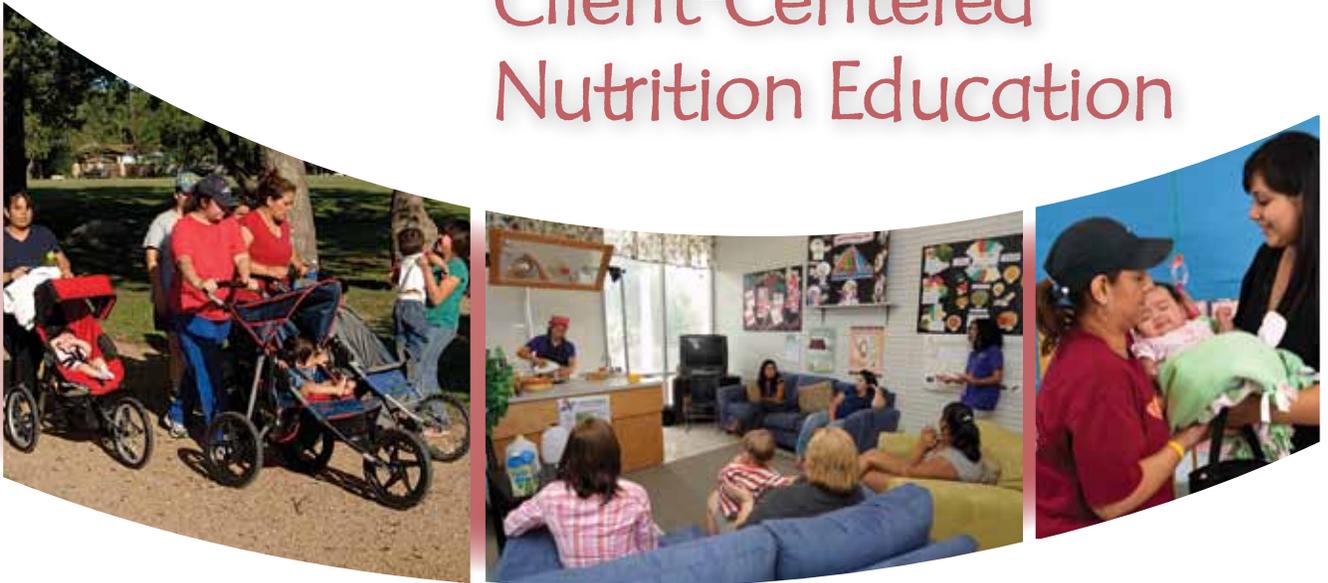


# Tales from the Field: Different Approaches to Client-Centered Nutrition Education



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There's a growing buzz about the move towards client-centered approaches to nutrition education. Many agency staff have participated in trainings that explored the "why" and "how" of client-centered nutrition education. Recent WIC News issues have presented articles on "embracing client-centered nutrition education" and "making pregnancy topics more client-centered." (See back issues at <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/wichd/gi/wic-news.shtm> if you missed them.)

This article highlights client-centered strategies at four Texas local agencies and gives tips on how to incorporate ideas into your clinics.

## **Pioneers in the field**

Local agencies that have created client-centered classes have found the shift rewarding and fun for everyone. Agencies of all sizes and locales are joining the client-centered movement and are finding out how easy it can be.

### ***A big agency with a big plan***

At Local Agency 26, City of Houston, nutrition education has never been more interactive. WIC clients in Houston can now "Catch Five" for better health. The Catch Five concept

brings nutrition education to life through interaction and comparison. Imagine classes where you set up a table or two and clients go from station to station learning about calories and food content while handling the products. In Catch Five, clients get that kind of experience. All the materials are easily stored in small plastic tubs when the class is over. No muss, no fuss, and completely client-centered.

### ***A play on words "woks" for everyone***

Want to get your clients active and healthy? At Local Agency 1, Austin, "Wok/Walk with WIC" is a client's passport to a healthier life. This program takes a two-pronged approach. In "Walk with WIC," clients are encouraged to sign up for an organized walking program led by WIC staff. Those who finish the program, which can take up to two months, receive perks and incentives to keep walking. Clients also learn about fitness and the importance of having peers support their efforts to get healthy. On the nutrition side, "Wok with WIC" makes cooking with fresh ingredients a snap. Every month, clients are invited to a cooking demonstration with WIC foods. These classes illustrate how easy it is to prepare healthy dishes. If you are interested in trying a food demonstration, visit [www.texaswic.org](http://www.texaswic.org) for easy food recipes.

### ***Growing interest through gardening***

Got a green thumb? Gardening is a way to get your clients involved with fresh food; just ask the staff at Local Agency 87, Region 4/5N. It doesn't take much to create a garden. If your clinic has outdoor space, it could soon be growing tomatoes, chilies, and herbs. The Palestine clinic was able to build a small green house (with help from Obesity Mini-grant funds) and holds classes where clients learn how to grow their own foods. Don't have space for a green house? No problem. The Athens clinic turned a small piece of grass into an herb garden with a little initiative from the staff and some help from the local Boy Scouts.

### ***Visualizing success***

Small classroom changes can go a long way. Local Agency 10, Grayson County, created an active learning environment by putting chairs into a circle and breaking the "lecture" format that emphasizes passive learning. This change allows clients to participate and interact. Add a few open-ended questions and let clients build on conversations with each other. The open environment allows clients to express themselves and gives them an active role in learning. Try a question like, "What is your favorite vegetable and what 'secrets' can you share about how you prepare it?" Another addition is using visuals. Grayson clinic staff have produced simple, eye-catching visual aids to get clients' attention and spur conversations. Many people are visual learners, so this can bring home a point. For example, grab a few pictures of gum disease and tooth decay from Google Images (images.google.com) when talking about dental health. You can spice up any lesson with printed images or a "grab bag" of visual aids (see example on the right).

### **Steps to Success**

Small changes, like rearranging chairs and adding visual aids or open-ended discussion questions, can go a long way. The key is to start small and expand on what you are already doing and to take advantage of the resources you have in your agency and the community. How can your agency get on board with the client-centered education movement?

### **Postpartum Grab Bag Lesson**

A client-centered lesson on postpartum self-care can start with a grab bag of items to spark conversation. Gather items in a container or bag and bring them to class. Some items to include:

- Tennis shoe
- Crying baby
- Healthy food item
- Water bottle
- Squeeze ball
- Pillow
- Watch/timer
- Sunscreen
- Picture of the beach or sand and shells

After an icebreaker, participants choose an item to begin discussion. Guide the conversation by using the following structure:

1. Ask participants why they chose an item or what the item makes them think about.
2. Listen to responses. Try to relate the item to postpartum self-care. Ask other participants to share ideas and see where the conversation flows.
3. Prepare additional questions for each item to keep the conversation going. For example:

#### Healthy food item

- How is eating healthy related to your wellbeing and your baby's health?
- When was the last time you had a good meal?

#### Timer

- How do you feel about your time now compared to before the baby?
- Some women have said that they feel like they don't have time to get things done. What advice would you give a mom in this situation?

#### Tennis shoe

- What can you do to get back into shape?
- What do you do with your baby when you are exercising?

#### Pillow

- What can you do to get enough sleep?
- How do you feel when you've had enough sleep? When you haven't?

Wrap-up the lesson by summarizing self-care techniques discussed, sharing postpartum resources and asking clients to describe something they will do to take care of themselves.