

Louisiana WIC

Sharing Session Guidelines



Self-Instructional Manual

Developed by the Louisiana WIC Program

Facilitating WIC Sharing Sessions

A Self-Instructional Manual

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1. What is a WIC Sharing Session?

■ What is a WIC Sharing Session?

A WIC Sharing Session is a form of group nutrition education in which WIC participants gather with a facilitator to discuss a nutrition-related topic in an open and informal exchange. Every WIC Sharing Session is a new learning opportunity because it reflects the interests, knowledge, and experiences of a new group of participants.

A WIC Sharing Session is a mid-certification nutrition education contact. Each session lasts about 20 to 25 minutes. The optimum size for a WIC Sharing Session is 8 to 10 participants.

A WIC Sharing Session usually has these main parts:

Introductions
Icebreaker activity
Opening question
Discussion (guided with more questions)
Summary and closing

"When people need to change behaviors, participation in group discussions is 2 to 10 times more effective than a lecture..."

Communication and Education Skills,
The Dietitian's Guide, 2nd Ed. 1991. Betsy B.
Holli and Richard J. Calabrese. p. 136.



■ Purpose of a WIC Sharing Session

The purpose of a WIC Sharing Session is:

1. To provide an opportunity for participants to learn in a pleasant, informal atmosphere
2. To encourage participants to educate each other by discussing their knowledge of a topic and by sharing their real-life experiences
3. To enable participants to give and receive support and ideas about their concerns and about making desired behavior changes
4. To provide access to resources for participants, if desired

The primary emphasis is on the feelings and experiences of the group members. The purpose is not to debate ideas. The purpose is to provide an opportunity for sharing information and support.

■ Participant's role in a WIC Sharing Session

The participant's role is to participate in the group in these ways:

1. To share concerns, interests, knowledge, and experiences related to the topic
2. To brainstorm with other group members to find practical solutions to problems or ways to make desired changes
3. To set personal goals, if ready to do so, and to support others in the group who are ready to set personal goals

■ Facilitator's role in a WIC Sharing Session

"Facilitating" means doing the things that make it possible for other people to do what they need to do—easily. In a WIC Sharing Session the facilitator—usually a WIC Nutritionist or Nutrition Educator—makes it possible for a group of WIC participants to have a lively, interesting, educational discussion of a nutrition-related topic.

The facilitator's role is to participate in the group in these ways:

1. To act as a moderator for the group, establishing a comfortable setting, setting "ground rules," choosing a topic for the session, and closing the session
2. To encourage participation by making it possible for everyone in the group to discuss their concerns, interests, knowledge, and experiences
3. To guide the discussion while at the same time allowing the participants the freedom to explore aspects of the topic that interest them

The facilitator uses a knowledge of:

- *group dynamics* to establish a sense of group spirit and an atmosphere for open exchange
- *adult learning* to approach participants in a positive, effective manner
- *stages of change* to help participants assess their own readiness to make changes and to break behavior change goals into small actions

The facilitator sets the tone of the session, projecting personal warmth, caring, and acceptance. The facilitator is not "the star of the show," however. The facilitator is more like a coach on the sidelines, helping the group to function well.

This manual, along with training and the actual experience of being a facilitator, will help a WIC Nutrition Educator learn to become a successful WIC Sharing Session facilitator.

■ Role of other WIC staff in a WIC Sharing Session

Other WIC staff have the important role of establishing positive participant expectations about a WIC Sharing Session. Clerical staff, nurses and nutritionists can all help decrease participants' stress about trying something new by promoting WIC Sharing Sessions as a pleasant experience.

WIC staff can help set the following positive expectations of WIC Sharing Sessions:

1. Sharing sessions are low-stress, and fun (not boring!)
2. Sharing sessions give participants the chance to learn what works for others in a casual atmosphere.
3. Sharing sessions are NOT classes.

■ "Ground Rules" of each WIC Sharing Session

- Everyone's thoughts about the topic are welcome.
- Be respectful.
Only one person speaks at a time.
No side conversations.
- Please don't repeat anything outside the group.

Self-Check

What is a WIC Sharing Session?



This is a simple self-check that lets you review the material you have just read. Answering these questions will prepare you for the post-test. The answers are on the next page.

True or False:

- | | | |
|---|------|-------|
| A WIC Sharing Session is a form of WIC nutrition education. | True | False |
| Each WIC Sharing Session will be different because each group of participants will have different experiences to share. | True | False |
| The participant's role includes sharing concerns, interests, knowledge and experiences related to the topic. | True | False |
| The facilitator acts as a moderator for the group and makes sure that each person has a chance to participate. | True | False |
| The facilitator should be seen as the group's teacher and is expected to be the "star of the show." | True | False |
| All WIC staff can promote WIC Sharing Sessions as interesting and fun. | True | False |

The "Ground Rules" of each WIC Sharing Session are:

(Check all that apply.)

- Everyone's thoughts about the topic are welcome.
- Several people are encouraged to speak at a time.
- No side conversations.
- Information should not be repeated outside the group.

Self-Check Answers

What is a WIC Sharing Session?

