



## *Customer Service Notes for WIC* **Participants Who Don't Follow Instructions**

We know it's unrealistic to expect every participant to follow instructions. Yet, how WIC staff handle these situations can mean the difference between positive customer service for the participant or an unpleasant experience.

There can be a variety of reasons why participants do not follow instructions. Listed below are some of these reasons.

- They don't understand what you've asked them to do (including those participants for whom English is not their first language).
- They don't see the importance of following instructions.
- They are forgetful.
- They are, in general, upset with their situation.

Sometimes, when a WIC employee lets participants know why something needs to be done or the benefit to them ("what's in it for them"), the participant is more likely to comply. For example, letting a participant know why you need certain personal information about them or their children may result in the participant more willingly providing it.

WIC staff need to remember to not take it personally when participants do not follow instructions.

Be careful about:

- Rolling your eyes and speaking in a condescending or scolding way that will irritate participants and not demonstrate stellar customer service.
- Showing your frustration in front of participants.

If needed, discuss your frustration with a co-worker after the participant leaves your office.

You can also ask yourself whether the participant can't or won't follow instructions. For those who can't, demonstrating patience and rephrasing or showing to them what needs to be done may be helpful. On the other hand, it will be a bigger challenge for those participants who just won't follow instructions. In these instances, you may need to remind them of the negative consequences.

In the end, "turning around" a participant who is not following instructions is a powerful tool for creating a lasting positive impression and exemplifies your commitment to quality customer service.

### **Questions for Reflection:**

1. Do you find similar situations among participants where they are not following instructions? (If so, look for a root cause.)
2. When participants are not following instructions, have you considered whether they can't or won't do so?

