



# NutriNet News

## Learner Centered Approaches to Nutrition Education

### What's Ahead for 2007-2010?

The Wisconsin Nutrition Education Network steering committee has been involved in a series of strategic planning meetings to set the direction of Network activities for the next three years. Representatives of UW-Extension's Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program (WNEP), Department of Health and Family Services Bureau of Family and Community Health, Wisconsin Bureau on Aging and Long Term Care Resources, Department of Public Instruction (DPI), Head Start Collaboration Project, Hunger Task Force, Madison Area Technical College and UW-Madison Department of Nutritional Sciences have participated in the process. Their goal is to improve nutrition education for low income Wisconsin residents and strengthen partnerships among agencies.

Nutrition education themes and priorities of each agency were identified, combined, and matched to projects currently in place. Educational teaching strategies, technology and alternative delivery methods emerged as the highest priority of all agencies represented. The second highest priority was overweight and obesity prevention.

Combining these priorities, a 2007-2010 directive emerged: *The Network will use learner centered approaches to provide nutrition education related to preventing overweight and obesity by emphasizing the balance of calories and physical activity and encouraging consumption of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and low fat dairy products.*

The Network's main goal in 2007 will be to coordinate a multi-agency program to develop educators' skills in using learner-centered approaches to nutrition education for Food Stamp recipients, eligible individuals and families. The long-term outcome is that learner centered

*Nutrition educators are constantly working to find teaching interventions, practices and methods which will result in a change in the behavior of their learners. This newsletter describes three approaches to learner centered education.*

approaches will be effectively and routinely used in nutrition education programs for this target audience. Network activities will have two emphases: 1) identifying, adopting and adapting educational materials for this purpose, and 2) coordinating multi-agency training for educators to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully transition to this approach to teaching.

Partnerships at the local level will continue to be very important. Multi-agency training will provide an opportunity for educators to learn together, practice skills and develop support systems.

New curricula introduced in the next three years will make use of learner centered teaching techniques specific to the intended audience. County partners will be involved in pilot testing, adapting and sharing materials as they are identified.

The *Stepping Up to a Healthy Lifestyle, Walk Dance Play* and *Jump n' Jive* materials will continue to be available on our website.

A summary of the results of the planning process will be available on the website in May. Watch for a chronology of activities to unfold throughout the summer. There will be many opportunities for county partners to get involved in further planning, training, testing materials, and evaluation.

This issue of NutriNet News provides an overview of several learner centered approaches to nutrition education. In 2007-2010, we will work with educators to help make their teaching more learner-centered, with techniques best suited to the diverse settings in which Food Stamp Nutrition Education takes place. We will provide materials that make use of these techniques. We welcome your thoughts and questions.

### Wisconsin Nutrition Education Network

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### Inside this issue:

Network Update	1
Using Stages of Change to Help Learners Make Better Lifestyle Choices	2
Motivational Negotiation: Nutrition Counseling with Pregnant Teens	3
Facilitated Dialogue Encourages Learners to Learn from one Another	4

# Using Stages of Change to Help Learners Make Better Lifestyle Choices

Mary Jane Getlinger, UWExtension



Stages of Change (SOC) theories point out that individuals must pass through a series of steps before assimilating a message into a resulting behavior.

Behavioral change is a process, not an event, and individuals are at varying levels of motivation or readiness to change. This model can be used to categorize the communication steps into five stages. As a person attempts to change a behavior, he/she moves through the five stages: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance.

Learners at different points in the process of change can benefit from different interventions matched to their stage at the time. The stages identify when behavior change occurs and the processes identify how people make behavior changes. Educators can use the Stages of Change theory to motivate learners and encourage them to set goals and make plans to improve their food and activity choices.

## Keys to Success

Knowing an individual's current stage can help educators to tailor messages, strategies and programs to the appropriate stage. In addition, nutrition education is most effective when there is open and interactive communication between the learner and the educator. Interactive activities help learners to clarify and assess personal values, refine reasoning processes and strengthen their ability to integrate and analyze information.

Stages of change can help educators focus on issues that are relevant to the learner. This type of education encourages learners to set goals and plan to make behavioral changes that fit their situations and needs.

## For more information:

**Stages of Change:** Applying Stages of Change to Dietary Behavior. *Nutrition for Family Living*, April 2001: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/wnep/specialist/nfl/mmpdfs/0104.pdf#page=6>

Greene et al. Dietary Applications of Stages of Change Model. *J Am Diet Assoc* 99(6):673-678.