True or False:

- A WIC Sharing Session is a form of WIC nutrition education. True
- Each WIC Sharing Session will be different because each group of participants will have different experiences to share. True
- The participant's role includes sharing concerns, interests, knowledge and experiences related to the topic. True
- The facilitator acts as a moderator for the group and makes sure that each person has a chance to participate. True
- The facilitator should be seen as the group's teacher and is expected to be the "star of the show." False
- All WIC staff can promote WIC Sharing Sessions as interesting and fun. True

The "Ground Rules" of each WIC Sharing Session are:

- Everyone's thoughts about the topic are welcome.
- Several people are encouraged to speak at a time.
- No side conversations.
- Information should not be repeated outside the group.

2. Understanding Some Basics

■ Group dynamics

Groups have an energy that adds momentum to the learning process. Groups bring things out in people that one-on-one experiences do not.

For instance, WIC participants in a group do not act the same way they do in one-on-one nutrition education. People tend to be more relaxed and more open to learning in a group because everyone shares the spotlight and the pressure.

Groups also generate lots of ideas. Once a discussion gets going, group members often find it stimulating to hear other people share their knowledge and experiences. This can lead participants to think of and contribute new ideas and approaches. Groups usually like to “brainstorm” with each other.

Most groups start slowly, however. Usually people wait to see who will speak up first. This is a predictable part of group dynamics. One of the facilitator’s biggest jobs is to begin the discussion. Then the discussion often takes on a life of its own. The facilitator mainly stays quiet, speaking up only when necessary to guide the discussion and help everyone participate.

A good facilitator takes advantage of positive thinking and sets a positive tone for the session. A group will sense when the facilitator is comfortable and supportive.

A comfortable group will have a good time and share freely with each other. An uncomfortable group will stick to safe topics and will need continual prodding to talk. Uncomfortable groups do not fully explore the topic and time drags. Comfortable groups find that time flies.

■ Adult learners

The participants in a WIC Sharing Session are “adult learners.” What does a facilitator need to know about adult learners?

- ✿ Adult learners already know a lot—but whether they decide to share what they know depends on how comfortable they are.
- ✿ Adult learners are not always self-confident. They may observe how the first few comments are handled by the facilitator and the group, and then decide whether or not it is “safe” to participate.
- ✿ Adult learners are most receptive to new information or behavior change when they have a new situation to deal with (like a new baby) or when they are concerned about something (like a child who is not eating well.)
- ✿ Adult learners are often self-conscious and don’t like to be singled out or called on. Many adult learners did not do well in school and are nervous about performing or being judged in a class.
- ✿ Adult learners like to know what to expect and they like to know what is expected from them. Be clear up front on what their role is and what your role is.
- ✿ Adult learners are more open to learning in a comfortable, fun, lighthearted atmosphere where they can participate.

☀ Many WIC moms feel isolated from others, by having young children at home, living in a rural place, or other circumstances. Being in a WIC Sharing Session where they are comfortable and among their peers can be a very positive experience for many.

☀ All adults like to feel valued. People feel valued when they contribute ideas to a group and help others think through problems and situations. Adult learners who feel valued are more open to new information and to behavior change.

■ Anticipatory Guidance

One of the best things about WIC Sharing Sessions is that the participants often provide each other with “anticipatory guidance.” This is just what it says it is: *guidance* that helps parents know what to *anticipate* from their infant or child. Effective nutrition education helps parents know what to expect from their infant or child and helps them understand what the infant or child is learning to do at the various developmental stages.

This kind of anticipatory guidance between friends used to happen over the back fence or over a cup of coffee. Now many parents are too busy for that kind of informal exchange.

Here is a sample of the predictable behaviors parents can help each other with in a WIC Sharing Session: children want to feed themselves, are picky eaters, go on food jags, refuse to eat meat, refuse to eat at all, and prefer drinking to eating. These are predictable behaviors at various developmental stages, but not everybody knows that. Parents are better able to cope when they know to expect these behaviors and understand that they are normal.

Participants in a WIC Sharing Session will help educate each other by sharing their experiences. Also, parents like to help other parents avoid the problems they have had. It builds their self-esteem to see that the experiences they have had are of value to others.

Part of the facilitator’s role is to help the group share real-life stories of what has worked in various situations. We all like stories, especially stories about what works. The more you can guide discussions to the experiences and knowledge that will help parents cope, the more popular your WIC Sharing Sessions will be.

•••••
• *Anticipatory guidance helps parents*
• *observe and understand their children. It*
• *helps parents have healthier relationships*
• *with their children, based on reasonable*
• *expectations. In the long run, those*
• *healthier relationships result in healthier*
• *children and healthier families.*
•••••

Bright Futures for WIC Nutrition Services, 2000
Susan Miller, MPH



■ Active Listening

Listening may seem like it’s the easiest part of being a facilitator but there is more to listening than it seems.

Active listening means your mind is not wandering to what you are going to say next, or what time it is, or some other distraction. It means you are truly focused on what is being said.

Active listening is a skill. It takes concentration and energy. It does not come naturally. It has to be developed.

