

m e m o

DATE: April 20, 2022
TO: Local Agency Staff
FROM: State WIC Staff
SUBJECT: Redirecting Participants and Streamlining Appointments: Tenth in the Nutrition Assessment Series

Redirecting Distracted Participants

Whether a WIC appointment is in-person or remote, participant distractions happen! The participant might be distracted by a child needing attention, preoccupied with text messages, or focused on driving. It is difficult to complete a nutrition assessment if the participant is not attentive to the conversation.

Prevent distractions before they happen:

- Let the participant know what to expect during the WIC appointment so they are prepared. When scheduling an appointment, share the anticipated length of the appointment and what will happen during the appointment. “This appointment will last about 30 minutes. Bring Emma along and we can check her height and weight. We will ask about her health and eating and talk about any concerns you have about her growth and nutrition.”
 - In-person appointment: For families with small children, suggest they bring a toy along to occupy the children. Let the family know when the kids have completed their portion of the appointment and are free to head back to the waiting room, if another adult is along to supervise.
 - Remote appointment: Ask the participant to choose a quiet location where they can talk privately during the WIC appointment. Ask that they avoid driving at the appointment time.
- Engage the participant from the start of the appointment to prevent disengagement. Use Participant Centered Skills (PCS) like open-ended questions, reflective listening, and affirmations to put the focus on the participant’s interests and concerns. These techniques will usually keep the participant talking. When a participant is talking, they will be more engaged and interested in the appointment.

If a participant becomes distracted, try these ideas:

- Acknowledge the distraction with kindness, allow time for them to address it, and then reengage them in the conversation. Here are some gentle ways to address the distraction:

- If a child is crying or demanding a parent’s attention, take a short break. Acknowledge the challenge of parenting small children. Suggest the parent take time to care for the child while you enter information into the computer. Having time to attend to the child’s need will reduce the parent’s stress and allow them to better focus on the appointment.
- During in-person appointments, older toddlers and preschoolers can become quite energetic and noisy! A kind word or smile from you might help quiet the child. Involving kids in the assessment questions is fun. “What food do you like to eat?” “What games do you like to play outside?” Sometimes their answers are funny or will promote the parent to talk about something.
- Occupy children with small, age-appropriate prizes. Stickers, coloring sheet/crayon, or plastic pinwheels are inexpensive take-home items. Most parents appreciate others’ kindness toward and interest in their children, which can improve engagement.
- Cell phone notifications evoke a strong urge to check messages! If a participant becomes preoccupied with their phone, ask if they need to step out to make a call or take care of an issue. Acknowledge their distraction and communicate your expectation that their attention is needed for the appointment! It respects your time and theirs.
- If a participant is driving during an appointment, ask that they pull over to a safe location. If that is not possible, offer to reschedule the appointment.
- If you are having a difficult time hearing a participant due to loud background noise, ask the participant if they can move to another room or area.
- Some participants become distracted and lose interest as you complete the nutrition assessment. A parent with multiple children may grow weary of the familiar questions.
 - The Nutrition Assessment tools guide your discussion to identify specific risks. Remember the tools are intended to be flexible in how you phrase questions and collect assessment information. The memo, [Conversational Assessment: Fifth in the Nutrition Assessment Series](#) shares strategies for an enjoyable, meaningful, and conversational nutrition assessment.
 - If the participant starts to disengage, it is time to move to another area of discussion. Redirect the conversation to something the client has expressed interest. “You mentioned a concern that Emma doesn’t like meat. What meats and other protein foods have you tried?”.
 - Life circumstances like a recent eviction notice or a relationship ending can be overwhelming. If a participant is preoccupied with a life crisis, take a few minutes to listen. Ask permission before offering any referrals or suggestions. If the participant is unable to focus, cover the critical parts of the appointment. Plan to follow up in a month or two when the participant may be less stressed and open to additional conversation.

Streamlining Assessments during appointments with Multiple Family Members

Providing services to multiple family members at one time is a very distracting and potentially chaotic situation! Here are some ways staff can manage distraction by limiting appointment length, maintaining engagement, and reducing repetition.

Prepare. Before starting the appointment:

- Complete the Information System fields for any proofs that were obtained before the appointment.
- Review participant charts to determine who needs height, weight, and hemoglobin measurements for in-person appointments so you are prepared to start with those measurements first.
- Start from an informed standpoint to reduce the time needed for the assessment process. For recertifications, quickly review assessment documentation from the most recent appointments to determine priorities for this appointment. Are there any growth issues, low hemoglobin levels, or chronic medical conditions? What nutritional concerns were identified? This review helps the CPA begin the assessment process with a better understanding of each family member's circumstances. [Value Enhanced Nutrition Assessment in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program Women, Infants, and Children \(WIC\)](#)

During the appointment:

- Determine what assessment information is best gathered at the family level. Nutrition assessment may be done simultaneously for some family members. An example: For children close in age, let the caregiver know you will be asking questions about eating and nutrition for both children at the same time and encourage them to share any differences. A family-level assessment can also reduce a caregiver's frustration by minimizing the number of times the same questions are asked about each sibling.
- Family members may have similar eating patterns and nutritional concerns. Complete the nutrition assessments first and then take a holistic approach to discussing nutrition and eating for the whole family. Affirm the strengths of the family. Think about what has the biggest impact on the health of the family. "Your children are learning good habits as you eat supper together as a family! You mentioned you would like your family to be more physically active. What types of activity has your family tried?" Discussing the overall health and nutrition of the family first can lead to a more tailored discussion of an individual family member's needs or concerns.

Discussion questions

- Think about an appointment where the participant was engaged and open to discussing their health and nutrition. What did you do to foster engagement? How were distractions minimized?
- Think about an appointment where the participant was easily distracted and could not focus on the conversation. What outside factors were causing distractions? How did you redirect their attention?
- What are some things you might change in your approach to redirecting distracted participants?
- Brainstorm ideas for streamlining appointments with multiple family members. Share your ideas with your co-workers!

Reference – Complete Listing of Hyperlinks

Conversational Assessment: Fifth in the Nutrition Assessment Series

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/wedupdate/2021/topic/1117nutassess.pdf>)

Value Enhanced Nutrition Assessment in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

(<https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/document/vena-guidance.pdf>)

Minnesota Department of Health - WIC Program, 85 E 7th Place, PO BOX 64882, ST PAUL MN 55164-0882; 1-800-657-3942, health.wic@state.mn.us, www.health.state.mn.us; to obtain this information in a different format, call: 1-800-657-3942.