

# Core WIC Training

WIC Connects



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DOH 960-328 August 2018



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# WIC Connects:

## Skills for Participant Centered Services

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### Training Objectives:

- **Experienced** the WIC Connects spirit.
- **Practiced** using WIC Connects listening skills (OARS).
- **Identified** one OARS skill you will focus on when returning to your work setting.

### Additional Resources:

- Washington State WIC Nutrition Program Policy and Procedure Manual: Volume 1, [Chapter 1- Positive Client Relations-Quality Service Delivery](#)
- *Motivational Interviewing in Health Care: Helping Patients Change Behavior* by Stephen Rollnick, William R Miller, and Christopher C Butler (2008).
- *Building Motivational Interviewing Skills: a practitioner workbook* by David B. Rosengren
- Touching Hearts, Touching Minds website: <http://touchingheartstouchingminds.com/>  
Emotional-based messages from Pam McCarthy
- Heart Button Counseling website: <https://www.heartbuttoncounseling.com/>  
from Chickasaw Nation WIC

## Part 1: About WIC Connects

Today we'll explore a bit about WIC Connects, Washington WIC's name for providing participant centered services.

### WIC Connects:

- Places the participant at the center of every interaction
- Builds relationships and improves outcomes
- Makes participants feel accepted
- Gives participants more freedom to make changes rather than defend against them

WIC Connects helps us learn about each participant's unique strengths, values, and motivations so we can help them find solutions that work for them.

WIC is a place where families get support to have healthy, happy kids and change behaviors.

WIC needs to be a place where people like to come, where they feel like we listen to them and can help meet their needs and interests.

### The WIC Connects spirit:

- Genuinely warm and respectful
- Accepting and understanding
- Emphasizes freedom of choice
- Encourages a collaborative relationship with each participant where both the participant and staff bring something to the table.
- Gives staff a better chance of having meaningful connections with the families they serve.

## Part 1: Building Rapport

The best time to start building rapport is when you interact with a person for the first time. Rapport is a relationship, even a short term one, which facilitates a light conversation or “small talk.”

### Activity 1A.

Take 2 minutes getting to know a WIC participant or someone in your office you haven't met yet.

#### What did your partner say/do to put you at ease?

Some possible answers:

- Warm, friendly greeting (smile)
- Use the person's name
- Establish and maintain eye contact
- Introduce yourself and your role

#### What things did you talk about?

Some possible answers:

- Where they are from
- Children/family
- Hobbies
- Work

#### What body language did you notice?

Some possible answers:

- Eye contact
- Smiling
- Leaning towards the other person

## Part 2: OARS

Washington WIC uses the term “OARS” to describe active listening skills:

- **O**pen-ended questions
- **A**ffirmations
- **R**eflections
- **S**ummaries

We'll explore a bit about each of these skills today.

Active listening skills help us have better conversations with participants. When we use these skills:

- Our participants are more likely to feel **heard, understood, and respected**.
- We **work together** with the participant.
- We have a better chance of finding ways we can **support a participant's desired change** or to provide assistance that **meets the participant's needs**.

## Part 3: Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions are the “O” in “OARS”.

Open-ended questions encourage the participant to respond with an answer of more than one or two words. They help you ask questions in a way that is open, inviting, and accepting. We can learn more about a participant's needs and concerns when we use open-ended questions.

- An open-ended question is designed to encourage a full and meaningful answer using the participant's own knowledge and/or feelings.

Close-ended questions limit the participant's response to a short answer such as “yes” or “no”.

- They usually work best when you're trying to clarify information.

Consider the difference in the amount of information a participant might respond with when asked these two questions:

1. Are you planning to breastfeed? (Close-ended)
2. How do you feel about breastfeeding? (Open-ended)

Consider starting **open-ended questions** with words such as:

- How
- What
- Why
- Tell me about
- Describe to me

**Activity 3A. Change these close-ended questions into open-ended questions:**

<b>Close-ended question</b>	<b>Open-ended question</b>
Do you have an appointment?	
Does your baby use a bottle at night?	
Did you understand the Rights and Responsibilities form?	
Is Jackie a picky eater?	
Are you going to breastfeed or bottle feed?	

*Look for more practice activities in the Appendix of this section.*

## **Part 4: Affirmations**

Affirmations are the “A” in OARS.