You have already developed your listening skills in counseling. Here are some tips on active listening in a group:

- Groups will keep track of whether you are really “there,” really present. One way people will assess this is by checking to see if you *look* like you are listening. Does your body language say that you are listening? Do you lean forward sometimes, a universal signal that says you are listening carefully?
- Do you look directly at people when they are speaking? The group will notice if you look at your notes, the clock, or the kids playing in the corner. However, if a member of the group continually speaks directly to you and not to the rest of the group, you may have to avert your eyes and look at other group members. Hopefully, the speaker will get the hint and talk with the whole group.
- Groups can be encouraged by your verbal and nonverbal feedback that you are really listening. They will notice your nods of approval, smiles, and encouragement.
- Listening carefully will allow you to clearly understand what a person has said and restate it for the group, when needed. Restating what someone has said can sometimes help other members of the group understand what has been said.

In many ways, the listening you do in a group reflects how much you like the people in the group. Encourage yourself to like the group before a session starts. Set that expectation for yourself. If you like the people in a group, you will listen better and they will know it. If you really listen, everyone in the group is more likely to listen, too—and your group will be more likely to be a success.

■ Stages of change

Of course one of the primary goals of nutrition education is helping participants make positive behavior changes in the areas of nutrition, food habits, infant and child feeding, and physical activity. However, changing behaviors is not an easy process, as we all know. The more facilitators understand about behavior change, the more effective they can be.

The participants in WIC Sharing Sessions can help each other think through how to change behaviors in small, do-able actions—but before getting to the “action” stage, a person has to go through other important stages of change.

The people in your groups will be in different stages of change. Don’t evaluate your success in a group by the number of people willing to take action steps toward changing a behavior or starting a new positive behavior. Many in the group may be doing the thinking and planning steps that come before the action steps.

The stages of change are predictable, although people do not necessarily go through the stages one right after another to success. Let’s take smoking for example. A person may have no intention of stopping smoking. Then one day they may really think about quitting. Then they may plan how to do it, then try doing it. Oops, then they might go back to smoking. At some future point, they may think about quitting again.

This person is cycling through the stages of change, even though they may not have been successful yet at changing their smoking behavior. Going through the stages of change several times, however, often helps a person succeed in the long run at changing a behavior. Most former smokers, for instance, did not quit on the first, second or even third try.

The stages of change are:

- **Precontemplation** (not even considering making a change)
- **Contemplation** (now thinking about making a change)
- **Preparation** (now planning to make a change)
- **Action** (now making a change)
- **Maintenance** (now making a change into a habit)
- **Termination** (the change is now fully complete and established)

In any WIC Sharing Session, there will be participants at different stages of change on different behaviors. It is important for the facilitator to understand and accept this so that the facilitator knows that not everyone is ready to take action or set goals on any particular behavior. A skillful facilitator will not push anyone to set a goal if they are not ready to do so.

The WIC Sharing Session may, however, help move a person from one stage of change to another—for instance, from not even thinking about making a change to considering making a change.

■ Goal-setting

A person who is in the “preparation” stage of change is planning to change something they do or is planning to add a new behavior. (Often adding a new behavior is easier to do than changing an established behavior.)

Setting a goal can help make the transition from the “preparation” to the “action” stage of change.

Here are some tips on goal-setting:

- In a comfortable group, you could ask if anyone would care to share their goal with the group. Saying a goal out loud, in public, helps a person commit to it.
- You could ask a participant if she would like the group to brainstorm different ideas about how to reach the goal.
- Encourage breaking goals into small, do-able steps. Making *small* changes over time is the best way to get a new habit established.
- Some printed materials have boxes for goal setting or you could provide an index card or piece of paper for participants to use to write their goals.

In summary, encourage participant goal setting but don't force it. Setting goals is a very personal thing and many people may not yet be at the goal-setting stage.

Self-Check

Understanding Some Basics



This is a simple self-check that lets you review the material you have just read. Answering these questions will prepare you for the post-test. The answers are on the next page.

True or False:

- | | | |
|---|------|-------|
| The facilitator can set a positive tone for the session. | True | False |
| Adult learners already know a lot. | True | False |
| Listening to the experiences others have had feeding children can help participants know what to expect. This can help them cope. | True | False |
| A group will notice the facilitator's nods of approval, smiles, and encouragement. | True | False |
| Every participant should be encouraged to set goals by the end of the WIC Sharing Session. | True | False |
| Making small changes over time is usually the best way to get a new habit established. | True | False |

Which of these things can help make a group comfortable?

(Check all that apply.)

- knowing what to expect
- getting positive feedback
- an atmosphere of acceptance, equality and respect
- comfortable seating
- a fun icebreaker

Which one of the following is NOT a step in the stages of change?

(Check one.)

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> precontemplation | <input type="checkbox"/> action |
| <input type="checkbox"/> contemplation | <input type="checkbox"/> maintenance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> preparation | <input type="checkbox"/> termination |
| <input type="checkbox"/> procrastination | |

Self-Check Answers

Understanding Some Basics

True or False:

- The facilitator can set a positive tone for the session. True
- Adult learners already know a lot. True
- Listening to the experiences others have had feeding children can help participants know what to expect. This can help them cope. True
- A group will notice the facilitator's nods of approval, smiles, and encouragement. True
- Every participant should be encouraged to set goals by the end of the WIC Sharing Session. False
- Making small changes over time is usually the best way to get a new habit established. True

Which of these things can help make a group comfortable?

