



## Customer Service Notes for *Working with Stressed Participants*

Just as we get stressed, so do our WIC participants. As WIC service providers, how we respond to the stressed participant can make the difference between calming the participant or further inflaming her.

Given how busy WIC staff are, there will be times when they are dealing with a stressed participant.

Suppose, for example, that Mrs. Jackson calls the local WIC office and is frantic. She cannot find her e-WIC card and she's just about out of formula for her son, Jason. As a WIC staff member, first assure Mrs. Jackson that you will handle the situation. You could say something along the lines of, "Mrs. Jackson, I'm very sorry you cannot find your e-WIC card. The lost card will be deleted in the system, and we will get you a new card as soon as possible." Then, depending on your policy, the replacement card can be mailed, or the participant may need to come to the office to pick it up. This approach shows that you are taking ownership of Mrs. Jackson's situation, as it demonstrates problem-solving skills. One would hope that Mrs. Jackson will be less stressed knowing that you are doing everything possible to help her.

Scheduling appointments can also be stressful for the participant. For instance, Ms. Hernandez is looking to schedule her next appointment. She tells you that Thursday afternoons work best for her since she gets out of work earlier that day. You check the schedule and find that the next three Thursday afternoons are completely booked. When Ms. Hernandez is informed of this, she snaps at you and says she can never get the appointments she wants. An approach to this situation would be to apologize to her. You could also let her know that you will be happy to contact her if there is a cancellation and that you will note in her record that she prefers Thursday afternoons for her appointments. Another suggestion would be to ask her to check back to see if, indeed, there are any cancellations on the upcoming Thursday afternoons. By sincerely seeking to accommodate Ms. Hernandez' scheduling preference, she may become less upset and stressed.

A certification appointment for a participant's child can also be a source of stress, particularly if the participant does not have the necessary paperwork. In this case, you can tactfully remind her of the information that is required and offer to reschedule her for the next available appointment.

Regardless of how stressed the participant is, don't act out of character and respond in a terse or sarcastic manner. Also avoid facial expressions that show you are annoyed. Always apologize and treat the participant like you would want to be treated; you never know what circumstance may have caused the stress.

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### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Do you take the time to listen to the participant to understand why she is stressed?
  2. Even if you have not caused the problem, do you apologize to the participant?
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