Affirmations are statements we speak out of genuine appreciation for participant’s strength and sense of well-being. Affirmations are not used as compliments. Compliments typically have a judgment associated with them. Instead use “You” statements, for example: “You are...”, “You feel...”, “You believe...” Affirmations are positively stated.

Affirmations:

- Are supportive, reinforcing statements that allow the participants to see their own strengths
- Focus on the person’s successes or efforts
- Show appreciation and understanding
- Increase people’s confidence in their abilities

**Affirmation examples:**

1. “See how your baby looks at you when you hold her? You can tell she really loves you.”
2. “You must have a lot of determination to come here today, despite the challenges you faced with your schedule and getting a ride.”
3. “You work hard at offering foods to Bobby. It’s important to you he learns how to make healthy choices on his own. He’ll have you to thank for that when he’s older.”

Here are a few things that we know work when making affirmations:

- Warmly welcome children of all ages, always saying something positive and affirming to them.
- Relate to the feelings and challenges of parents.
- Renew each parent’s sense of hope, allowing them to leave the WIC clinic inspired to change and with a clear path to success.
- Affirm parents and make them feel successful; make them feel like great moms.

**Activity 4A: See it? Say it!**

For each situation, create a statement to affirm the parent. Find something positive you notice the person is doing, and point it out using an affirmation.

1. A mom in the waiting room has a book and some small toys to keep her toddler busy.	
2. A participant walks in a little late. She says, “I didn’t think I would get here this morning. It was crazy at my house!”	
3. A dad who is applying for WIC for his daughter gives you all the paperwork you asked him to bring.	
4. A grandma brought apple slices and string cheese for her grandchild’s snack.	

### **Activity 4B. Create affirming statements**

Write an affirming statement for each of these statements. Work individually or with a partner.

1. "This is my first pregnancy and I really want to be healthy for my baby, so I am trying to eat better than I normally do."
2. "I quit smoking and my relatives don't smoke in my home anymore."
3. "I'm sorry I'm late today. I had a hard time getting a ride to my appointment."
4. "It's really hard to use checks at the grocery store. I brought my shopping guide with me but the whole grains were really confusing. I just bought bread because it was the easiest to find."
5. "Weaning off the bottle has been really hard. Nikki cries when she doesn't have her bottle before bed, and nothing seems to help. "

## Part 5: Reflections

Reflections are the “R” in “OARS”.

A reflection is a statement that mirrors what you think the participant meant by what they said.

You’ll use reflections in the spirit of understanding, trying to get to the heart of what your participant is sharing: the emotion and meaning behind what the person tells you.

### Listening is the key to:

- building trust,
- gaining understanding, and
- creating the conditions for taking action.

### Tips to forming reflections:

1. When someone tells you something, ask yourself:
  - What does she really mean?
  - Why is what she’s telling me important?
  - How might she feel about this?
2. Based on your guess, form a reflection. Make a statement to mirror what you think the person meant, or what the person is feeling that wasn’t said.
  - **Simple reflection** - Repeating or rephrasing what the participant says in similar words.
  - **Paraphrasing** – making a guess to the unspoken; what you think is the meaning of the participant’s statement.
  - **Reflection of feeling** – the listener emphasizes the emotional aspects of the participant’s statement.

Consider starting your reflection with one of these:

- You mean that...
- It sounds like you...
- You’re feeling...
- So you’re saying that...
- So you....
- You’re wondering if...

Remember:

- Reflections are statements, not questions.
- It’s easy to jump to education or problem-solving when someone makes a comment. You want to help, but wait until you know more.

- Reflections don't have to be perfect. Your participant will let you know if you understood correctly. If you didn't get it right, your participant will clarify what she meant.

### **Activity 5A: Explore Reflections**

Let's explore some possible reflections for statements you might hear your participants make.