- knowing what to expect
- getting positive feedback
- an atmosphere of acceptance, equality and respect
- comfortable seating
- a fun icebreaker

Which one of the following is NOT a step in the stages of change?

- precontemplation
- contemplation
- preparation
- procrastination
- action
- maintenance
- termination

3. Getting Comfortable With Facilitating

■ Your comfort level

You may never have facilitated a group discussion and you may be uncomfortable about trying it. However, the best way to get comfortable with it is to *do it* and to learn from doing it.

Try looking at your readiness to facilitate WIC Sharing Sessions in terms of the stages of change. What stage are you in now? Contemplation—just thinking about it? Or are you in preparation—making plans to do it? Perhaps you are already in action, and are looking here for tips on how to do it differently.

In any case, the following suggestions should give you confidence that you *can* have a positive experience facilitating WIC Sharing Sessions.

■ The participant's comfort level

The extent to which you are able to make participants comfortable will affect how easy it is to facilitate your WIC Sharing Sessions. As discussed before, your attitude, listening skills and your own comfort level are the basics. Here are some other reminders:

- Always put the seats in a circle before the session. Due to room size, the circle might be more like an oval. If the group is really large for some reason, make two circles, one inside the other. Never try to do a Sharing Session like a class, where you are in the “teacher” position and the “students” face you in rows.
- Also, don't seat yourself in a “power” position in the circle. Before anyone else arrives, put your things in a chair

that blends in with the others. If you seat yourself so that you are “in charge” of the circle, your group will relate to you rather than with each other. Think carefully about where you will sit. Remember: you are the coach, not the “star of the show”!

- Use introductions and perhaps an icebreaker to get people comfortable. (Ideas in Section 4.)
- Make sure participants know the “ground rules” and what is expected of them. (See Section 1.)
- Let the group know how long the Sharing Session will last. Then finish on time.
- Let children read books or play with toys that don't make noise. It would be helpful to have another staff member play with or read to the children in a corner of the room, if possible. (How about a senior volunteer to help, or someone from the library or a reading-promotion program? How about if another staff member does a separate nutrition activity with the children in another room, using ideas from the binder, *Tickle Your Appetite?*)

■ How to encourage discussion

The origin of the verb “to educate” is “to draw out.”



Drawing people out and getting people to *participate* in discussion can be a challenge. Here are a few tips that others have learned from experience:

- Be sure it's clear from your introduction that this is *their* discussion group, not yours. Your role is to help *them* discuss the topic and share what they know about the topic with each other.
 - The *earlier* you give people the opportunity to participate, the more likely they are to participate. Also, the earlier they participate, the more *often* they will participate for the whole session.
 - An idea to get people talking right away: ask them to pair off in two's, starting at your left, and have each pair discuss your first open-ended question for a minute or two. Then ask who will share with the group one thing that they discussed with each other. Once participants have already said something to their partner, they will find it easier to say it another time to the group.
 - Asking for examples is a powerful way of getting discussion going. Participants often find it easier to tell a story (of what their child does, for example) than to speak in generalities.
- Ask, “Does anybody here need the group’s support or ideas for something she’s trying to do now?”
 - Describe what you know to be a common situation in regard to your topic, like “Mary has a 2 year old, Johnny, who refuses to eat, all he wants to do is drink all day.” (Make up whatever scenario is appropriate to the topic.) Then ask, “From your experience, what advice would you give Mary?” Get several bits of advice. This should lead to a good discussion.
 - Tell the group that you will read a list of tips you have gotten off one of the WIC nutrition education cards that deals with your topic and that you want participants to think of examples from their own experience that back up each tip. Frequently, reading the list will trigger thoughts and issues from participants, leading to a wide-ranging discussion.
 - Ask a question and then ask people to raise their hands if they have an opinion about it. Most people have opinions. Then ask if anyone will share their opinion. If nobody wants to share their opinion, ask them what they think *your* opinion is! Then you can ask why they think that’s your opinion. That could start a fun discussion!
 - Always say “thank you” for responses to your direct questions, especially for the first few responses. Make sure the first few speakers are warmly thanked and feel “well-protected.” Everyone will notice how you treat them. If you handle the first responses warmly, you will set up an atmosphere of trust.

- Don't dominate or over-control the discussion. Say as little as possible, just enough to keep things going. Let the participants dominate the discussion. When in doubt over whether or not to say something, be quiet!
- Are you having an awkward silence? Give it a minute. Give participants the chance to fill a silence. That way, they share in the pressure to make the session work.

■ How to guide a discussion

- ✿ Always have an outline that includes several prepared questions related to your topic. You don't have to ask all the questions and you don't have to follow your outline. However, it's good to have it to fall back on. Having prepared questions increases your comfort level, even if you don't use them.
- ✿ To encourage discussion, ask for other points of view. For instance, try one of these statements:
 - "Okay, now we know where three people stand. Does anyone else have a different point of view?"
 - "Are there other ways of looking at this?"
 - "What do the rest of you think?"
 - "Does everyone agree with this?"
 - "Let's do an opinion poll on this. How many people think it would be a good idea to...?"
- ✿ Ask for examples. Examples from real life make concepts easier to relate to, and they often lead to discussion. One person's experience will often trigger another person's memories.

