

Customer Service Notes for

Building Rapport with New WIC Participants

For some individuals, becoming a WIC participant can initially be uncomfortable. These individuals may not be that familiar with WIC, including its processes and procedures. They may also be nervous and unsure of what to expect from WIC staff.

As a member of a WIC team, your role in building rapport with these new participants can go a long way in establishing a positive, long-term relationship.

Here are some reminders of how to build rapport with new participants:

- **Start with a Smile:** Your warm greeting and non-verbal communication will create a positive first impression and an atmosphere of sincerity and trust.
- **Understand the Participant's Needs:** Make an effort to understand the participant's situation so you can best assist them.
- **Ask Open-Ended Questions:** These are questions that are answered with something other than a yes or no. They elicit responses that give you more information about the participant. Questions that start with What, Where, and How will get the conversation going.
- **Use Active Listening Skills** – When the participant is speaking, be sure she has your full attention. Focus on what she is saying and listen for meaning. It is very easy to not listen and simply wait for your turn to speak. You can also take notes of key points and paraphrase. By paraphrasing, you demonstrate caring, listening, and professionalism. You might also uncover a misunderstanding that you can address.
- **TOPS/Empathy:** Putting yourself in the other person's shoes (TOPS) and being empathetic by understanding their feelings will put you in the mindset of thinking about your recommendations from the participant's perspective.
- **Be Courteous:** We want to be mindful of the importance of long-term relationships, so strive to be courteous. Just because our suggestions were not accepted initially doesn't mean that the participant will never accept them. Keep your participant relationships strong by allowing them to be a part of their plan of change and you will always have additional chances to present ideas and provide stellar service.

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you make an effort to create a positive first impression with new participants?
2. Do you consistently ask open-ended questions of new participants?
3. Do you demonstrate empathy with all participants?

