

Customer Service Notes for *wic*

Working with “Talkative” Participants

As busy service providers, we know you see a high number of participants each day in your local WIC agencies. We also know that you recognize how important building and maintaining rapport is with each participant.

Sometimes, you will work with participants who are by the nature of their personality, extroverts and talkative. While I’m sure you prefer this to someone who says very little, you may need to temper the chattiness in order to stay on schedule.

When you are meeting with someone who likes to talk, you can give them subtle hints that you are pressed for time. For example, let’s say you are meeting with Donna, have provided her with nutritional counseling, and are wrapping up the appointment. Suppose she then brings up her ex-husband and starts complaining about him, something that you have heard many times before. You can first stand up, signaling that you are trying to wrap up. You can then tactfully say, “I’m sorry I can’t chat today, as my schedule is pretty full, and the next client is waiting.” Then you can smile and say that you look forward to seeing her again.

Some participants are eager to share other personal aspects of their lives. While a little of this is fine to build and maintain rapport, with a talkative person, you may need to gently cut them off. For example, suppose it’s a busy afternoon and you are already running behind schedule. Marissa shows up for her appointment and immediately pulls out pictures from her brother’s wedding to show you. While you want to be pleasant, you really don’t have time to look at them. One technique would be to quickly look at one of the pictures and say, “Oh Marissa, they look great and I wish I had more time today to look at them, but we’re running behind schedule. Maybe I can look at them at your next appointment.” By saying this, you are showing interest in Marissa and her pictures but you are being candid in telling her that you can’t look at them now. What you want to avoid is showing impatience with someone like Marissa by bluntly saying, “I have no time for that now.”

Talking on the phone with talkative participants can also be a challenge. If you get a call from a participant who you know is talkative, you can help the person get to the reason for their call by saying, “Oh hi Brenda, how can I help you today?” Again, this shows your interest in helping and maintains rapport so that the person does not feel cut off.

Being professional with participants who like to chat will ensure that you maintain rapport yet stay on schedule.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What specific techniques can you use to help talkative participants get to the point?
2. Are you aware of any of your non-verbal behavior that would show impatience with chatty participants?