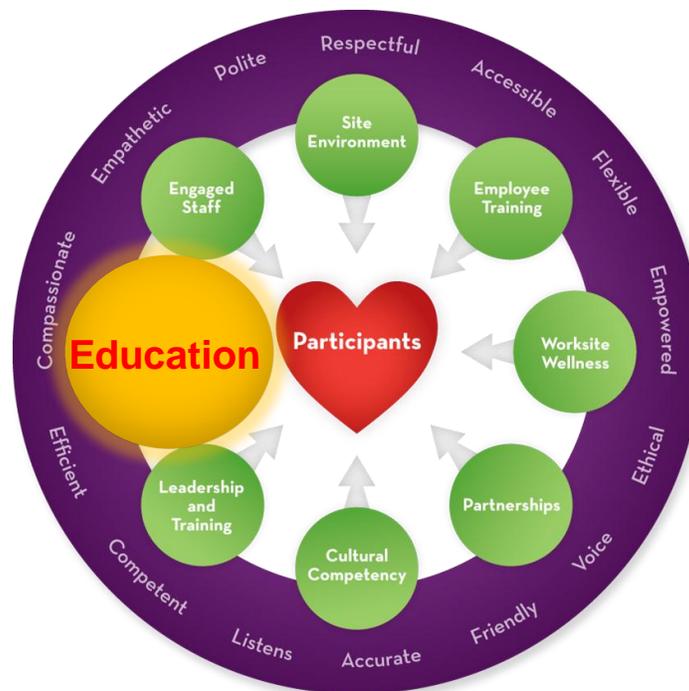


# Opening the Conversation & Asking Permission

## Participant Centered Education

### Facilitator's Guide



This module is one in a series focusing on Participant-Centered Education (PCE). PCE is a key component of California WIC's effort to offer *Platinum WIC – Participant Centered Services (PCS)*. The California WIC PCS approach puts the WIC family at the center of everything we do and focuses on the strengths of participants, employees and community.

PCE places the participant at the center of the education process. PCE focuses on the participant's capabilities, strengths, and their nutrition, health, and referral needs, not just problems, risks, or unhealthy behaviors. PCE includes working collaboratively, eliciting and supporting motivation to change, and respecting participants as the ones who decide if and when they will learn and/or make a change.

## **OPENING the CONVERATION and ASKING PERMISSION**

Opening a conversation and asking permission are two techniques that can be used to show respect to participants and to help them feel safe. The beginning of a session is crucial to its success. As the saying goes, "You never get a second chance to make a good first impression."

Techniques for opening the conversation should be used at the very beginning of the session. Asking permission can be used several times in a session; for example, at the beginning of a session, when sharing results of lab tests or explaining information about growth, and when offering advice or suggestions.

Opening the conversation and asking permission support the PCE principles of respect, safety, and voice. Training on these additional topics will reinforce the learning from this module.

### **Trainer's Notes**

#### **Purpose:**

To become comfortable with the Motivational Interviewing (MI) techniques of opening the conversation and asking permission.

**Objectives:** By the end of the session, staff will have:

- Reviewed key components of the MI approach to opening the conversation and asking permission
- Practiced using a personalized approach to opening the conversation and asking permission

#### **Directions:**

- Consider whether you want to include Activity 5: "Opening the Conversation in Groups"

#### **Materials:**

- "Open the Conversation and Ask Permission" Trainee Workbooks

#### **Room Set Up:**

- Staff seated at tables or in small groups

#### **Additional notes about opening the conversation and asking permission:**

In small WIC sites with few staff or participants, participants may already know staff names; so introductions may not be needed.

Sometimes staff worry that a participant might say “no” when asking permission. This is pretty rare. Staff can be reassured that it probably won’t happen to them often, if ever.

If someone does say “no”, it is usually due to one of two things:

1. They have a valid reason such as having an emergency to deal with (e.g.: “my husband just went to the hospital”)
2. They are not happy about being at the WIC site. In this case, we recommend staff honor the participant’s response and try to reschedule the appointment, or come up with another option. You could say something like, “I respect that. It sounds like this is not a good time for you. Maybe we can find a better time.” Often, an unhappy participant will reconsider at this point.

Finally, it may help to remind staff that:

1. If the participant does NOT want to listen to the educator, then the session will probably be a waste of time for both the participant and educator, and:
2. USDA does NOT require participants to take part in nutrition education. Participants may refuse nutrition education. Always DOCUMENT whatever happens.

#### **NOTE: Asking Permission in Groups**

Usually you will not want to encourage staff to ask permission at the beginning of a class. Sometimes asking permission *during* a class may be appropriate, such as when offering advice.



## Activity 2

### A Participant-Centered Way to Open a Conversation

It helps to start a session by letting the participant know a few things at the very beginning. These can include:

- **Your name** (if the participant doesn't already know you)
- **Your position** (if the participant doesn't already know you)
- **How long the session will last**
- **The purpose of the session**

This shows respect to the participant and can help her relax a bit.

