I can help another way.

I can do that!

Taking responsibility helps solve problems.

I am willing to try.

Attitude is everything. I have an attitude of service.

Tell me what I can do to help.

Voicing my ideas will help our team.

Everyone is responsible, including me.

Section
3

“The Nerve to Serve” – preventing & handling negative situations

Routinely providing excellent customer service helps prevent negative situations in the clinic. Returning customers become familiar with your attitude of service and your willingness to help, and know they can count on you to follow through with responsibilities. It is difficult for someone to be negative towards those who are regularly helpful and care.

Avoid negative responses

Negative situations can develop when customers receive a negative response to a request. People feel they are not going to be helped and may become upset when they hear responses that start with what the customer service provider can't do or isn't allowed to do.

Sometimes WIC rules limit staff from doing something a client requests. How do you avoid a negative response and still let the client know you can't do something they requested?

1. Begin your response with a positive statement,
2. Communicate your willingness to help, and
3. Inform the customer what it is you can do to help.

Example: A caregiver has two children that need certification appointments. Your clinic closes at 4:45pm. The caregiver asks for a 4:30pm appointment.

You could respond...	A better response might be...
“No. The latest I can schedule you is 4:00pm.”	“I’m noticing that a 4:00pm appointment would allow enough time to certify both children but 4:30pm would not. Can I offer you the 4:00 pm?”

At times you will be asked a question and you may not know the answer. Statements such as, “I don’t know” or “I’m not sure” basically convey the messages, “I can’t help you” or “I’m not going to help you”.

1. Begin your response with a positive statement,
2. Communicate your willingness to help, and
3. Inform the customer what it is you can do to help.

For example:

Your client tells you she will be traveling to the other side of the state next week. She asks if she can use her WIC checks at a store there. You are not sure if she can use them in that city.

You could respond...	A better response might be...
<p>“I’m not sure. I guess you could try.”</p>	<p>“Let me try to find out for you.”</p>

Activity 5: Changing a negative into a positive.

1. On the next page, review the scenario and the response.
2. Think about how you could respond differently if you aimed to start the response with a positive statement and let the client know what you can do to help.
3. Write the words you would use instead in the “changed response” box.

Consider practicing this activity with a coworker to learn how he or she would respond to the situation using best customer service practices.

Remember,
start with a positive
statement and add
what you can do.



Scenario	Response	Changed Response*
A client asks you if she needs to bring her daughter to the next appointment.	I'm not sure.	
A client asks if it is possible for you to print 4 months of checks instead of just 3 months of checks.	I can't do that	
A client calls and asks if she can stop by to pick up her checks. It is 4:50pm and your office closes at 5:00 pm.	No. We're about to shut off our computers for the day. It's too late.	
A client asks if she can get evaporated milk instead of milk in a gallon jug.	I don't think so. Why don't you want the regular milk?	

*Need suggestions?
Visit the last page of this section.*

Defusing difficult situations

Typically customers who are acting difficult are the ones who have not had their expectations met or do not fully understand the role of the worker. Most often, the person is focused on getting immediate assistance with solving a problem and doesn't feel the customer service provider is helping.

Generally, people do not want to be difficult or argumentative with a caring individual. Often, upset customers are unaware of how their negative behavior is affecting others. The person may not have the conscious desire to be difficult and is simply reacting to their feelings.

Tips for working with people during difficult situations

1. Take time to try to understand the person's point of view.
 - State that you want to help.
 - Ask how you can be of assistance.
 - Listen for details about the concern, situation, or request.
 - When appropriate, apologize for the situation.
 - Repeat the concern or request to make sure you understand the person's expectations.
 - Ask questions to gather more information.
2. Show you care, and take steps to avoid negativity.
 - Gather the facts.
 - Demonstrate your willingness to help.
 - Be honest.
 - If you feel yourself becoming defensive, don't react quickly. Breathe, and continue to listen to the person so you understand their expectations.
 - Offer solutions.
 - Take responsibility for finding a solution, or for putting it into action.
3. Don't take the situation personally.
 - Recognize the person probably feels insecure and defensive at the time.
 - Know that even when you've done your best, the person may not want your help because they are too embarrassed by the way they have acted. They may want help from another.

