

Troubleshooting Guide for Classroom Management

This guide includes tips for handling situations that may come up in an interactive group nutrition education session.

Special Points of Interest:

- Starting and managing conversations
- Correcting misinformation
- Dealing with different personalities
- Minimizing distractions
- Evaluating how the class went

Starting and Managing Conversations

Starting the Conversation

To get the conversation started, have questions in mind that do not have right or wrong answers. For example:

My goal today is for everyone to leave with a tip or an idea to make your job as a parent easier.

What could we talk about today that would help you?

What would we talk about that would make your time here today valuable?

Keeping the Conversation Going

If there is a lull in the conversation, try asking questions that are easy for participants to answer, like:

- When was your child born?
- What is your child's favorite fruit or vegetable?
- What things do you enjoy doing with your child?
- Questions that start with: How do you feel about...? What do you know about...? What have you heard about...?

If you want parents to share more ideas or solutions on a particular topic:

- What else?
- Who else would like to share?

If you have a long period of silence

- Tell the group that it is OK to take a moment to think about their responses.
- Address the group by saying: "It's sometimes hard to be the first to respond." Then pick someone you know will be comfortable answering the question.
- Share your own experience with the topic being presented.

Remember—a period of silence that may be uncomfortable to you may feel different to the participants who might be thinking about what they can say in response to the question.

Getting all clients involved in the conversation

Encourage all participants to voice their ideas, especially the quiet ones, by:

- Repeating participants' comments;
- Giving positive feedback both verbally ("that's a really good idea") and physically (nodding your head, smiling, etc.); and
- Listening fully to each of the participants.

If participants are having conversations off to the side, say something like:

"Each of you has great ideas and I'm sure everyone wants to hear from each of you. Would you please talk one at a time so we don't miss any of your valuable thoughts?"

Keeping the conversation on track

Bring participants back to the main topic when conversations get off track. At the end of a comment, say something like:

"That is wonderful. We started today talking about fruit and vegetables. Would anyone like to share something else related to feeding fruit and vegetables?"

To refocus the conversation, you can also summarize what had been said before getting off track. When the facilitator frequently summarizes the participants' comments, the dialogue can continue to closure. Start summarizing by saying:

- "Let's review what has been mentioned so far..."
- "In summary, we can say that most of you think..."
- "I think I have heard you agree to the following..."
- "Many of you have different opinions. Let's take a moment to review these."

Dealing with Different Personalities

Dealing with uncooperative clients

In groups, often a couple of participants like to talk a lot and several are very quiet. Include the quiet ones in the conversation by asking them what they do under the circumstances plotted by the very talkative parent. For example:

- Talkative parent: "How can I get my toddler to eat more veggies?"
- Facilitator to non-talkative parent or to group: "What do you do to get your child to eat more veggies?"

Let all the parents take a turn at answering the question until everyone who has a suggestion has a chance to share.

If one parent is dominating the conversation, say something like: *"Sue, it sounds like you know a lot about this. Now let's hear what others feel about it. Who else would like to share?"* or

"Your points are really interesting, but we also need to discuss some other issues. Why don't you catch me after this session and we can talk some more."

If a client seems hostile, do not take this personally. Show concern, acknowledge the issue by listening, and offer to help with the situation after class.

If someone speaks too softly, repeat their questions or comments to the group before replying or asking for others' point of view.

Dealing with a large group

When you have too many participants, break them up into small groups to discuss the class topic. After about 10 minutes, bring the whole group together and have each small group "report back" about their discussions.

Correcting Misinformation

Correcting misinformation tactfully

You can go two different routes:

1. Throw it back to the group by asking other group members to correct the mistake. *"What have you heard regarding...?" "Has anyone heard differently?"*
This can be risky unless you are sure you will get the right answer.
2. You can also AFFIRM, ADD, and MOVE ON (California WIC) by:
 - First you AFFIRM by thanking the participant for the information shared. (See examples in the box below)
 - Then ADD the correct information with a concise response. *"Note that...is a common myth and that it can have negative consequences such as..."* or *"Research shows..."* *"The pamphlet says..."* or *"WIC recommends..."*
 - Finally, MOVE ON by reaffirming the learner and getting back to the discussion. Thank the participant again for helping others hear about the myth so that no one acts on this.

Examples of Affirmations

- *"Thanks for sharing that. It's a common misconception that...is often shared in the press/books/people. I wouldn't want anyone leaving today thinking that was true. Research shows/WIC recommends... I really appreciate your sharing."*
- *"Thank you for saying that since lots of others think that, too. However, the latest information is... Thanks again for bringing that up."*
- *"I am very glad that worked for you. Other people found that... worked better for them. OR "I'm very glad that worked for you, but all the references we've seen do not recommend it."*
- *"You've brought up a really interesting issue. Let's look it up in (a specific reference) and see what they say about it."*
- *"Thank you for bringing that up. That used to be what was generally recommended, but now new research has found that*

Minimizing Distractions

Physical arrangement of classroom

The physical arrangement of the classroom can help avoid distractions:

- Arrange chairs and tables before clients arrive for class.

- Have all group session materials and handouts ready beforehand.
- If you plan to have a group discussion, arrange the chairs so that the clients are close and facing each other, such as in a circle, horseshoe, or around a table.
- Make sure all clients can see the visuals you plan to use.
- If possible, arrange chairs so the door to the room and windows are behind your participants.
- You may want to make sure you have an area for strollers and young children.

Children

Make special arrangements in the classroom for children:

- Try to involve them in the class.
- Set aside a special place for them with child-sized furniture or a rug and pillows for them to sit on.
- Prepare silent activities for them if they will not participate in the class.
- Let parents know that it is OK to leave the classroom to attend to their children and to come back whenever they are ready.
- Include a pathway for pacing so that parents can remain in the room while soothing a uncomfortable infant or young child.

Evaluation

How the class went

Self/class evaluation (how did it go)

How do I know I did a good job?

Usually a client's body language can tell you immediately if they were satisfied by the interaction. If you felt you paid attention to their answers, had a meaningful interaction, and helped them arrive at a solution they are willing to try, then most likely you did a great job.

How do I know my clients learned from this experience?

You can end the class by asking your clients what they learned, what they are going to try, and whether they enjoyed the class. Their feedback will tell you if they learned from the experience.