

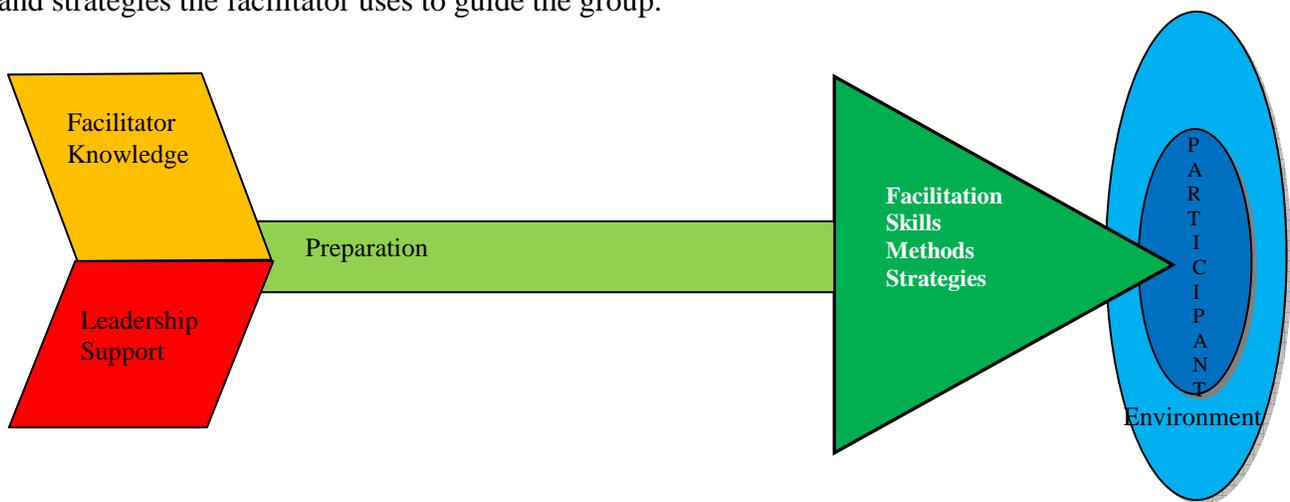
Participant Centered Groups: Listening and Learning Together – A Model

Overview

Participant centered groups are an interactive form of learner focused education where participants have the opportunity to discuss topics and share their questions and knowledge with other participants in the group. This allows participants to gather information from each other in a supportive environment where their culture, prior experience, and personal concerns are acknowledged and respected.

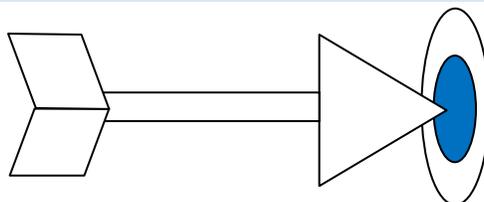
People are more likely to change behavior when they feel comfortable in their surroundings, are actively involved in the educational process, and develop the ability to reflect on their own behavior. Participant centered groups create a safe learning environment that supports adult learning. The role of the facilitator in participant centered groups is to create an atmosphere of acceptance, guide the discussion and activities, and encourage participation from all group members.

The following model identifies six areas of influence or domains which contribute to providing successful participant centered groups. The target represents the learning environment with the participant at its center, while the arrow indicates the knowledge, support, preparation, skills, methods and strategies the facilitator uses to guide the group.



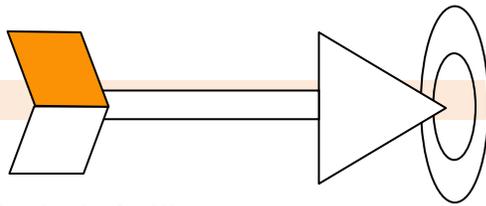
Participant Centered Groups Model Domains:

Participants at the center



At the heart of it all, nutrition education focuses on the participant. WIC's ultimate goal is to promote positive health outcomes for the participant.

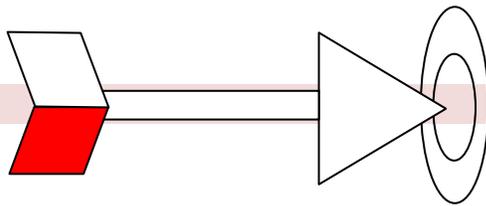
Facilitator knowledge



Staff has the knowledge needed to effectively facilitate groups.

- Understands adult learning theory, learning styles, stages of change, and group dynamics
- Understands the social-ecological model of influences on health behaviors
- Differentiates between participant centered and teacher centered approaches to facilitating groups
- Understands basic instructional design and theory
- Knowledge of subject matter/content area (e.g. knowledge of breastfeeding if facilitating breastfeeding groups, knowledge of infant nutrition and feeding if facilitating infant feeding groups)

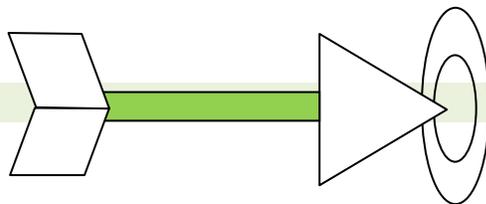
Leadership and Support



Agency leadership are committed to providing Nutrition Education (NE) and ensures that it is supported and that the necessary resources are allocated.

