Module B:

Communication: Verbal and Nonverbal
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OVERVIEW

Introduction

This module is about effective communication. Good communication is an important part of teamwork and good customer service.

Learning Objectives

After completing this module the Nutrition Assistant will be able to:

- Explain why good communication is important,
- Identify behaviors that can help or hurt communication and team building,
- Identify statements that can hurt communication and some positive alternatives,
- Assess personal strengths and areas needing improvement in communication skills,
- Use techniques that improve communication in challenging situations
- Identify ways to give difficult or negative information to participants in a positive way
- Identify 2 important elements to resolving conflicts with upset people
- Explain how to answer the phone appropriately.
GOOD COMMUNICATION

Definition
Communication is the giving and receiving of messages between people.

Importance
Good communication is making sure that each person understands the message and that the message gets to the person in a positive way.

Good communication helps:
- Participants get good customer service
- WIC staff work as a team

Good Communication Helps WIC Participants
Good communication helps give participants:
- Access to nutritious foods
- Accurate and up-to-date information about nutrition
- Referrals to other important services

Good Communication Helps WIC Staff
Good communication helps WIC staff:
- Be more efficient, effective, and satisfied
- Feel less stress
# HOW WE COMMUNICATE

## Elements of Communication

There are 6 things or elements that are part of how we communicate with others. These are:

- attitude
- actions
- talking
- listening
- appearance
- setting

## Chart of Communication Elements

The chart on the next page describes the elements of communication and how to use these elements effectively. Use the chart to guide you in your communications with staff and participants.

## Learning Activity 1

To learn more about good communication you may want to try Learning Activity 1 found at the end of this module.

*continued on next page*
### HOW WE COMMUNICATE (continued)

#### Elements of Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELEMENT &amp; DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>SUGGESTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Attitude**          | • Be polite, friendly, optimistic & respectful  
                        • Show compassion & confidence |
| **Actions**           | • Make the person feel welcome & comfortable  
                        • Be on time & use time efficiently  
                        • Focus your full attention on the person |
| **Talking**           | • Be courteous  
                        • Establish trust  
                        • Ask appropriate questions**  
                        • Do not interrupt  
                        • Choose your words carefully. (For example, carefully choose when you will use formal or familiar words in Spanish) |
| **Listening**         | • Be a good listener**  
                        • Avoid judgmental responses  
                        • Help the person identify her/his feelings  
                        • Reassure the person that her/his feelings are okay |
| **Appearance**        | • **Posture**: Lean toward the speaker. Avoid crossing arms & legs.  
                        • ** Gestures**: Use open-palm gestures. Do not point, clench fist or shake fingers.  
                        • **Facial expressions**: Nod or smile. Do not look bored or disgusted.  
                        • **Eye contact**: Maintain eye contact only if it is culturally appropriate.  
                        • **Body Language**: Do not fidget or act restless. See Nonverbal – Next page  
                        • **Voice**: Use a respectful tone that is not too loud. |
| **Setting**           | • Make sure the area is clean, attractive and orderly  
                        • Make sure the area feels private |

**You may want to read Task IV - Module A: Individual Education (Counseling) for more information on asking questions, good listening skills and non-verbal cues.**
### NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nonverbal Communication</th>
<th>People tell much of what they are thinking and/or feeling through nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication is believed more that what we say.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. Responsiveness and Cooperativeness  
   a. Open hands  
   b. Relaxed facial expression  
   c. Head tilted  
   d. Index finger along cheek  
   e. Leaning forward with sincere interest

2. Defensiveness and Suspicion  
   a. Arms or legs crossed tightly in protective gestures  
   b. Minimal eye contact with sideways or darting glances  
   c. Squinting or peering  
   d. Touching or slightly rubbing the nose  
   e. Rubbing behind the ear with index finger  
   f. Rubbing the eye

3. Frustrated, Lack of Confidence, Nervousness  
   a. Wringing of hands  
   b. Rubbing back of neck  
   c. Twitching face  
   d. Shaky voice  
   e. Fidgeting  
   f. Plucking at collar

4. Anger, Aggressiveness, Dominance  
   a. Rigid body  
   b. Glaring eyes and tight closed lips  
   c. Fist-like gestures  
   d. Pointed index finger  
   e. Territorial dominance  
   f. Inappropriate touching

5. Tiredness or Boredom  
   a. Drumming on the table  
   b. Tapping of feet  
   c. Looking at a clock or watch  
   d. Staring out into space  
   e. Drooping eyelids  
   f. Head in palm of hands  
   g. Blank stare
BEHAVIORS THAT AFFECT COMMUNICATION

Positive or Negative Effects

Your behavior can have a positive or a negative effect on how well the WIC program works. Participants get better service when you use good communication skills with co-workers and participants.