Anytime you feel that someone is truly physically threatening you get away from the person and call the police.

Typically you will be able to “defuse” an upset client by using your skills of working with people during difficult situations. There are times when you will have to deal with negative experiences that will be more difficult.

1. If you feel the person does not want to work with you, ask another staff person to help.

Words to use:

“I’ll get my supervisor. It might help to talk with someone else about this.”

2. If the person has been loud and disruptive, it may help to remove “the spotlight of attention” from the person. The person may be embarrassed about the way they are treating you, but doesn’t want to “lose face”. Asking someone else to see them, or assisting them in another part of the office may allow them to drop their guard.

Words to use:

“If you prefer, I can have my supervisor help with this situation, or we can go into this office and talk more privately.”

3. Allow yourself time to respond. You need to ask someone an answer, look up a policy, or get assistance from a coworker. Explain this to the customer.

Words to use:

“I can look up the rule in our manual, or call the State office. I understand the rule is _____, but if you give me about 5 minutes, I will find out for sure. Can you wait while I do that?”

*Remember - let the person know first what you can do.
Then offer alternative solutions, if necessary.*

4. If you have tried to assist the person by providing the best customer service you can, and the person remains argumentative or outright abusive:

- Do not allow yourself to be abused, and do not argue back.
- Keep your own sense of self-confidence, still remain helpful, and do not allow yourself to be verbally or physically abused.

Words to use:

“Excuse me – I want to help you. I have to ask you not to talk to me that way.”

Learning Check Point

Identify ways of handling the following difficult situations that could occur in the clinic.

Situation 1:

A client arrives 15 minutes late to her group education (class) appointment. She assumes you will not see her because she is late. When you greet her, she uses a raised voice and begins explaining why she was late.

How will you handle this situation?

What words can you use? How will you treat her? How can you put her at ease?

Situation 2:

A grandmother brings her teenage granddaughter to her WIC appointment. When you ask the teen questions, the grandmother responds for her. The teen seems frustrated and seems to want to answer the questions herself.

How will you handle this situation?

What words or actions can you use to better involve this WIC teen without offending her grandmother?

Situation 3:

A client calls to ask if her child can start solid foods at 3 months of age. You are uncertain of the answer.

How will you handle this situation?

Suggested responses for Activity 5

Scenario	Response	Changed Response*
A client asks you if she needs to bring her daughter to the next appointment.	I'm not sure.	Let me find out.
A client asks if it is possible for you to print 4 months of checks instead of just 3 months of checks.	I can't do that	I can print 3 months worth of checks for you. That's the most I am allowed to provide at a time.
A client calls and asks if she can stop by to pick up her checks. It is 4:55pm and your office closes at 5:00 pm.	No. We're about to shut off our computers for the day. It's too late.	I can see you first thing in the morning, but unfortunately the office is closing in 5 minutes and that doesn't give either of us enough time for the check pick up. Can I schedule an appointment for you for tomorrow?
A client asks if she can get evaporated milk instead of milk in a gallon jug.	I don't think so. Why don't you want the regular milk?	Let me ask. I've never been asked that question before. I'm curious to know too!

Communication

Communication Components

Psychologists have devised a formula that breaks a message into three portions. The three components that make up the total impact of the message are:

1. Words
2. Tone of Voice
3. Body Language

We use a combination of all three of these components when having face-to-face interactions with our customers. Each component “says” something to our customer.

Activity 6: Face-to-face conversations

1. Imagine you are having a face-to-face conversation with someone.
2. Consider the impact the communication components (Words, Tone of Voice, Body Language) have on the message that is being conveyed during a face-to-face conversation.
3. Guess what percentage (out of 100%) each of the communication components have on the message being conveyed.

_____ % of message impacted by Words

_____ % of message impacted by Tone of Voice

_____ % of message impacted by Body Language

Do you realize that out of 100% of a message, people on average pay the most attention to body language?

The following are the percentages each of the communication components have on the message being conveyed during a face-to-face conversation:

Words	7%
Tone of Voice:	38%
Body Language:	55%

This means it's important to pay special attention to our non-verbal communication, because our customers are!

Recognize messages non-verbal communication deliver

Non-verbal language is not always interpreted in the same way among our clients and us. We serve customers with various life experiences and often those who have cultural backgrounds that are different from our own.

