

Transition from Assessment to Goal Setting:

Eleventh in the Nutrition Assessment Series

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One important role of CPAs is to support positive health outcomes for participants. This is done by guiding the participant toward improved health outcomes through goal setting. The Nutrition Assessment allows CPAs to identify risk codes and gather relevant information from the participant in order to guide the nutrition education discussion and goal setting, and to determine what information and resources to share with the participant. It's important to do a complete assessment in order to tailor the discussion to the participant's concerns and determine how best to address them. Once you have all this important information, you can move on to goal setting.

When transitioning from the assessment to goal setting, consider the flow of the appointment; it should be a seamless transition that feels natural in the conversation. CPAs should be able to effectively transition from the assessment, to education, to summarizing the discussion, and then on to goal setting. Once you have moved past the assessment and education, you will probably have some ideas of the participant's desired behavior changes. Asking additional open-ended questions will clarify their interest and readiness to adopt new healthy behaviors.

As we begin to learn what the participant's desired behavior change is, we can move on to goal setting. Although we use the term 'goal' regularly as WIC staff, participants may understand other terms better. Some participants may use the term 'goal,' which is great! Others may better understand other terms, such as "next steps" or "small changes." Utilizing PCS skills will help the CPA determine the most effective term to use with each individual participant.

The Nutrition Assessment may identify several areas where behavior change could improve a participant's nutrition and health outcome. Addressing too many areas at once can be overwhelming to the participant and make taking action harder. CPAs can use PCS skills to prioritize the topic areas and guide the participant toward improved health outcomes through incremental behavior change by breaking goals into small, achievable action steps. When the CPA demonstrates how a goal can be achieved through small action steps, the participant gains confidence in their ability to perform the action and achieve their goal. The participant will be empowered to maintain the healthy behavior as they gain confidence with each successful step taken and goal achieved.

Setting goals is the first step to help participants bridge the gap between their wishes and reality, and the most effective goal is one the participant sets for themselves. Participants are more likely to take action when it is their idea, and they determine their goals and action steps. Some participants have an idea of what they want to work on, while others don't know or say they haven't thought about it. CPAs can help guide goal setting and may offer ideas, while leaving the final decision up to the participant.

Tips for helping participants set a goal

- Use open-ended questions to help the participant clarify the change they want. Pause and sit in quiet curiosity after asking questions to give the participant a chance to think and respond.
- Listen for change talk! This may include the participant’s desires, ability, fears, and needs, as well as reasons the participant may want to make a change. Use those openings to suggest a possible goal or behavior change.
- Recognize and adjust your approach based on the participant’s stage of change. Check out the WIC Works [Stages of Change](#) handout for more information!
 - What are the stages of change?
 - Stage 1: Precontemplation
 - Stage 2: Contemplation
 - Stage 3: Preparation
 - Stage 4: Action
 - Stage 5: Maintenance
- Help participants verbalize concrete next steps rather than big, broad goals. Rather than “I will exercise more”, a participant may state “I will go on a walk three times this week.”
- Focus on just one area for change. We don’t have to “fix” everything in one visit!

Examples

- “You mentioned you were interested in trying some new vegetables with your family. What vegetables would you like to try in the next month?”
- “I heard you say you were considering weaning Ethan off the bottle. What steps will you take in the next few weeks to wean Ethan?”
- “It sounds like you will try taking your prenatal vitamin in the evening when the nausea has ended.”

Notice with each of these examples, you don’t have to use the word “goal”!

Group Activity

- You’ve completed the assessment, provided education, and provided a summary of the discussion. Now, it is time to help the participant set a goal! Based on the following statements that you heard during the appointment, what questions might you ask that could help the participant create a more specific goal or action step?
 - “I want my kids to eat less sugar.”
 - “Some kids really do love sugary foods. What foods or snacks do you think would be a better choice to help with offering less sugar?”
 - “I wish Jack would eat more vegetables.”
 - “I think many parents would agree with you. Is there a way you could offer vegetables that might make them more appealing to Jack?”

TRANSITION FROM ASSESSMENT TO GOAL SETTING

- “I’m really trying to cut back on the cigarettes.”
 - “Smoking cessation is challenging for most people. Can you think of one way that you could distract yourself when you are craving a cigarette?”
- “I haven’t been moving enough lately.”
 - “Fitting in exercise is hard when you are busy with the kids all day. Have you considered including the children in your exercise activity?”

Watch for the next installment of the Nutrition Assessment series next month!

Reference – Complete Listing of Hyperlinks

Stages of Change

(https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/document/stages508c_0.pdf)

Minnesota Department of Health - WIC Program, 85 E 7th Place, PO BOX 64882, ST PAUL MN 55164-0882; 1-800-657-3942, health.wic@state.mn.us, www.health.state.mn.us; to obtain this information in a different format, call: 1-800-657-3942.