Put Positive Behaviors into Practice

The following behaviors can help communication and teamwork. Use these with co-workers and participants:

- show respect
- be polite
- be on time
- have a positive attitude
- listen carefully
- show empathy
- be flexible
- be helpful
- give compliments
- show appreciation

Avoid Negative Behaviors

The following behaviors can hurt communication. Avoid these at all costs! Do NOT:

- look “down” on others
- blame others
- gossip
- complain
- interrupt
- correct others
- criticize

Learning Activity 2

To learn more about good communication, you may want to try Learning Activity 2 at the end of this module.
CHALLENGING PEOPLE

Working with Angry People

Most of the people you will work with at WIC will be friendly. Sometime you will have to communicate with someone who is upset or angry. Learning to communicate well with an angry person can take extra skill.

Challenges - Practice Makes You Shine

How can you handle a situation when a WIC participant becomes upset, frustrated, unhappy or angry? Read through this strategy called VERA and consider how this would work for you.

V - Vent: Let the customer vent. Listen to them! Let them get it all out. Make it your goal to really understand what happened. Be a partner, not an adversary. Suspend judgment. Just listen and be calm. You can’t calm a customer if you are not calm. Take a deep breath or have a drink of water to calm yourself. Also, don’t take the situation personally.

E - Empathy: Acknowledge the vent. Separate the people from the problem. Do this by letting them talk and putting yourself in their place. Listen to their whole story without interruption. Show you are listing with eye contact, and other verbal attends. Don’t respond with “but our policy is . . .” or “WIC Rules say.” Don’t make excuses for yourself or anyone else. Show a desire to help the participant resolve the issue. After they are done, you can say you are sorry this happened to them and try to help.

R - Real Problem: Identify the real concern. Figure out the real issue that needs to be solved. Ask tactful questions to get the bottom of it and to find out the facts. Make sure you understood what they told you. “You were angry about being told you were too late for the class.”: Or “You felt the clerk treated you rudely.” Ask questions to draw out their feelings. “How did that make you feel?” State what you think is the problem. “Sounds like you need another appointment.”

A - Agreement: Find an answer together. Respect their point of view. If they know you are on their side, this will have a calming effect. They will feel that least someone understands. Agree with what you can. Act with sincerity. Say, “We both agree this should never have happened to you”. Show respect if you do not agree. Take responsibility if you can.

Agreement on a solution- Ask what would work or suggest something. Explore mutually acceptable options. Say “What appointment times will work for you?” Try to phrase things positively – not “I can’t make an appointment for you until next week, but instead, “We have a Tuesday appointment.” Offer to do something. “I can make that appointment right away.” Be careful not to promise something you can’t do. When you agree on a solution, recap it for the participant. Summarize what you will do and follow through!
CHALLENGING PEOPLE (continued)

Behaviors to Avoid

When in a challenging situation the following are behaviors to avoid:

- Scowling, rolling your eyes, or smiling inappropriately.
- Touching an angry person.
- Slouching.
- Sitting or standing with arms crossed.
- Chewing gum or eating.
- Sighing. *(This may look like you are annoyed or impatient.)*
- Moving slowly when responding or taking action. *(This may further upset the person.)*

Learning Activity 3, 4, 5

To practice using effective communication skills you may want to try Learning Activity 3, 4, 5 found at the end of this module.
PROGRESS CHECK

1. Mark the following as “TRUE” or “FALSE”.
   ______ Communication is the giving and receiving of information.
   ______ Good communication can help WIC staff work as a team.
   ______ Good communication is not necessary for good customer service.
   ______ Our attitude and our appearance are not part of how we communicate.
   ______ Avoiding judgmental responses is important to good communication.
   ______ Maintaining privacy is not important to good communication.

2. Put a check (✓) mark next to any of the items that would help to improve communication.
   ______ leaning forward in chair, nodding, and smiling
   ______ listening carefully
   ______ identifying the speaker's feelings
   ______ sitting with folded arms
   ______ Chewing gum while talking
   ______ starting the session on time
3. Mark the following behaviors as “P” for having a positive effect on communication or “N” for having a negative effect on communication.

_____ correcting others
_____ interrupting
_____ being flexible
_____ showing respect
_____ being polite
_____ listening carefully
_____ avoiding challenging people

4. Match the statement that you should avoid with its alternative, more positive statement.

_____ “You didn’t do this right!” A. “I’m confused. Please clarify for me.”

_____ “You aren’t making any sense!” B. “We want you to be healthy. Exercise helps people stay healthy.”

_____ “Sit here!” C. “I notice that you were late to your last 3 appointments.”

_____ “You should exercise more.” D. “Please feel free to have a seat while you are waiting.”

_____ “You always show up late!” E. “There are a few items here that need to be changed.”

_____ ”You have to bring your son’s blood test results.” F. “We need your son’s blood test results next time.”
5. VERA is a method of dealing with challenging situations. Complete what the letters represent and summarize the concept:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LETTER STANDS FOR:</th>
<th>SUMMARIZE:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Put a check (✓) mark next to any of the items that would help and not hurt your communication with someone who is upset.