Activity 7: Look me in the eye

Answer these questions:

1. How do you feel when a client does not make eye contact with you?
2. What message is conveyed when a client does not make eye contact with you?

Consider this...

Eye contact and how it is interpreted varies with each culture. Some cultures believe when talking with someone of authority it is a sign of respect to lower your eyes and to avoid eye contact.

Common types of non-verbal communication

Head movements

Head movements are probably the clearest indicators of messages people convey with non-verbal communication.

- Nodding the head up and down is positive.
Examples: To convey “yes” is the answer to a question, you may nod your head. You may also nod your head to express that you understand or relate to what someone is saying.
- Shaking the head side to side is negative.
Examples: To convey “no” is the answer to a question, you may shake your head. You may also shake your head to express disbelief or dissatisfaction.

Facial expressions

Facial expressions can be more difficult to accurately understand. The message someone is conveying through facial expressions can be interpreted differently.

Activity 8: Read my face

1. Look at these pictures that represent facial expressions.
2. Under each one, write down the message you think the facial expression is conveying.









Optional:

Ask a coworker what message he/she thinks the facial expression is conveying. Compare your interpretations.

Gestures

The following examples of gestures are commonly interpreted the same among many cultures:

- Relaxed, open palmed types of gestures are generally positive. Example: When welcoming someone to have a seat, you may use an open palmed gesture.
- Pointing and clenched fists usually are considered threatening and negative gestures.

Many people make gestures as they talk to enhance the message they are trying to convey. This is considered, “talking with your hands.” Observe the body language of the person you are speaking with to see if they are distracted by the gestures or not. For some, gestures may help emphasize the message.

Time

Cultural differences impact the “message” time conveys. For example, someone is schedule an appointment for 11:00am. This person, depending on their culture and interpretation, may be interpreted this as:

- I will be seen exactly at 11:00 am.
- or
- I have to fill out paper work for my 11:00 am appointment so I’ll show up at 10:45 am.
- or
- I’ll be seen around 11:00 am so I’ll get there around 11:00 am.

When setting appointment times with clients, it is important to be clear about the expectations. Tips:

- Inform clients that this appointment time has been specially set aside to provide services to them.
- Ask the client to arrive at or shortly before the scheduled time.
- Provide the information the client needs to successfully attend the appointment at the scheduled time. Example: write their appointment time on their WIC ID/Appointment Folder, or ask the client to write the appointment on the calendar.
- Ask the client to notify you if they believe they are going to be running late or can’t make it to the appointment.

It is also important to find a balance between the time we are allotted to provide WIC services and the time we need for addressing clients' needs. We don't want to rush the client we are serving in order to attend to the next client waiting. Also, we should not keep the next client waiting too long.

Most clients understand how busy staff can be, but they want to be acknowledged and served in a timely manner. If you are running behind schedule, inform the next client of the approximate waiting time and apologize for the wait.

Posture

The way we carry ourselves can convey messages about whether we are:

- Energetic or fatigued
- Interested or bored
- Approving or disapproving
- Anxious or confident
- Approachable or unapproachable

Leaning forward is an example of an open posture, and this indicates interest.

Closed postures include crossed arms or legs and leaning away from a person. These can convey disinterest or dislike for a person. They also may be subconscious postures that are not intended to convey a message. You may cross your arms because you are cold, or it may be a comfortable position for you. Just keep in mind this posture may be communicating something different.

Proximity

The distance between you and another person is considered proximity. You may have heard the saying, "this is my space, and this is your space." This saying communicates the comfortable physical distance between people.

Give the client a chance to establish a comfortable space for herself and respect the client's space. If you experience someone stepping back from you, you may want to check your proximity.

Furniture arrangement

The arrangement of furniture in the office can either support a good exchange of information between you and your client or could cause a barrier.

Computers can be barriers, especially if your view is blocked eye contact between you and your client. Inform the client when you need to enter information into the computer. You may be able to continue to listen to the client while entering information, however assure that the client does not feel as if you are more interested in entering the information than listening to her.

Environment

Psychologists have found that the attractiveness or ugliness of surroundings creates feelings that carry over to communication. Create a clinic/office environment that conveys the WIC message. It should show respect for the clients, seem warm and caring, make clients feel good to be there, and help to set a positive tone of your services.