Example 1) **I need to reschedule my appointment. I missed my last one because I had to work. I'm almost out of formula and I really need to come in today.**

*Possible reflection:*

- *It's hard for you to make it into WIC appointments because of work, and you're worried about running out of formula.*

Example 2) **It's really hard to find whole wheat bread that's WIC approved at the store, and so I just don't buy it.**

*Possible reflections:*

- *You wish it was easier to buy WIC approved whole grains, especially the bread.*
- *There are a lot of bread choices at the store, and it's hard to find the type and size that's WIC approved.*

Example 3) **The store is always out of 1% milk. Why can't you change my checks back to 2%?**

*Possible reflection:*

- *You're frustrated that you can't find the type of milk you need store and you wish we could change the type of milk we give.*

### **Activity 5B. Practice forming your own reflections:**

Consider looking back at "Tips for forming reflections" on page 9.

1. Your participant says, "I'm breastfeeding but my baby seems hungry all the time. I need to get some formula for him today."
2. Afternoon appointments are harder for me to get to than morning appointments.
3. I didn't bring my paystub with me today. They're available online but I don't have a printer at home. I really need to get my checks today though.

## Part 6: Summaries

**Summaries** are the “S” in OARS. They are a special way of applying reflective listening. The purpose of using summaries during conversations is to make sure we “got it all”.

Summaries help reinforce the information discussed, plus show participants you’ve been listening carefully. They help prepare the participant to tell you more and allow the participant to hear their own reasons for change.

Summarizing:

- Shows the other person that you have been listening carefully
- Draws together the pieces of the picture
- Reemphasize certain aspects; highlights themes
- Use to guide the conversation
- Help to change direction in a gentle and positive way

Although you could use summaries throughout a conversation, they are particularly helpful at transition points - after someone has finished speaking, told a story, or when ending an appointment.

### Key elements:

1. Start with an introduction.

*“Let me see if I understand...”*

2. Highlight key messages and summarize any goals or actions the participant wants to take.

- Either Capture “cons” and “pros” (in that order)
- Or highlight key messages if there are no cons and pros.

3. Check for understanding.

*“Did I get it all?”*

## Activity 6A: Explore Summaries:

Example Summary:

1. **Start** with an introduction:

“Let me see if I understand...”

2. **Capture** both sides *or* highlight key messages:

“**On the one hand** pumping when you go back to work feels challenging with your job and **on the other hand** you feel strongly that providing breastmilk to your baby is very important to you.”

3. **Check** for understanding:

“Does that sound right to you?”

## Activity 6B: Practice making summaries

### A participant says:

“I like the ideas you shared with me about using my fruit and veggie check. I’m going to try combining my check and my son’s check at the store next time. Then I won’t forget about the check at the end of the month and I can buy more.”

**Summarize:**

### A participant says:

“It’s really hard for me to make it to WIC appointments. My job doesn’t give me my schedule until the week before and someone has to cover my shift. I can try to make the next appointment but I might have to reschedule.”

**Summarize:**

## Activity 6B. Putting It All Together

Find a partner and have a 5 minute conversation using WIC Connects skills.

*Partner 1:* Have a conversation with Partner 2 about one of your own goals.

*Partner 2:* Use WIC Connects skills throughout the conversation.

- Ask at least 1 **open-ended question**.
- Give your partner an **affirmation**. Remark on something that your partner seems to be doing right or has tried. "See it, say it".
- **Reflect** to make sure you understand what your partner has told you.
- **Summarize** the conversation.

*Partner 1:* After the conversation is over, share what WIC Connects skills you noticed Partner 2 using, and how the conversation felt to you.

Switch after about 5 minutes so that you can both experience using WIC Connects skills.

### Ways to continue learning...

- Activities in the Appendix of this section
- LMS Online module – Participant Centered Services
- LMS Online module – Principles of Influence
- Ask your WIC Connector
- *Don't have an LMS account yet? Ask your Coordinator to submit a request for one.*

## **SIX EASY WAYS TO MEET AND EXCEED CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS**

### **1. Greet each person with a smile and an attitude of service**

You can show your willingness to help with smile, a welcoming greeting, and a simple phrase such as, “Hi, how can I help you today?”

### **2. Acknowledge participants when they arrive**

Participants understand staff are busy, but they still want to be acknowledged. Even when you are helping another participant in person or on the phone, acknowledge the arrival of participants. This may be done simply by smiling and gesturing that you will be with her shortly.

### **3. Recognize how the participant might feel**

Our customers can feel overwhelmed with things going on in their lives and with the amount of information we provide. They may be worried they won’t be able to remember everything. Be empathetic, recognize how the participant might be feeling, and offer assistance.

