

Client-Centered Nutrition Education for Pregnant Clients Offers Variety of Learning Opportunities

by Erica Harris, M.S., R.D., L.D.
Nutrition Education Consultant



Pregnant clients, especially those new to WIC, may feel a variety of emotions as they walk through the door — hope, uncertainty, excitement, or a mix. By embracing a client-centered approach to WIC education, WIC staff can help ensure clients get their concerns addressed and increase the chances clients leave feeling empowered to make smart choices to support a healthy pregnancy.

Through Value Enhanced Nutrition Assessment (VENA), WIC counselors engage clients in meaningful conversations to address their

questions and concerns. Similarly, a client-centered approach to group education allows pregnant moms to learn in ways that suit them best.

What is client-centered education for pregnant clients?

Client-centered education is learner-centered, respectful, and engaging. For pregnant clients, this means respecting them as experts in their lives and offering a variety of learning opportunities that motivate and support them in making healthy choices.

Being client-centered can mean a variety of things. The chart below identifies practical steps to move nutrition education toward a more client-centered approach.

Not very client-centered

- Reading a script
- Lecturing
- Focusing on paperwork
- Showing a long video without also attempting to tailor information to client concerns

More client-centered

- Establishing rapport with clients and helping them meet others to build social support
- Listening more and talking less when facilitating your favorite WIC lessons
- Incorporating more open-ended questions during classes to encourage clients to share experiences and brainstorm strategies that could work for them
- Action-oriented classes involving fun activities; nutrition fairs that enable expecting moms to pick and choose what they need to learn; food demonstrations; or grocery tours

Creating a positive learning environment

Setting a comfortable environment is essential, regardless of which learning methods are used. Take a moment to reflect on your personal experiences as a patient in the health-care system — do some memories make you cringe while others set you at ease? The environment and attitudes of all staff (receptionist, nurse, nutritionist, doctor, etc.) make a big difference in the overall experience of the patient, and the same goes for WIC clients. In WIC classes, comfortable chairs and simple gestures such as addressing clients by name and thanking them for participating can and do matter.

Building social support through group classes

One of the biggest benefits of bringing WIC clients together for group classes is the opportunity to connect them with peers who are experiencing a similar situation. When WIC educators take a step back and encourage participants to share their own experiences, pregnant moms can learn from and lean on peers for support. Being client-centered may involve adopting new lesson plans, but not necessarily.

The way a WIC educator carries out a lesson plan can make a world of difference. By brushing up on existing skills, WIC educators can create a more client centered learning experience with existing lessons. For example, experiment with different icebreakers to see how best to “break the ice” and create an environment of sharing for an old favorite lesson. Similarly, try drafting a few extra open-ended questions to keep handy in order to open up more conversation during class. If you have ideas for making the learning experience more engaging for clients, discuss them with your local agency nutrition education coordinator and registered dietitian so they can communicate with your state nutrition education liaison and ensure you have appropriate nutrition education codes.

Utilizing existing resources in new ways

Providing relevant and engaging education for pregnant moms involves tapping into what matters to them, and the sky is the limit for drawing upon materials for inspiration.

- For example, emotion-based nutrition education materials from the Touching Hearts Touching Minds project can be used as fun icebreakers to existing classes or as the basis of new lessons altogether. Check out <http://www.touchingheartstouchingminds> to find emotion based nutrition education materials for pregnancy.
- Lullabies from the *Every Ounce Counts* campaign CD titled “Sing to Me: a Lullaby Album” could also be fun to incorporate into group classes or play in the waiting room to engage the senses and promote breastfeeding. Check out <http://www.breastmilkcounts.com> for more information.

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Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

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Recommended Sleep Environment

It is recommended that:

- Babies are placed to sleep in safety-approved crib or bassinet with a firm mattress, using a well-fitting sheet made for the crib or bassinet.
- Parents maintain the home and especially the baby's sleep area free of cigarette smoke.
- Babies are never placed to sleep on soft mattresses or cushions, such as beds, sofa, chairs or waterbeds.
- Babies' sleep environment is free of toys or other soft bedding items, such as blankets or comforters, stuffed animals and bumper pads.
- Babies' sleep environment is free of unsafe items, such as plastic sheets, plastic bags, strings, cords or ropes.

The safest place for a baby to sleep is in the same room with a parent or caregiver but on a separate sleep surface, such as a safety-approved crib or bassinet.

Resources:

Texas Child Fatality Review Team Newsletter and publications are available at this website. http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mch/Child_Fatality_Review.shtm

Texas Child Fatality Review Team – Annual Report 2008 http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mch/Child_Fatality_Review.shtm

Texas State Child Fatality Review Team Committee Position Statement: Safe Sleep for Infants. http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mch/Child_Fatality_Review.shtm

References:

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID): Fetal and Infant Mortality Information. <http://www.cdc.gov/SIDS/mortality.htm>

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Online classes provide independent learning options

Offering clients choices in how to receive their nutrition education gives them flexibility to learn at their own pace on their own time. Online classes are a client-centered alternative for busy moms who have a difficult time making it to the clinic. Several web lessons designed specifically for pregnant moms are available. Check out <http://www.texaswic.org> for the latest and greatest.

Other client-centered approaches

Overall, when planning group education classes for expecting moms, WIC educators may find it helpful to ask, “What types of motivation, skills and information, and support do clients need to support a healthy pregnancy?” Then work with existing materials or develop new programs at your agency to help set clients up for a successful pregnancy. Assessing client needs through short surveys can also help WIC staff find new ways to spice up education and provide client-centered learning opportunities to best suit client needs. Here are a couple strategies to consider:

- **Nutrition fair or carnival** – Set up booths on pregnancy topics and invite community partners to join you for a special day for pregnant WIC clients. Health fairs can be an efficient and fun way to draw together more resources at one time for busy staff and participants.
- **Grocery tours for expecting moms** – On average, WIC clients shop at grocery stores more than two times per week, though they typically only come to WIC once every three months. By building relationships with local grocers, WIC

staff could offer special tours for pregnant moms.

- **Cooking demonstrations** – Depending on your agency's resources and facilities, there are countless options for food demonstrations using WIC foods.

Being client-centered can involve tweaking existing practices, not necessarily reinventing the wheel. Be creative and stay tuned for more information on client-centered nutrition education at the WIC NBF conference, April 6-8, 2010!

Intern Projects

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and an additional 34 million have low bone mass, placing them at increased risk for osteoporosis. “Let Us Take a Break from Poor Bone Health” was an event created to increase awareness of nutrients and behaviors vital to bone health to reduce incidence of osteoporosis in Williamson County.

Partners, including an orthopedic doctor, Dairy Max, and an individual with a bone disease helped with the project. An event was held featuring various booths and discussions about bone health. A cooking demonstration using smoothie and broccoli almond stir-fry recipes, a milk-tasting activity booth, and cheese give-a-ways were highlights of the event.



Telling us what you want is as easy as that!

Take the online survey at <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/wichd/gi/wicnews.shtm> and let us know what you'd like in the Texas WIC News!