- All staff market NE to participants, understand session topics offered in their agency, and schedule participants appropriately.
- Appropriate NE sessions are scheduled in a languages appropriate for participants and staff time is allocated for NE preparation and session design
- Only staff with the necessary knowledge and skills to be successful are scheduled to facilitate NE groups.
- Staff facilitating sessions are observed and provided positive feedback.
- NE groups are evaluated for effectiveness by facilitator, participants, and supervisors.

Preparation

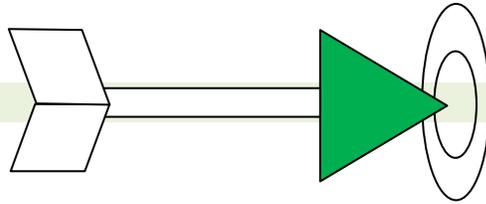


Nutrition education sessions are carefully planned to meet the needs of the participants and all necessary materials and resources are prepared ahead of time.

- Session topics and methods are based on learning needs of participants (e.g. anticipatory guidance, participant category, based on participant surveys or assessments).
- The session outline is designed based on clear purpose and objectives and includes specific content to cover, open-ended questions to ask, and participant activities that are respectful of participants customs and beliefs.
- Session outlines are reviewed, practiced or piloted, evaluated, and revised before they are presented regularly to scheduled participants.
- Content is limited to allow time for dialogue and action (teach less, learn more) and is flexible enough to change based on the participants needs.
- Session logistics are determined (e.g. location, length of session, frequency offered, materials are prepared, appropriate staff to facilitate are scheduled).

- Facilitator is mentally prepared for the session, leaving personal concerns, judgments, and opinions at the door.
- Learning materials, such as handouts and videos, are not the focus of the session, but are relevant and support the topic of the session. Materials have an element of interactivity, and avoid judgment or restrictive language.

Facilitation



The point of contact with the participant is during NE sessions. The role of the facilitator during that time is use their skills, methods and safety strategies to keep the discussion on topic and to ensure participants in the group feel safe to interact and learn.

Facilitation Skills

Adapts the Oregon WIC Listens skills used for individual counseling to groups.

- Spirit and style
 - CARING – Collaborative, Accepting, Respectful, Involved, Non-judgmental, Genuine
 - The facilitator understands the impact of their tone of voice, eye contact, and body language
- Opens the conversation
 - Greet the group and introduces self, role, topic, and time available
 - Sets the stage and asks permission to proceed
 - Starts the session with a warm-up activity to invite participation and focus the learning
- Demonstrates active listening
 - Asks open ended questions
 - Determine the needs, knowledge level, and interests of the group
 - Guides the discussion and elicits ideas and information from the participants
 - Affirms participation without judging right or wrong answers
 - Reflects to ensure understanding or to acknowledge emotion
 - Summarizes to keep discussion on target and on topic
 - Attending (observing what is the body language and tone of voice of the participants)
 - Involves the group
 - Pauses to allow time for participant to answer before asking another question or offering information
 - Asks the group to answer other participants' questions by sharing their experiences or thoughts, before offering information
 - Allows time for everyone to talk and accepts all viewpoints non-judgmentally
- Closes the session
 - Summarizes the ideas and information provided by the participants
 - Invites the participants to reflect on what they have learned and encourages a move to action
 - Expresses confidence in the participants' abilities and thanks them for participating
 - Allows opportunity for feedback or evaluation of the session

Facilitation Methods

Information and session activities are provided to participants in a way which involves them in their own learning.

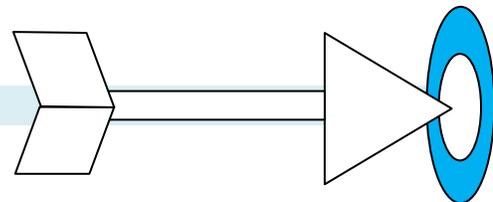
- Provides opportunities for experiential learning (cooking demonstrations, taste tests, hands-on practice, discussions, planning, decision making)
- Visual aids or learning materials are used effectively
- Family centered – involves family members and children whenever possible
- Provide menu of options on key concepts
 - Offer ideas that are not discovered by the group
- Use a variety of methods that address different learning styles
 - Pair sharing
 - Small groups or table topics
 - Explore-offer-explore
 - Pros and cons grid
 - Stories
 - 0-10 scaling
 - Menus or lists of choices
 - Trade-offs
 - Values clarification/emotional messaging

Facilitation Safety Strategies

Groups can be scary for both the facilitator and the participant. Safety strategies can decrease fears and increase confidence.

- Provides a “safe” environment by establishing ground rules and building the group from within
- Rolls with resistance
- Facilitator safety
 - Responds to incorrect information using the “Affirm – Add – Move on” method
 - Redirects to the group when discussion gets off track
 - Clarifies different views
 - Knows what to do if you don’t know the answer to a question
 - Uses strategies to address the talkative participant
 - Involves the quiet participant
 - Uses strategies to address the disruptive participant

Experiential Learning in a Safe Environment



Participants feel comfortable and safe in the environment where NE is provided. Whenever possible they are given the opportunity to participate in their own learning.

- The location of training is accessible (Americans with Disabilities Act, parking, close to clinic), comfortable (light, temperature, seating) and inviting (homey, not cluttered).
- The environment and materials are prepared and arranged prior to beginning of session.
- The environment is safe for participants and their children (child proofed).
- The environment is used to maximize learning with seating in a circle (when appropriate), and easy to see visuals.
- Facilitators use methods and strategies that involve the participant.