Example: “Using your checks the first time can be confusing and can feel overwhelming. I can offer some helpful tips, if you would like.”

### **4. Put yourself “in the participant’s shoes”**

Participants often feel comfortable sharing exciting events happening in their lives. Other times, participants need help dealing with a difficult situation. When talking with a participant, learn how they feel and consider how you would feel if you were in that situation.

### **5. Use body language that shows respect.**

In face to face conversations, it’s typically best to make eye contact and avoid distractions. Rolling your eyes, huffing, and continuing to do things without looking at the participant are examples of disrespectful body language.

Although participants on the phone can’t see your body language, smiling elevates your voice and your tone of voice will be more natural and friendly sounding. Try smiling during phone conversations.

### **6. Take responsibility for handling the issue or request.**

Taking responsibility might be the most valued aspect of customer service. Customers want to know that someone will help handle the issue, or will look into their request.

Even when you are not sure about an answer or when the requested task is not typically part of your job, take responsibility. Make it your personal mission to find someone who can follow through to answer the customer’s question or find someone who can look into the participant’s request.

**PRACTICE: CREATE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS FOR COMMON SITUATIONS**

This activity gives you a chance to create a list of open-ended question you can use in your clinic. Read the situation in the box to the left. In the box to the right, write an open ended question you can use in that situation.

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Open-ended question I can use in my clinic</b>
You are providing check education to a participant who transferred into your clinic from another Washington WIC clinic.	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What questions do you have about using your WIC checks?</li><li>• Which fruits and vegetables are you thinking of getting with your WIC checks?</li></ul>
You are helping a participant choose the best time and day to schedule her next appointment.	
A breastfeeding mom mentions she is going back to school next month. Ask her about breastfeeding plans and what you can do to support her.	
You are prescreening a participant and need to find out about her income.	
You are issuing checks to a participant. The last time she was in your clinic was the first time she received checks.	

**Tip:**

Consider starting **open-ended questions** with words such as:

- How
- What
- Why
- Tell me about
- Describe to me

## **PRACTICE: AFFIRMATIONS**

**Read** these sample affirmations. **Put a star** next to ones you can image yourself using.

- Thank you for coming in today and bringing all your paperwork.
- Good for you, that's a real challenge.
- Keep it up, you're doing great.
- You really know your baby. You're tuned into your baby's needs.
- Your baby knows that you're there when she needs you.
- You're making healthy choices, even when less healthy choices are all around you.
- It's because of your breastmilk that your baby is gaining weight so well.
- Good job getting all that taken care of. It must have been a lot of work.
- You have been really patient today while I entered all your information (helped the person on the phone, learned this new way, etc.)
- Wow, you worked hard to get here on time.

## **PRACTICE: REFLECTIONS**

1. Form a reflection for each of the following statements

- I didn't bring my appointment folder. I don't like to keep my checks it in anyway.
- Afternoon appointments are harder for me to get to than morning appointments.
- I buy the same foods every time I shop. I don't want to get in trouble.
- Every time I come here they want me to fill out the same form!
- The cashier at the grocery store told me I had to get my checks changed if I want Lactose free milk.
- I'd like to exercise more but I don't have the energy at the end of the day.
- I'm all out of formula, and I really need more today.
- I don't want to make an appointment until I know my work schedule.
- My son won't like the low-fat milk. He's been used to drinking whole milk.

## **PRACTICE: SUMMARIES**

### **Storytelling and summarizing**

Pair up with someone. Each of you will take turns telling a story and being a listener.

When you're the listener, try:

- Using **open-ended questions, affirmations, and reflections** to gather more information from the speaker. Then, **summarize** the story to assure you understood what your partner shared with you. Feel free to take notes to help with your summary.

Choose one of these three questions to ask your partner:

1. **"What is the story behind your name?"**
2. **"Describe your favorite childhood toy."**
3. **"What do you like to do on vacation or on a holiday?"**

## **PRACTICE: VISUALIZE WIC CONNECTS WORKING IN YOUR WIC CLINIC**

Instructions:

1. List one OARS skill you will focus on when returning to your work setting.
2. Visualize how your interactions with participants will look, sound, and feel.
3. Draw a picture of this image below.
4. Write a note about what you're drawing represents.