- ✿ Leverage off what somebody has said. "Shawn just said that her child did xyz when she tried new foods, and she stopped feeding them to him. Has anyone else had this situation?"
- ✿ When someone is going off the subject, wait for them to pause or look for a natural break. Interrupt tactfully and summarize the person's views that pertain to the topic. (For example, "Excuse me, what I just heard you saying, Margie, is that..." or "Margie, you just made a great point a minute ago and I'd like to get back to it. You said...") Then ask a question that gives others a chance to talk.
- ✿ You can gently redirect the group back to the topic by saying something like, "Let's get back to what we were talking about a few minutes ago..." or "Let's move on to another area..."
- ✿ Notice if a topic area comes up in several people's comments. This may indicate that it's a common concern. You could say, "I'm hearing several of you say that you're interested in xyz, so let's talk about that further..."
- ✿ If things start to feel rambling or jumbled, or it feels like people are talking but it's starting to go nowhere, it's time to get things back into focus. To do this, you could select one particular point to repeat or you could condense a number of points into a summary. An all-around wrap up strategy might be, "Wow, you are really coming up with all kinds of situations and concerns and this is great! What I want us to do now, though, is go back to that question we started with, and see if we can summarize what we have come up with..."

■ How to deal with overly talkative participants

Sometimes talkative participants seem to monopolize a discussion. It can happen naturally, especially if others in the group are not talkative. However, sometimes an overly talkative participant dominates the group and the group gets bored, passive, or restless. The group is often waiting for you to turn the session back into a group discussion.

The most important rule is to be tactful. The overly talkative participant is most likely just playing her role (discussing, participating) and has just gotten carried away. It happens to everybody once in awhile.

You may actually give the talkative participant relief by interrupting and directing the conversation to others. Think to yourself, "I am doing the overly talkative person a favor by interrupting now." If you choose to think of it that way, your interruption will be friendlier, warmer and more tactful.

With that in mind, here are some tips on how to deal with an overly talkative participant:

- Interrupt with a smile (always with a smile) and say something like: "Oops, Betty, I'm sorry to interrupt, but it's time to go on to my next question, which is...."
- "Betty, thanks for starting us down this path, you have really shared a lot of your experiences about xyz with us...but we are getting kind of short on time and I want to make sure we all have a chance to share, so now let's go around the circle and everyone gets a chance to speak —or you can say "I pass" if you choose..."

Going around in a circle and giving everyone a chance to say something is a good way to deal with the overly talkative participant. Start with the person next to the overly talkative person so that you can end with the person just before the overly talkative person. Then move on to a new subject. If the group is large, ask for very short responses, but give everyone a chance to speak.

■ How to give quiet people a chance to participate

People may be quiet for several reasons:

- Overly talkative speakers may intimidate them.
- They may like to think before they share.
- They may not see a natural opening to say what they want to.
- They don't want to be seen as too pushy.
- They may want to check out the group before opening up.
- They may feel that their ideas are not worth sharing.
- The anxiety of speaking up may be too high to overcome without help.

In any case, as the facilitator, you will want to watch for body language or facial expressions that signal that a quiet person wants to speak. You could invite them to speak by saying, "You look like you might be about to say something?" or "Was there a thought you wanted to share?"

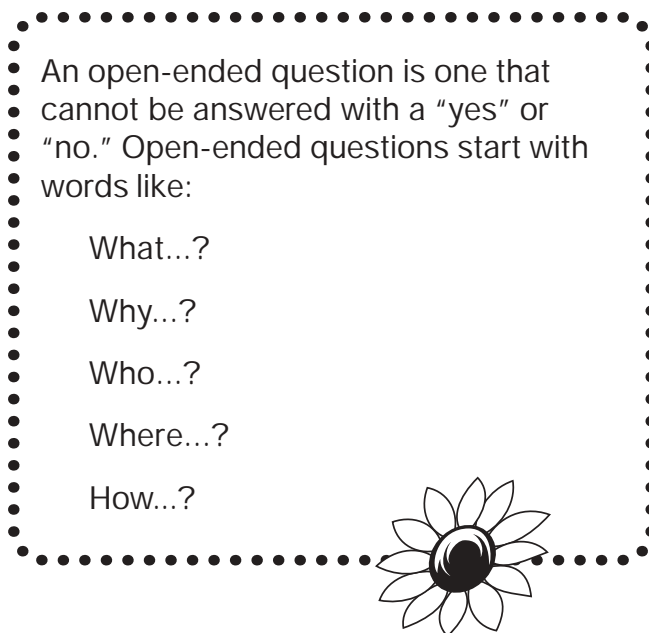
If a quiet person makes a move to talk but someone else jumps in first, you can say, "Let's go one at a time. Rita, why don't you go first?"

■ Asking open-ended questions

Asking open-ended questions is a skill. It is one of the most basic skills a group facilitator needs. Open-ended questions will stimulate people to think and respond. There are no right and wrong answers to open-ended questions.

An open-ended question is one that cannot be answered with a "yes" or "no." Open-ended questions start with words like:

- What...?
- Why...?
- Who...?
- Where...?
- How...?



