



Customer Service Notes for **wic**

Working with Participants for Whom English is not Their First Language

With today's diverse WIC participants, it is important to have an inclusive work environment where participants who do not speak English feel welcome. This goes toward providing stellar service for all participants.

It is good practice to speak in a normal tone and not speak louder or raise your voice. Speaking louder does not help non-English speaking participants understand the information trying to be conveyed to them.

Keep in mind that for some non-English speaking participants, they may be able to understand spoken English better than they can speak it. Remember to slow down when speaking, since participants who do not speak much English will benefit from employees speaking slower.

Suppose that Mrs. Morales, a participant with limited English-speaking skills, enters your office. Be mindful of your facial expressions and body language. Do not show frustration if she does not understand you and may become frustrated herself. Do not show a negative expression that you really don't want to be bothered or want to help her. Consider such options as:

- Have the participant work with a colleague who has an ability to speak and understand the participant's language
- Write down the instructions if the participant can understand English in writing better
- Use brochures and paperwork written in other languages.

Remember to use humor sparingly with a participant for whom English is not their first language. Humor can be easily misunderstood by individuals from a different or even the same culture. Of course always avoid inappropriate jokes and comments with all participants and co-workers. Make every effort to ensure that the visit is handled in a professional and non-offensive manner.

By making the effort to communicate with your non-English speaking participants, you will improve your customer service and create a welcoming experience for them.

Questions for Reflection

1. Are you careful not to become frustrated with non-English speaking participants?
2. Do you treat non-English speaking participants as you do other participants?
3. Do you look for creative ways to communicate with non-English speaking participants?