- using "I" statements instead of "you" statements
- sighing
- respecting the person and taking what s/he says seriously
- acting annoyed
- listening carefully to what s/he says
- staying calm
- speaking in a caring yet firm tone
- dealing with the participant’s feelings first and then the problem
LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The following activities are included and are recommended for interactive learning:

- **Learning Activity 1**: Body Language: Percentage Words, Tone & Body Language
- **Learning Activity 2**: Looking at Communication
- **Learning Activity 3**: Challenging Situations – Case Studies
- **Learning Activity 4**: Role Plays
- **Learning Activity 5**: Providing Information in a Positive Way
ACTIVITY 1: PERCENT OF CONVERSATION THAT IS WORDS, TONE AND BODY LANGUAGE

Based on what we have covered in Verbal and Non Verbal communication, estimate the impact of Words, Tone, and Body Language in conversation.

Guess:

_____%  Words – The actual words spoken.

_____%  Tone – Tone of voice, the way the words were spoken.

_____%  Body Language – The total presentation: body movements, facial expressions and hand gestures.

(Answer: Words – 8%; Tone – 37%; Body Language – 55%)
# Activity 2: Looking at Communication

## Learning Objectives

After completing this activity, the Nutrition Assistant will be able to:

- identify what is needed for good communication.

## Instructions

1. Arrange with your mentor or supervisor to observe one or more co-workers communicate with some participants. You will watch them:
   - greet participants as they arrive at the site,
   - assess eligibility,
   - counsel,
   - teach class, and
   - hand out food instruments.

2. Make sure the co-worker explains to the participant that you are observing the session for training purposes.

3. Write down your observations on the form on the next page. Note anything that seems to help communication.

4. Discuss your observations with your mentor or supervisor.
## Activity 2: Looking at Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Observations (Note attitude, actions, talking, listening, appearance and setting.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greeting participants</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessing Eligibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading Class Session</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handing Out Food Instruments</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
ACTIVITY 3: CHALLENGING PEOPLE

1. A participant comes into the WIC site angry. You are the first person she sees. She starts to scream and curse at you. You are unclear as to why she is upset. What do you say to her?

Your Approach:

2. A participant has missed her 3:00 appointment. She comes in at 4:55 and appears very upset. She tells you she needs to be seen. The site closes at 5:00. What do you say to her?

Your Approach:

3. You are counseling a participant about breastfeeding. She does not trust anything you say. She constantly questions you and rolls her eyes at you. You are not sure she is getting anything out of the session. What do you say to her?

Your Approach:
ACTIVITY 3: CHALLENGING PEOPLE

4. A co-worker is having family problems and is spending a lot of work time chatting with co-workers. She often comes to you for moral support. You notice that you are getting behind with your work due to the conversations with her. What do you say to her?

Your Approach:

5. A co-worker who is training you suddenly bursts out in anger. She tells you she shouldn’t be training you and that she is overworked and underpaid! What do you say to her?

Your Approach:
ACTIVITY 4: ROLE PLAYS

Learning Objectives
After completing this activity, the Nutrition Assistant will be able to:

- show how to use effective communication skills.

Background
A role play is when 2 or more people act out a scene as though it was "real life". "Props" such as baby dolls or food models are not needed but may be helpful.

Instructions
1. Ask your mentor, supervisor, or a co-worker to role play any 3 of the 5 roles (A-E) described on the following page.

2. Using the information you have learned about good communication, act out the role of a WIC Nutrition Assistant for each of the 3 situations.

3. Mentor/Supervisor/Co-Worker: Using the role plays as your guide, act out the role of the participant or co-worker. Try to be as realistic as possible.

4. After each session, ask your co-worker to tell you what s/he noticed. Make sure to ask for your strengths as well as weaknesses.

continued on next page
## Activity 4: Role Plays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role Play</th>
<th>Scenario</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Debbie Kendle is a 20-year-old pregnant woman who comes in with her mother. This is her first pregnancy and she is rather shy and does not say much. Her mother, however, is eager to tell you everything!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Maria Gomez has not followed any of the dietary suggestions you gave her last visit. She also does not speak much English. She seems to be eager to make some changes in her diet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Sue Lee comes to the WIC site very upset. This is her first visit. She wipes her tears but doesn’t seem able to stop crying. She says something about her boyfriend having a gun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Tammy Gray, a co-worker, needs your help interpreting for a Spanish-speaking participant. You are in the middle of a session with a participant when she rudely interrupts you. She tells you it is urgent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>At a staff meeting Jasmine White, a co-worker, criticizes the way you handled a participant. She calls you “insensitive” and “racist”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACTIVITY 5: PROVIDING INFORMATION IN A POSITIVE WAY

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity, the Nutrition Assistant will be able to:

- Tell participants difficult or negative information in a positive way.