Good ways to get discussion going are to use phrases like:

- "Who is interested in...?"
- "What do you think about...?"
- "Who has any experience with...?"
- "What advice would *you* give to a mom who...?"
- "Who has a real-life example of ...?"

■ Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a process many groups use to come up lots of ideas in a short period of time. The trick is to just keep tossing out ideas without getting into whether or not they are *good* ideas. People just say what comes to mind. Brainstorming can be a good way to change the energy level during a discussion.

An added bonus: brainstorming can be a good way to get a few laughs when people feel comfortable enough to have some fun with it. Say, "All ideas are welcome, even really crazy ones. In fact, the crazy ideas would be fun to hear. We won't analyze the ideas or anything right now. Let's just toss out ideas for a minute or two about how Lisa might handle this situation."

Somebody needs to jot down the main ideas during brainstorming. Then you can go back and look at the list and Lisa can say what she thinks are the ideas that could work for her. Other participants may have tried some of the ideas they tossed out and can tell her more about how they worked.

■ Dealing with misinformation

As you know, there is a great deal of misinformation in the area of nutrition.

As a facilitator, you will need to decide which minor points to let go and which ones should be addressed. Being tactful is important because if the participant feels badly, she may not speak up again, and others may be afraid to "say something wrong," too.

There are many ways to handle misinformation, but the guiding principle is to respect the person's feelings while you either solicit a different point of view from the group or offer a different point of view yourself. Try to see if someone in the group has a different view before offering one yourself. Ask, "What do the rest of you think about that?" Lots of times the group will offer up alternatives and correct the misinformation.

For instance, let's say a woman in a group of pregnant women says that she doesn't want to gain more than 8 pounds. Instead of reacting, ask the group in a calm voice, "What do the rest of you think about gaining 8 pounds during pregnancy?" or "What do the rest of you think could be some of the

results be of just gaining a small amount of weight during pregnancy?”

Here are some approaches that others have used to correct misinformation or misconceptions without embarrassing the participant:

- “Well, I used to think that myself, and then I learned that...”
- “I’m glad you brought that up. That used to be the recommendation for years, but research has found that...”
- “You have brought up a very interesting issue, and one that I have done some research on, as a matter of fact, because lots of moms ask me about it. I’ve learned that...”
- “I am glad that worked for you. Other people have found that xyz worked better for them. Has anyone here tried xyz?”
- “You’ve brought up an interesting issue. Has anyone had a different experience or different information?”
- “I wonder...would you have done anything differently if you had had the information we have talked about today?”

Overall, the thing to remember is that putting down anybody’s ideas or experience is to be avoided—by yourself and by the group. Don’t forget: one of the “Ground Rules” is that everyone’s thoughts about the topic are welcome.

■ Using printed materials

Printed materials can be used in WIC Sharing Sessions as a tool to stimulate discussion or as a resource, but printed

materials should *not* be the focus of Sharing Sessions.

Always give participants a choice of whether they want to keep any printed materials. This is a small point but it shows respect for the participant’s ability to decide whether or not they want the information.

■ Summarizing and closing the session

Summarizing brings ideas together. It is a great learning technique. Reviewing material allows participants to “save” the information in their brains. A facilitator can summarize when some main points have been made or when the group seems to have come to some conclusion.

Summarizing at the end of the Sharing Session is the facilitator’s responsibility. Reviewing what has gone on helps give the session closure. One idea is to go around and have everyone share what the session has meant to them or share something that they are more aware of now. This way the group can see that their input and shared experiences helped everyone learn something or become aware of something.

This kind of sharing at the end of the session might also include any goal-setting that individuals may have considered. Ask, “Is there anything you plan to do differently after our discussion today?”

You might want to end the session by saying, “I always learn something in these Sharing Sessions. Thank you for what you taught me today, and for coming and participating.”

Self-Check

Getting Comfortable With Facilitating



This is a simple self-check that lets you review the material you have just read. Answering these questions will prepare you for the post-test. The answers are on the next page.

True or False:

The comfort level of the group will affect how easy it is to facilitate the WIC Sharing Session.	True	False
The facilitator should be seated so that she is clearly “in charge” of the group.	True	False
The origin of the verb “to educate” is “to draw out.” Part of the facilitator’s role is to “draw out” the knowledge and experiences of the participants in the Sharing Session.	True	False
Giving participants a chance to fill an awkward silence helps them share in the pressure to make the session work.	True	False
The facilitator will find it helpful to have an outline of questions to guide the session, even though she does not need to ask all the questions.	True	False
Overly talkative participants should be shamed into being quiet.	True	False
Asking open-ended questions is an important skill for a facilitator.	True	False
An open-ended question is one that is not answered with a “yes” or “no.”	True	False
A question that starts with “Do you...?” is an open-ended question.	True	False
The facilitator should try to deal with misinformation tactfully.	True	False
Printed material is a great focus for a Sharing Session. Participants can read to each other from the material.	True	False
Reviewing what has been discussed can be a good way to close a WIC Sharing Session.	True	False

Self-Check Answers

Getting Comfortable With Facilitating

True or False:

- | | |
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| The comfort level of the group will affect how easy it is to facilitate the WIC Sharing Session. | True |
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| Reviewing what has been discussed can be a good way to close a WIC Sharing Session. | True |

4. Making Sharing Sessions Fun

■ Being creative

Sometimes there is not a lot of time to be creative, but it does pay off to put your creative touch on how different topics are approached. Changing the approach from topic to topic will keep interest high. Even within one Sharing Session, it helps to have a few different ways to change the pace.

