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DATE: October 20, 2021
TO: Local Agency Staff
FROM: State WIC Staff
SUBJECT: Strength-Based Nutrition Assessment – 4th in the Nutrition Assessment series

One purpose of Nutrition Assessment is to identify any deficiency in the participant's health or nutrition to assign applicable risk codes. WIC Nutrition Assessment uses a series of questions related to health or nutrition concerns to identify risks. To a participant, the questioning process can appear deficiency focused, like the CPA is looking for what needs to be "fixed". That can make the appointment feel judgmental.

At WIC, our goal is to empower participants and build their confidence in making behavior changes. One way is to make the Nutrition Assessment Strength-Based.

A Strength-Based Nutrition Assessment:

- Focuses on the whole person and individualizes the assessment to the person.
- Views each participant as having potential to be developed. During a Strength-Based Nutrition Assessment, the CPA targets opportunities to build the participant's confidence and self-efficacy. This approach evokes motivation and a participant's hopes for the future.
- Uses "Risks" as an opportunity to achieve healthy outcomes.
- Creates a collaborative relationship between the CPA and participant and allows the participant to determine their own priorities.

How can we take a Nutrition Assessment process that looks for deficiencies and make it Strength-Based?

First, let us look at an example of a deficiency-based Nutrition Assessment. In this scenario, see a snippet of a Nutrition Assessment with Lucy, the mother of two-year-old Ella.

CPA: How do you feel if Ella doesn't finish her plate?

Lucy: That's ok. If Ella is full, I don't make her eat anymore.

CPA: Ok, tell me about the beverages Ella drinks.

Lucy: She drinks milk at meals. She loves juice and drinks that between meals. I wish I could get her to drink more water.

CPA: Children should only have about 4 ounces of juice, once a day. What does Ella drink from, a bottle, sippy cup, or open cup?

Lucy: She is a messy drinker, so she uses a sippy cup or bottle. I know the bottle is not good for her, but it is hard to work on weaning when I am so busy. I am finishing my nursing degree. It has taken an extra year, but I am determined to graduate next semester!

CPA: Now that she is two years old, you really need to wean her off the bottle. The bottle is bad for her teeth. She should be using an open cup. What are some of her favorite foods or snacks?

Lucy: My mom watches Ella while I am at school. She snacks mostly on fruit, cheese, and yogurt at my mom's. She loves hummus and baby bell peppers. She will eat most of the vegetables that we offer at suppertime.

Think about this type of interaction for a moment. How might the participant feel?

Now let's make that Nutrition Assessment Strength-Based!

Along with Participant Centered Skills, there are some intentional steps that a CPA can take to make the Nutrition Assessment Strength-Based.

1. As you talk with a family, think about their strengths. That includes character strengths, aspirations, goals, knowledge, skills, family support, and resources. What are some strengths that you identified with Lucy?
2. Affirm the positive. Look back at the scenario, what are some possible affirmations?
3. Hold education until the assessment is complete. Notice how the CPA asks a question and then provides "advice" before moving to the next question? Lucy probably felt like she was doing nothing right! Complete the Nutrition Assessment, prioritize concerns, consider the participants interests and motivation before moving towards education and counseling.
4. Identify the participant's readiness for behavior change and explore that desire or interest.
5. Avoid being the expert with all the answers. Ask the participant about what they already know about an issue and their ideas for approaches.
6. Normalize concerns, reassure them that many other parents experience the same things.

Now let's make that Nutrition Assessment Strength-Based!

CPA: How do you feel if Ella doesn't finish her plate?

Lucy: That's ok. If Ella is full, I don't make her eat anymore.

CPA: You are watching for Ella's hunger and fullness cues. Being responsive to Ella's appetite cues helps her know she can trust you! (*Affirm the positive.*) Tell me about the beverages Ella drinks.

Lucy: She drinks milk at meals. She loves juice and drinks that between meals. I wish I could get her to drink more water. (*Indicates readiness for behavior change.*)

CPA: You would like Ella to drink more water. What kinds of things have you tried to encourage her to drink water? (*Explore readiness for change.*)

Lucy: I have been trying to set a better example and drink water between meals instead of tea and pop!

CPA: Good plan! What does Ella drink from, a bottle, sippy cup, or open cup?

Lucy: She is a messy drinker, so she uses a sippy cup or bottle. I know the bottle is not good for her, but it is hard to work on weaning when I am so busy. I am finishing my nursing degree. It has taken an extra year, but I am determined to graduate next semester! *(Be aware of participant's strengths.)*

CPA: Yes, two-year-olds are messy eaters and drinkers! My son wore half his food and beverages on his clothes at that age. *(Normalize concerns)* What are some of Ella's favorite foods or snacks? *(Hold education)*

Lucy: My mom watches Ella while I am at school. She snacks mostly on fruit, cheese, and yogurt at my mom's. She loves hummus and baby bell peppers. She will eat most of the vegetables that we offer at suppertime. *(More strengths identified!)*

CPA: Hummus and peppers! It is great that you are introducing her to many different foods. *(Affirm the positive.)*

As the CPA moves to providing education, here are some additional Strength-Based steps to use:

7. Continue to explore what the participant already knows about an issue and their ideas for approaches.
 - Rather than diving right into "telling" Lucy that Ella should be weaned, ask some open-ended questions, such as "With your busy schedule, what are your thoughts about how to approach weaning from the bottle?" or "What are your goals with weaning from the bottle?"
 - Ask permission before sharing information, "Would it be ok if I shared what has worked for other parents?"
8. Target opportunities to build confidence and self-efficacy.
 - Affirm the positive, build on existing behaviors and practices, "You are so responsive to Ella's needs, I know you will figure out the best approach to weaning."
9. Help the participant set small achievable goals, which will lead to healthy outcomes. Allow the participant to be successful with small changes. We don't need to address every issue at one visit.
 - After discussing weaning, Lucy might set a goal to work towards weaning such as "offer only water in the bottle".

Watch for the next memo in our Nutrition Assessment series next month!

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