

Mentoring in WIC: Information for Coordinators

Benefits of Mentoring

■ Enhanced client-centered service	■ Increased staff engagement
■ Consistency in staff skills	■ Improved staff morale
■ More effective nutrition counseling	■ Participant retention

Although staff training is vital for staff development, stand-alone training without consistent follow-up rarely leads to integration of skills into daily practice. Without reinforcement, the new skills will be replaced by the older, more familiar routines and habits. Offering tailored support and mentoring to each staff member will help staff incorporate new skills and apply them appropriately. Although mentoring involves an investment of time and energy, improvements in staff skills will lead to a significant improvement in program effectiveness and increased participant retention.

Choosing a Mentor

The person selected as a mentor should have a firm grasp of client-centered skills, both in theory and practice. Ideally, a mentor has worked in WIC for at least a year and is trusted by other staff members. The mentor may also have a supervisory role in the WIC agency, although this is not a requirement for WIC mentors.

Below are some characteristics of successful mentors. Effective mentors will approach skill development with optimism and the belief that within each person is the desire to grow and improve. Mentors are good listeners who are accepting of different points of view. A mentor works with staff “where they are at.” Some staff members may naturally gravitate to the client-centered style while others might need more support. A mentor will also be someone who is actively working on their own skills with a goal of continual growth and improvement. In this capacity, mentors serve as a role model for others.

Common Characteristics of Mentors:

• Positive	• Supportive	• Resourceful
• Enthusiastic	• Confident	• Sincere
• Caring	• Knowledgeable	• Loyal
• Cooperative	• Compassionate	• Flexible
• Patient	• Reliable	• Honest

Common Questions about Mentoring

How often should people be mentored?

How often staff are mentored will depend on several factors. Each agency is empowered to determine the amount of mentoring that works best for their unique situation. Typically, once a month is the starting point with frequency of mentoring

adjusted based on readiness, skill level, and staff engagement. Keep in mind, there are circumstances when more mentoring time is warranted, including:

- When training new staff
- When staff are learning a new procedure or technique

How many mentors do I need?

The precise framework of each mentoring system will be dictated by the needs of the organization and its employees. Both clerical and nutrition staff can benefit from mentoring and should be considered in the evaluation of the number of mentors needed. If the agency is very large and has several mentors, it may be wise to select a mentor program coordinator to oversee the program. The mentoring coordinator would be responsible for training new mentors, planning and facilitating mentor meetings, reporting and data collection, and conducting periodic assessments to track progress.

What are the roles of mentors?

In addition to one-on-one mentoring sessions, the mentor's role may include:

- Identifying resources and training needed to promote skill development
- Providing diverse learning opportunities to accommodate different learning styles
- Facilitating discussions to promote learning
- Exploring ways to recognize and celebrate staff achievement

Will mentoring effect scheduling?

Yes, minimally. And planning ahead can alleviate scheduling issues.

Consider the following suggestions:

- Identify the best days or times to plan for mentoring. If early mornings are normally slower, use that time. Likewise, if a school holiday predicts fewer attendees, plan to mentor on that day.
- Assess the mentors other duties and make changes if necessary to accommodate the time needed for mentoring.

Mentoring will add a small amount of time to each appointment. But remember -- the time invested in mentoring today means more effective services from that staff person every day!

How do I make it sustainable?

Make it a standard of practice:

- Determine how to incorporate mentoring duties into work schedules
- Set aside time for mentoring
- Clarify expectations
- Establish accountability to ensure mentoring takes place

Allow for networking and growth opportunities for mentors.