Here are some ideas to stimulate you to think of new ways to approach topics and groups:

- All learning in a group does not have to involve the whole group. You can ask people to be learning partners and talk about a subject with their learning partner. They can then either share with the whole group or not. Either way, they are learning from each other.
 - If the topic is one which is factual, you could make a list of statements relating to your subject matter, half of which are true and half of which are false. Write each statement on a separate index card. Make sure that there are as many cards as there are participants and give one card to each. Tell them that their "mission" is to figure out which ones are true and which ones are false.
 - Another strategy: take statements off the WIC nutrition education cards about your topic and put them on index cards. Pass out one card per person and ask for an example to back up the statement on the card each person gets. When the conversation runs down, have them pass the cards around fast for a few seconds and do it again. That way each person will have a new statement to relate to.
- Write down the clients' ideas and tips and ask if you can use them in a newsletter, tip sheet, website, or bulletin board. This provides a way for participants to see that their ideas are valued and are of use to others.
 - A group secretary could write down the main ideas of a group and read them off at the end of the session.
 - You could read a statement and ask, "Does this ring true for you? Has anyone learned this through experience? Could you tell us about it?"
 - Use props to stimulate discussion. For instance, in an infant feeding Sharing Session, you could pull out infant items that could relate to major discussion points, like a spoon, a baby food jar, a sippy cup, a rice cereal box, a milk carton, and a jar of honey. You could say, "These things are going to remind us to talk about them." (Perhaps you would want to put items away as you talk about them, so you can see what is left.) Have participants say what concept each item represents. For instance, a participant might say "Honey... Honey is something babies shouldn't have until they are one." Maybe she also knows why. Within any group you will probably have experienced parents who know the WIC infant feeding messages and can share them with the group.

■ Introductions

The most successful WIC Sharing Session feels like a social event as well as an educational one. Introductions are very important.

Here is a checklist of how to introduce each Sharing Session:

- Tell the group your name and that you are going to facilitate a group discussion today on xyz topic. The session will go until __ o'clock.
- Rules: Say that you want to promote a climate of acceptance and a comfortable group where everyone feels comfortable to speak. Call attention to the "ground rules."
- Roles: Emphasize that this is *their* discussion group. Your role is to help them have a discussion in which everyone learns from each other's experience. They each know a lot. Today they can share what they know and help each other with some of their hard-earned personal experience.

Then have either an icebreaker that allows the participants to introduce themselves or just go around and have each person introduce herself and perhaps say something personal, like how old her children are. You can also ask them something regarding the topic. Decide this ahead of time and add it to your outline for the session.

"Call people by name. The most delightful sound to anyone is the sound of their own name."

10 Commandments for Helping People.
Sparks Center, University of
Alabama at Birmingham



Don't assume everyone knows everyone else. Name badges are a great idea. This way, you can all call each other by name. You should wear the same name badge as everyone else.

■ Icebreakers

An icebreaker sends the message that the WIC participants will be playing an active role in the session. Another good reason to do an icebreaker: you, as the facilitator, will feel less nervous. Choose an icebreaker that you are comfortable with.

In your introduction, explain to clients that you want to begin with a fun opening activity. There are lots of things you can do. Even though such an activity takes up some time, it is good to spend at least some time getting people comfortable and feeling like a cohesive group.

You can use these ideas or develop your own that reflect your creativity and your knowledge of your participants. Have fun!

Some ideas for icebreakers:

- ✿ For fun, put on some fast music and do a little "chair-dancing"—which means the groups sits in their chairs doing some stretching and "dancing" following your lead. (For a demonstration, see the WIC "Fit Kids" video teleconference tape.)
- ✿ Ask people to introduce themselves and say how many years they have been a parent. If you have children, start with yourself. Keep track of the number of years and add them up. You will find that there is an impressive number of years of experience in every group!
- ✿ Say, "I know it's hard sometimes to be the first one to speak, so I'm going to ask a question *everybody* here has an

opinion on, I'm sure, and I just want you to answer it for a minute or two with your learning partner."

(Their learning partner will be someone sitting beside them. It is best to turn to your left and say "Why don't you count off 1, 2, 1, 2—and you ones and twos will be learning partners." If there is a person left at the end, she can be a learning partner with you, or she can join the previous two partners and become a threesome.)

☀ Ask each person to match up with another participant they don't know, to interview each other for 1 minute each. Interview questions could vary from group to group, and could include information related to the topic of the day. For instance, in a Sharing Session on feeding young children, you could ask them to include their name, their children's ages, and their feeding or nutrition concerns. After one minute, announce it's time to switch roles and go for another minute. Then have them introduce each other to the whole group. If there is a person without a partner, you can partner with them and introduce them to the group. It might help if your introduction goes first, to show people what you expect them to do. Keep it short so this icebreaker doesn't take up too much time!