*Example: Hi, my name is Ana and I'm a nutrition assistant. Today we're going to recertify Alfredo. First I'll ask you some questions and put the information into the computer, and then I'll talk to you a bit about Alfredo's diet. It should take about 10-15 minutes.*

## 1. Explain the Importance of Opening a Conversation Well: Activity 1

**Say:** *One of the most important moments in an education session is the very beginning. From the moment a participant starts talking to you, they unconsciously start evaluating the session. It is critical to have the participant feel safe and respected right from the start.*

**Ask:** *What do you already do to help your participants feel safe and respected from the beginning?*

**Instructions:** **Encourage** a few staff to answer.

## 2. Review Key Steps in the PCE Approach to Opening the Conversation: Activity 2

**Say:** *It is especially important to start building trust with your participants from the beginning, because in WIC, we ask participants to share many personal and sensitive issues. You can think of it as if you are at the participant's door and want to be invited into their house. You wouldn't just barge right in. So we do a few things at the start of a session.*

### INSTRUCTIONS

**Invite** staff to read silently the part of the handout about opening the conversation.

**Ask** staff what questions they have about the information on opening the conversation.

**Give an example** – using yourself.

**Activity 3**  
**Asking Permission**

Another way to show respect is by asking permission. For example: At the start, you can ask the participant if it's OK to talk about her health or her child's health.

*Example: I'd like to talk with you about what Alfredo eats and what he is doing now. Is that OK?*

Other ways to ask permission:

- Is that alright?
- Would that be OK?
- Would that be good for you?

**When to Ask Permission**

- At the beginning of a session
- Before explaining information about growth or lab tests
- Before offering information or advice

NOTE: It helps to use your own words so that you feel comfortable.

ALSO: Participants almost never say "no", and will appreciate being offered the choice.

**Activity 4**

Write down how you might open the conversation and ask permission to start a session:

**1<sup>st</sup> time**

**2<sup>nd</sup> time**

**3. Review Asking Permission – What it is, How to do it, and When to Use it: Activity 3**

**Say:** *Another way to show respect is by asking permission.*

**INSTRUCTIONS**

**Invite** staff to read silently the part of the handout about asking permission.

**Ask** staff what questions they have about asking permission. Give an example – using yourself.

**4. Practice Opening the Conversation & Asking Permission – (each person at a table gets to practice 3-4 times): Activity 4**

**Say:** *Now take a moment to write down how you might open the conversation and ask permission to start a session (make up a name for the participant). Follow the suggestions on the handout, but use your own words.*

**INSTRUCTIONS**

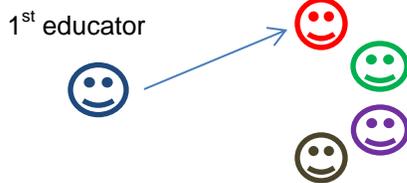
**Allow** staff 1-2 minutes to write down their ideas.

**Say:** *Now each of you will practice opening the conversation and asking permission with everyone else in your group.*

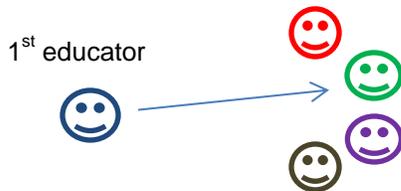
**INSTRUCTIONS**

Have each group **select** someone to be the 1<sup>st</sup> educator.

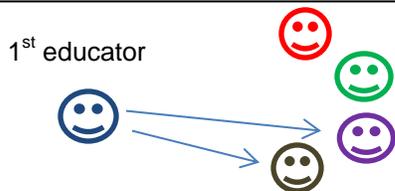
A) 1<sup>st</sup> educator practices with 1 person – others listen



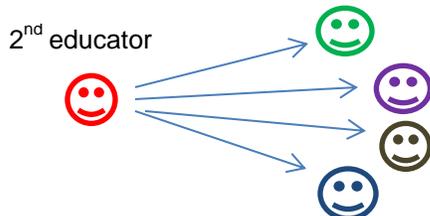
B) 1<sup>st</sup> educator practices with a different person – others listen



C) 1<sup>st</sup> educator practices with all the others, one by one



D) 2<sup>nd</sup> educator practices with all the others, one by one



## Practice Opening the Conversation & Asking Permission (Activity 4) cont'd

A) She will then **practice** opening the conversation and asking permission with one person in the group, and with **everyone else** in the group **listening**.

B) Then the same person will still be the educator and will **practice** with a different person in the group.

C) Then she'll **practice** with another person in the group until the 1<sup>st</sup> educator has had a chance to practice with every other person in her group. Again, the others will just listen.

D) Now have the 2<sup>nd</sup> educator **practice**, one by one, with every other person in her group.

E) Continue until **EVERYONE** in the group has had a chance to practice with EVERYONE else in her group.

## 5. Debrief

**Ask:** *How did that work for you? Based on what you heard other people say, how might you change the way you would open the conversation or ask permission? You can write this down in your workbook.*

*What do you think about using this approach to start a conversation with your participants?*

### **INSTRUCTIONS:**

**Listen** to staff ideas.

Encourage them to **think about** whether they might change what they say to open the conversation and ask them to write this down.

## 6. (Optional) Opening the Conversation in Groups: Activity 5

### **INSTRUCTIONS:**

**Ask** staff to **compare** the way they start a **group session** with the way suggested in their workbook. How could they see using this approach in groups?

Invite staff to **write** in their workbooks how they might modify this approach to **use in a class** they teach.

**Ask** a few staff to share their ideas

## 7. Review

### **INSTRUCTIONS:**

**Ask** staff what they think about using this approach with their participants