**Motivational Negotiation:** Connecting with the Pregnant Adolescent, Module 3: Working Toward Behavior Change. University of MN Leadership, Education & Training Program in Maternal & Child Nutrition. <http://www.epi.umn.edu/let/nutri/pregadol/img/module3.pdf>

**Facilitated Dialogue:** Sigman-Grant, M. Let's Dance. <http://www.unce.unr.edu/publications/SP04/SP0421.pdf>

Norris, J. From Telling to Teaching: A Dialogue Approach to Adult Learning. *Learning by Dialogue*, 2003 - available through amazon.com or <http://www.learningbydialogue.com/book.htm#>

Louisiana WIC Sharing Session Guidelines [http://www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/Sharing\\_Center/LA/sharing\\_session\\_manual.pdf](http://www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/Sharing_Center/LA/sharing_session_manual.pdf)

Stages of Change		
Stage	Learner Status	Educator's Strategy
Pre-contemplation	Not aware of a need to change; Does not intend to make a behavior change.	Increase awareness of the need to change; Personalize information about risks and benefits
Contemplation	Understands the message; Realizes the change may improve life; Is considering a change in the next six months.	Assist in identifying the barriers; Assist in identifying ways to overcome the barriers.
Preparation	Individual has tried some changes which may have been drastic and failed. Intends to take action in the next month.	Assist in developing and implementing a concrete action plan that includes realistic goals.
Action	Individual has been successfully modifying his/her behavior for the past six months; Has followed a gradual plan and has been successful.	Assist individual with feedback, problem solving, social support and reinforcement.
Maintenance	Individual has changed behavior for more than six months.	Assist with coping; Provide reminders; Help find alternatives to avoid slips and relapses.

# Motivational Negotiation: Nutrition Counseling with Pregnant Teens

Betsy Kelley, Nutrition Education Network

Many nutrition education sessions with teens end up in frustration for both the teen and the educator. Traditional educational approaches may lead to knowledge change, but hardly ever lead to behavior change. In order to make counseling sessions more successful, nutrition educators are moving away from the traditional approach where the educator is the expert, to a partnership where the learner plays a more active role. Nutrition educators can facilitate behavior change by understanding the enormous challenges facing pregnant teens and using a nutrition counseling style that accepts the mother where she is in her life. This style is called Motivational Negotiation.

What is Motivational Negotiation (MN)? MN is a learner centered approach to promoting positive changes in behavior based on the person's own motivation to change.

In traditional nutrition education, the educators are experts. They determine changes and how they should be made. They may present only positive aspects of change to try to persuade the learner to do the "right" thing.

In MN, the educator and learner are a team. The learner is expert on their own life, and the educator is expert about facts and experiences of others. The educator provides information only when asked to, and the learner and educator explore both the positive and the negative side of change.

Drawing on the teen's values and goals, MN helps to link current, past and future behavior to concerns that are most relevant to the individual. This strategy helps to highlight the discrepancy between behavior and values, a normal human phenomenon. This discrepancy is used as an opportunity to explore ways to change.

## Essential Principles

The five essential principles of MN fit into the teen's tasks of questioning and pushing against authority and the awareness of the discrepancy between behavior and practice. The curiosity and openness seen in teens fit well into the MN framework.

1. *Express empathy.* Educators should show they understand the challenges facing

the pregnant teen. Empathy is not sympathy.

2. *Avoid argumentation.* Arguing is destructive to the learning environment and will cause the teen to shut down.

3. *Roll with resistance.* Resistance is a natural consequence of a negative turn in the conversation caused by something the educator said. When the educator meets resistance, adjust by redirecting the conversation.

4. *Support self efficacy.* The educator can help the teen to believe in herself and her abilities to cope with her situation. This is more important than giving information about nutrition and physical activity.

5. *Develop discrepancy.* Teens know that behaviors and beliefs are often at odds. They question this in adults; helping teens recognize the same patterns in themselves can facilitate change.

## Reflective Listening

Once the conversation has started, the educator can ask open-ended questions to encourage the teen to participate. Allow adequate silence time for the teen to respond. If the teen is uncommunicative, the educator can resort to using close-ended questions to keep the conversation going.

Once the teen responds to the open-ended question, the educator reflects back what was said. Reflective listening makes no assumptions about what the teen means. The educator only reflects back what they hear in order to elicit more input.

## Dealing with Resistance

During many counseling sessions a moment occurs where the teen may resist what the educator is saying. MN suggests that resistance is a cue that educators need to stop what they are doing and start listening.