☀ In a group of parents with infants, ask each person to introduce herself and to describe her baby—name, age, and personality, perhaps. You might be able to use these descriptions to provide an introduction to the first topic, such as crying, colic, or feeding concerns.

■ Group activities and games

Often people learn best by doing. What fun and educational activity or game can you do in your Sharing Session? That is always a good question to ask yourself!

Some Sharing Sessions will lend themselves to activities, like making a simple toy in a group on active play.

A group activity does not have to take a lot of time. Group activities are especially useful at the beginning of the group, to establish a sense of group identity, or in the middle, to break things up. You might want to avoid activities near the end of the Sharing Session, as they can make you go overtime, and they can disrupt the sharing time.

Self-Check

Making Sharing Sessions Fun



This is a simple self-check that lets you review the material you have just read. Answering these questions will prepare you for the post-test. The answers are on the next page.

True or False:

The facilitator is encouraged to be creative and to make the Sharing Sessions interesting. True False

Sometimes it helps if participants pair off into "learning partners" to talk about the topic. True False

Simple props are not a good idea. True False

It has been said that the most delightful sound to anyone is the sound of their own name. True False

An icebreaker can help people feel comfortable--including the facilitator. True False

Even though an icebreaker takes time, it is good to spend at least some time getting people comfortable. True False

A group activity can be especially good at the beginning or middle of a Sharing Session. True False

The facilitator's introduction to a WIC Sharing Session should include the following:

(Check all that apply.)

- What the topic is.
- The facilitator's credentials and extent of personal experience with the topic.
- The "Ground Rules" for the session.
- Encouragement to share knowledge and personal experiences.

Self-Check Answers

Making Sharing Sessions Fun

True or False:

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| Sometimes it helps if participants pair off into “learning partners” to talk about the topic. | True |
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The facilitator’s introduction to a WIC Sharing Session should include the following:

- What the topic is.
- The facilitator’s credentials and extent of personal experience with the topic.
- The “Ground Rules” for the session.
- Encouragement to share knowledge and personal experiences.

5. Your Facilitator Toolkit

■ “Ground Rules” Poster

You could make a “Ground Rules” poster or you could write the ground rules on a flip chart or chalk board.

The Ground Rules:

- Everyone’s thoughts about the topic are welcome.
- Be respectful.
Only one person speaks at a time.
No side conversations.
- Please don’t repeat anything outside the group.

■ Facilitator’s Preparation and Evaluation Form

The “Facilitator’s Preparation and Evaluation” form is on page 5b. Make copies of it as you need it.

Evaluating each Sharing Session is important, because you will be learning from your experiences. It will just take a few minutes to make notes on how the session went and what you would do differently next time. Put these notes in a file and review them before your next Sharing Session, to remind you of the lessons that you have learned.

■ Participant form for evaluating a WIC Sharing Session

This form is on page 5c. Make copies of it as you need it. Each page has two forms on it, so cut the page in half. If you would like to ask participants different questions, make up your own form.

Participants do not put their name on this form. This will help you get more honest evaluations of your Sharing Session.

Getting participant’s opinions about how the session has gone can be a great help to you. Positive responses will make you feel good and negative responses will give you tips on what to do differently next time. Don’t get upset at negative responses—only when we are alerted to what we could do differently are we likely to change and develop.

Over time, as you get more comfortable doing WIC Sharing Sessions, the evaluations will reflect your progress as a facilitator. Evaluations will make it clear that you are making a difference in people’s lives with this kind of nutrition education.

Facilitator's Preparation and Evaluation Form

Sharing Session topic: _____

Date: _____

Facilitated by: _____

Preparation:

- Did you reserve the room?
- Did you check to see how many participants are scheduled?
- How many chairs do you need? ____
- Are the chairs in a circle?
- Do you have the "Ground Rules" on a poster, flip chart, or chalk board?
- Do you have your "Outline" for the Sharing Session?
- Have you thought of any props?
- Do you have the props?
- Do you have enough participant evaluation forms?
- Do you have toys and books for the kids?

Evaluation:

Notes on Today's Sharing Session

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. How would you grade participation? | A | B | C | D | F |
| 2. How would you grade your facilitation? | A | B | C | D | F |
| 3. How would you grade the overall success of the session? | A | B | C | D | F |
| 4. Did you try something new that worked well? | | | | | |
| 5. Was there anything that didn't work well? | | | | | |

If you had any problem in the session, what was it and how did you handle it?

Would you handle it differently next time? How?

6. What did the clients learn?

7. What did you learn?

What did you think of today's WIC Sharing Session?

Please check your answer to the following statements:	☺☺☺ Strongly Agree	☺☺ Agree	☺ OK	☹☹ Disagree	☹☹☹ Strongly Disagree
I enjoyed the WIC Sharing Session today.					
I learned something today.					
I was able to share some things I know with others.					
I would like to be a part of more WIC Sharing Sessions.					

Do you have any suggestions for making this Sharing Session better?

Thank you!

What did you think of today's WIC Sharing Session?

Please check your answer to the following statements:	☺☺☺ Strongly Agree	☺☺ Agree	☺ OK	☹☹ Disagree	☹☹☹ Strongly Disagree
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I would like to be a part of more WIC Sharing Sessions.					

Do you have any suggestions for making this Sharing Session better?

Thank you!