

Customer Service Notes for

Techniques for Communicating Effectively with Participants

A key to providing stellar service is communication. As WIC employees, you may need to initiate the communication, or you may be responding to questions and comments from participants. Either way, you want to communicate effectively and avoid confusion and misunderstandings.

You may sometimes need to draw out information from participants who are quiet. Remember to use questions to get the individual to open up. Open-ended questions are especially helpful to use. For example, suppose you are looking to find out what vegetables Mrs. Williams' daughter Amy eats. Instead of asking, "Does Amy eat a lot of vegetables?" in which case you may get a simple "Yes" or "No" response, ask, "What types of vegetables does Amy eat?" Using this open-ended question should enable you to learn which vegetables Amy likes to eat.

Communicating with empathy is another important skill to use with participants. For instance, assume that you are trying to stress the importance to Juanita's son, Jose, of eating healthier snacks. Juanita tells you that this is difficult since Jose's grandmother babysits some afternoons and gives Jose unhealthy snacks. Use the "Feel/Felt/Found" technique to demonstrate your empathy but still make your point. In this example, you could say, "I understand how you feel. We also have other participants whose mothers babysat and they encountered the same situation. Yet what they found is if they emphasized with their mother the importance of giving healthier snacks to their child, they were able to avoid the child receiving unhealthy snacks."

Also communicate the benefits of a healthy lifestyle to participants. The "Because of/You Can/Which Means" statements are one way to do this. For instance, when discussing breastfeeding with a participant, you can say, "Because of the nutritional benefits of breastfeeding, you can provide your daughter with more nutrients, which means she is likely to be healthier."

Communicating effectively with participants is not always easy, but it pays off in establishing better relationships.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Do you use more open than closed-ended questions when working with participants?
2. What are some situations where you might use the "Feel/Felt/Found" technique?
3. Do you remember to communicate the nutritional benefits to participants?