MN acknowledges that learners need to go through the Stages of Change (see page 2). From a knowledge perspective, the teen may be aware of her situation and what needs to be done. However, from a feeling, value and belief perspective, it is likely that the teen may be in the Precontemplation or Contemplation stage and not ready to change behavior. *Resistance occurs when*

A learner centered approach to promoting positive changes in behavior based on the person's own motivation to change

*the educator is moving beyond the teen's readiness to make a change.*

Resistance reflects the teen's real and/or perceived barriers to change. The educator can help the teen recognize and prioritize these barriers in order to overcome them. Sometimes asking what advice she would give a friend in that situation takes the focus off the

teen's own barriers and shows possible strategies for change.

End the session by prompting the teen to develop a plan or to put closure to the topic discussed.

## Facilitating Change

At first glance, MN appears to be more time-consuming than traditional nutrition education. However, it can be just the opposite. MN gives the teen the opportunity to talk, so the educator can quickly learn her knowledge base, her attitudes and beliefs, and her goals and values. It also prevents the educator from getting too far ahead of where the teen is in the change sequence, so they can guide the teen towards appropriate behavior changes to work towards.

Change occurs when a teen recognizes that their current behavior will not help them reach their goals or goes against what they value most. For the youngest pregnant teens, this may be difficult as their values and beliefs are part childlike and part adult. In addition, they are more dependent on the adults in their lives for their basic necessities. It is easier for older pregnant teens, those who are mastering the abstractions of life, to work at changing their behaviors. Ultimately, it is the teen who must decide they are ready and make the changes for themselves.



# Facilitated Dialogue Encourages Learners to Learn from One Another

Gayle Coleman, UWExtension

## What is facilitated dialogue?

Facilitated dialogue is a learner-centered approach that encourages and supports positive changes in behavior among learners in a group setting. It builds on adult-learning principles that recognize adults bring prior knowledge and life experiences to the learning process.

## Why use it?

Adults have a set of valuable life experiences. They usually enjoy opportunities where they can apply past experiences to the new knowledge they are gaining. Many adults with low-incomes value relationships with other adults and a supportive, non-threatening environment.

## Components of lessons using facilitated dialogue:

**ANCHOR** – an icebreaker or other activity that introduces the lesson topic and helps learners to begin to connect to one another.  
**ADD** – the active learning part of the lesson where information based on the lesson objectives is introduced, and learners share experiences and ideas about the topic.  
**APPLY** – an activity or discussion that helps learners explore how the content applies to their situations.  
**AWAY** – what learners plan to do as a result of the lesson.

## Tips for implementing facilitated dialogue

- Aim to have at least 4 but no more than 10 individuals in the group.
- Conduct classes in a comfortable,

friendly environment.

- Arrange seating so learners face one another, and educator sits with learners.
- Plan ahead – review the lesson content ahead of time and think about probing questions he/she might use to encourage learners to find answers to questions.
- Encourage learners to learn from one another by deflecting questions to you back to the group. For example, if someone asks you, “How can I get my family to eat more vegetables,” you could respond, “What suggestions do others in the group have?” Another way to encourage learners to learn from one another is to have them work in pairs or small groups without and then have them share back to the entire group.

Adults come with a set of valuable life experiences

- Be an active listener.
- Allow ample time for responses even if the silence seems long.
- Ask probing questions if no one responds to an initial question, to clarify a question or to encourage additional responses.

## Techniques for implementing facilitated dialogue

- Open-ended questions (who, what, how, why) encourage learners to share.
- Stories or case studies create a safe situation and generate discussion.
- A 0 to 10 scale can be used to assess how important a topic is to the learners, or

how interested they might be in a topic.

- A pros and cons activity can be used to generate thinking and discussion about the benefits of making or “costs” of not making a change in behavior.
- A menus and choices activity can help learners generate a list of possible suggestions and then choose to use one or more of them.

## Suggestions for overcoming challenges

- Use eye contact to encourage learners to speak (conversely, avoiding eye contact with very talkative learners is one way to encourage them not to speak.)
- If someone gives incorrect information, say something like, “thank you for saying that because others think that too. However, the latest information is (insert correct information.)”
- If one person tends to dominate the discussion, consider talking to this person before or after class and ask him/her to help you get the more quiet learners involved. One way she could help you to do this is by waiting to share her suggestions until after the quiet learners have offered their ideas.

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## Our Mission

The Wisconsin Nutrition Education Network facilitates collaborative planning of nutrition education programs at the state and local levels. We promote healthful and enjoyable eating so that Wisconsin's low income individuals and families receive consistent, positive, relevant, accurate, and effective nutrition messages.

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