

Customer Service Notes for

Be Honest with Participants, but Be Tactful

We know there are times when, as WIC service providers, we would like to be blunt with certain WIC participants. Be careful, as this approach may turn off participants.

While we do not recommend you be dishonest with participants, you do want to be tactful. Being too direct can be seen as dictatorial with participants.

The words and phrases you use can make the difference in communicating messages to participants and increasing the likelihood that they will change their behavior or comply with WIC guidelines.

Notice the table below. On the left are statements that will likely turn off participants. Notice on the right the alternative statements.

“Why aren’t you giving Amy healthier snacks!?”	“We discussed your giving Amy healthier snacks. It seems she is still eating a lot of unhealthy snacks.”
“I told you last time you have to bring the paperwork with you.”	“It will help us to spend more time with you if you bring the completed paperwork with you. Otherwise, we need you to first complete the paperwork here, before we can meet with you.”
“We’ve told you before that we can’t always accommodate the times you want your appointments on such short notice.”	“While we would like to provide the times you want for your appointments, we have a better chance of accommodating you if we hear from you with more advance notice.”
“How many times do we need to tell you that you have to stop giving Joey so much food? He is still very overweight for his age.”	“I am concerned that Joey is very overweight for his age. How can we work on cutting back on his food?”

Communicating with empathy and tact will help ensure that your interactions with participants are positive and productive!

Questions for Reflection:

1. Do you pause and communicate tactfully with participants even when you are annoyed with them?
2. Do you avoid starting questions or statements with “You have to” or “Why?”