Learning Check Point

Answer the following questions

1. Which of the three communication components has the most impact on messages being conveyed during face-to-face conversations?

Words, Tone of Voice, or Body Language?

2. List two examples of common non-verbal communication:

Provide Client Centered Services

Client Centered Services

Providing client centered services means to focus services, including education, on the client's needs, interests, and readiness to make a change. Clients tend to be more open to information staff offer when they feel respected and heard. Staff who find out more about the client's needs and interests can better provide client centered services.

Through the use of a combination of open ended and closed ended questions, you will be able to have better conversations with your clients and learn more about them.

Open ended questions

Open ended questions are ones that can be answered with more than just "yes", "no", or another short response. They provide the client with the opportunity to share more details, and for staff to learn more about the client.

Examples:

- "Tell me what you know about breastfeeding."
- "Describe to me how your energy levels change throughout the day."
- "How do you feel when your roommate smokes inside the house?"

Closed ended questions

Closed ended questions are ones that can be answered with a short response. They often help clarify information. Examples:

- "Do morning appointments work for you?"
- "Do you think you can talk with your roommate about his smoking?"

Activity 9: Recognizing open ended and closed ended questions

1. Review the list of questions.
2. Place “O” by open ended questions and “C” by closed ended questions.

_____ “Tell me about your baby.”

_____ “Do you want an afternoon appointment?”

_____ “What are your questions about shopping with WIC checks?”

_____ “Would you like to talk about that?”

Reminders:

Closed ended questions can be answered with a brief response.

Open ended questions help the client share more details.

Key components of client centered services

- Understanding,
- Focusing education and information on the client’s needs and interests
- Working in partnership with the client
- Treating the client as an individual
- Offering choices and allowing the client freedom to choose
- Showing respect and acceptance

Don’t all of these keys sound like traits of good customer service?

Whenever you provide information about how to use WIC checks, discuss breastfeeding, or any other time you provide information to clients, you are educating them.

By focusing on these key components, you and the client will be able to reach a successful and positive outcome.

Your Customer Service Mission

As a reminder, WIC's vision is to eliminate poor nutrition in children in Washington State. WIC's mission is to improve the lifelong health and nutrition of women, infants and young children in Washington State.

WIC staff's customer services practices and attitudes should align with WIC's vision and mission. This involves taking a close look at your personal view of best customer service.

Many businesses and organizations develop and adopt a mission statement that helps their staff focus on a specific attitude and a goal they all strive to achieve.

Take time to develop your own personal customer service mission.

You may want to ask yourself these questions:

- Why do customers remember me/WIC?
- How do customers feel after they deal with me/WIC?
- What do customers tell their friends about me/WIC?
- In what ways do we help each other in our clinic?

Activity 10: Create your customer service mission statement

1. Type or write your personal customer service mission.
2. Sign it, and post it near your desk at work.

It may help remind you and others of your commitment to having a positive attitude and goal of providing excellent customer service!

A sample customer service mission can be found on the following page.

My Personal Customer Mission Statement

My goal is to provide the best customer service possible.

*I strive to be positive and understanding.
I communicate in constructive and encouraging ways.
I do my best to help my customers with compassion and care.*

*I promote and encourage breastfeeding as
the best and healthiest way to feed babies.*

*I support those I serve by providing them with information and by
allowing my customers to make the best choices
for their situation and family.*

I respect my customers' choices.

*I uphold the integrity of the WIC Program by following
the rules, and encouraging others to do the same.*

*I investigate options and offer solutions,
especially in situations that call for me to
extend myself beyond my normal job duties.*

*I work to protect and improve the health
of people in Washington State.*

*I support my fellow coworkers and customers
in achieving their goals and doing their best.*

Signed

Date

Learning Assessment

Trainees who have successfully completed this module have:

- Identified what customers commonly expect from customer service providers.
- Noted two ways to meet and possibly exceed customers' expectations.
- Prepared for dealing with negative situations in the clinic by reviewing steps to take when confronted with difficult clients or situations.
- Practiced changing negative responses into positive responses.
- Taken steps to build their “nerve to serve” by exploring ways of handling difficult situations that could occur in the clinic.