Instructions

1. The next few pages contain 5 situations in which the WIC staff person has given difficult or negative information.

2. For each of the statements made, give a more positive alternative in the box provided.

3. You may want to discuss your alternatives with your mentor or a supervisor.
ACTIVITY 5: PROVIDING INFORMATION IN A POSITIVE WAY

1. Nancy Billings, who is pregnant, is not eligible for WIC. Her income is $1,000 over the annual limit. A WIC staff person tells her:

   “You are not eligible! Not much we can do for you here!”

Better words:

2. Mei Li Hong walks into the WIC site and checks in at the front desk. Two staff people are sick and appointments are running about 1 hour behind. The WIC staff person says:

   “Sit down. There’s a long wait. We’re running behind schedule!”

Better words:
ACTIVITY 5: PROVIDING INFORMATION IN A POSITIVE WAY

3. Kim Nguyen who is Vietnamese speaks limited English. The clinic’s Vietnamese interpreter is out sick and there is no one else who speaks Vietnamese. A WIC staff person is counseling her and says:

“We can’t help you since our interpreter is not here.”

Better words:

4. Patty Coleman shows up at the WIC site but her appointment is not until the following week. She tells the person at the front desk that she checked her calendar and believes her appointment is today. The WIC staff person tells her,

“You made a mistake! Come back next week!”

Better words:
ACTIVITY 5: PROVIDING INFORMATION IN A POSITIVE WAY

5. Roberta Jones does not nurse her infant son who is now 7 months old. She can no longer be served by WIC and must be disqualified from WIC. The WIC staff person says:

“We have to disqualify you.”

Better words:
PROGRESS CHECK ANSWERS

1. Mark the following as “TRUE” or “FALSE”.

   **TRUE**  Communication is the giving and receiving of information.

   **TRUE**  Good communication can help WIC staff work as a team.

   **FALSE**  Good communication is not necessary for good customer service.

   **FALSE**  Our attitude and our appearance are not part of how we communicate.

   **TRUE**  Avoiding judgmental responses is important to good communication.

   **FALSE**  Maintaining privacy is not important to good communication.

2. Put a check (✓) mark next to any of the items that would help to improve communication.

   ✓ leaning forward in chair, nodding and smiling

   ✓ listening carefully

   ✓ identifying feelings

   ✔ sitting with folded arms

   ✔ chewing gum while talking

   ✔ starting the session on time
PROGRESS CHECK ANSWERS (continued)

3. Mark the following behaviors as “P” for having a positive effect on communication or “N” for having a negative effect on communication.

_N_ correcting others
_N_ interrupting
_P_ being flexible
_P_ showing respect
_P_ being polite
_P_ listening carefully
_N_ avoiding challenging people

4. Match the statement that you should avoid with its alternative, more positive statement.

   **E** “You didn’t do this right!”
   **C** “I’m confused. Please clarify for me.”

   **A** “You aren’t making any sense!”
   **D** “We want you to be healthy. Exercise helps people stay healthy.”

   **D** “Sit here!”
   **E** “I notice that you were late to your last 3 appointments.”

   **B** “You should exercise more.”
   **F** “Please feel free to have a seat while you are waiting.”

   **C** “You always show up late!”
   **G** “There are a few items here that need to be changed.”

   **F** “You have to bring your son’s blood test results.”
   **H** “We need your son’s blood test results next time.”
PROGRESS CHECK ANSWERS (continued)

5. VERA is a method of dealing with challenging situations. Complete what the letters represent and summarize the concept:

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</tr>
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<td>E</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>Real Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Agreement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

V: Let the customer vent – Listen to them! Let them get it all out. Just listen and be calm. Also, don’t take the situation personally.

E: Acknowledge the vent. Separate the people from the problem. Listen to their whole story without interruption. Show you are listing with eye contact, and other verbal attends. After they are done, you can say you are sorry this happened to them and try to help.

R: Identify the real concern. Ask tactful questions to get the bottom of it and to find out the facts. Make sure you understood what they told you.

A: Find an answer together. Respect their point of view. If they know you are on their side, this will have a calming effect. To find agreement on a solution, ask what would work or suggest something. When you agree on a solution, recap it for the participant. Summarize what you will do and follow through!

6. Put a check (√) mark before any of the items that would help and not hurt your communication with someone who is upset.

- √ using “I” statements instead of “you” statements
- ___ sighing
- ___ respecting the person and taking what s/he says seriously
- ___ acting annoyed
- √ listening carefully to what s/he says
- √ staying calm
- √ speaking in a caring yet firm tone
- ___ dealing with the participant’s feelings first and then the problem