

Guidelines for Making Nutrition Education More Client-Centered

Purpose:

- Establish a set of guiding principles for conducting client-centered nutrition education classes in Texas WIC programs
- Serve as the basis for developing formal client-centered nutrition education policies and state and local level procedures
- Offer a framework for local agencies that are developing client-centered approaches to nutrition education

Background:

Client-centered approaches to nutrition education offer WIC agencies the opportunity to maximize their resources in creative and realistic ways. The term “client-centered” may encompass a variety of methods, settings and approaches. However, there are common elements that should be incorporated into client-centered nutrition education, which should reflect each agency’s unique desires and circumstances.

Essential Elements:

Client-centered approaches to nutrition education **engage clients as active participants** in their own nutrition education experiences. Being an active participant can include:

- Opportunities for the discussion of nutrition topics in safe, positive group settings
- Participating in hands-on nutrition education activities that place nutrition education concepts into practice
- Practicing and mastering useful skills

Using client-centered approaches to nutrition education acknowledges and respects clients as adults who have **expertise about their own families’ nutrition**. This can include:

- Involving clients in sharing their experiences
- Inviting clients to share what they have learned
- Giving acknowledgement to clients who share their experiences and expertise
- Offering materials and formats that are geared toward adult learners

Client-centered approaches include an element of **client choice**. These may include:

- Choice of lesson topic or setting
- Choice of information that meets their needs
- Choice of how to receive information in ways that are best suited to their learning style

Client-centered methods provide **relevant nutrition information** to clients keeping in mind nutritional risks and family circumstances. This can be achieved by:

- Using the results from participant surveys to develop lesson topics and schedules
- Considering local and regional nutrition risk patterns
- Asking participants about their concerns
- Using a feedback process, such as lesson evaluations, to ensure relevant nutrition education material

Client-centered approaches may be delivered in a variety of formats and settings, which can be **tailored according to local resources and client needs**. Formats may include:

- Group classes, such as support groups, hands-on activity classes (e.g., cooking, taste tests) or facilitated discussion
- Off-site formats such as web lessons, take-home DVDs, field trips (library, grocery store, playground) or health/fitness fairs
- Individual settings to accommodate client circumstances

Client-centered approaches to nutrition education include **measurable objectives and evaluation methods** for both staff and clients. Examples of measurable objectives include:

- All participants are involved in discussions or learning activities (staff/leader objective)
- Clients verbally share a successful family nutrition experience and identify a new strategy to try (client objective)

Evaluation methods should address the stated objectives of the class. Evaluation methods include:

- Staff self-evaluation: How many of the participants participated in the class?
- Client feedback at the end of class: Which of the ideas shared today will clients try with their family?

Staff providing client-centered approaches to nutrition education has **adequate preparation** to teach and lead the course. Preparation may include, but is not limited to:

- Credentials or certification
- Specific material knowledge or training
- Training in conducting group discussion classes
- Experience in conducting the type of nutrition education being offered