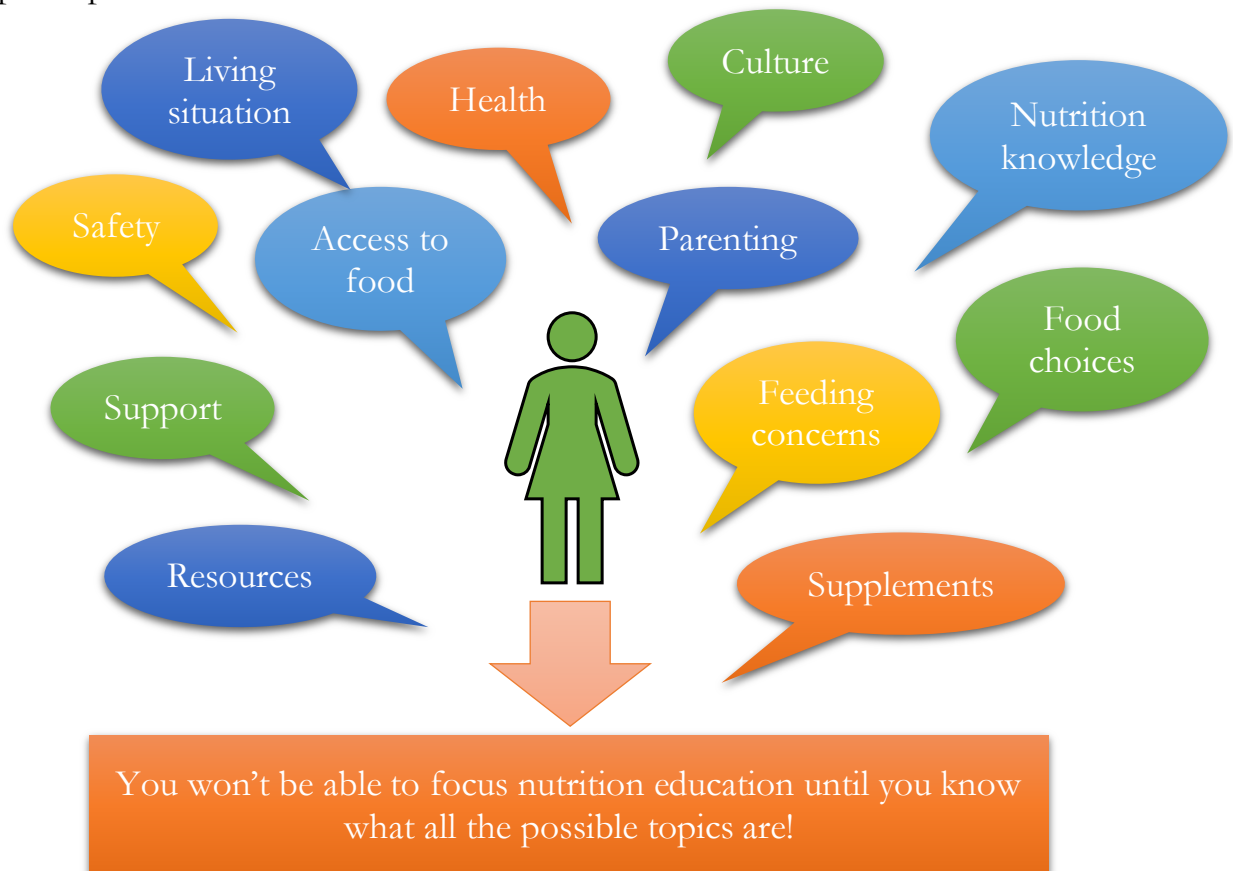


5-1 Moving from Assessment to Nutrition-Focused Counseling

Focusing on nutrition education

One of the key benefits of participating in WIC is the nutrition education we provide. That is what makes WIC different than other programs that just provide food. Nutrition education that is targeted to the specific needs of the individual being seen will help them use the food we provide to improve their long-term health and the health of their family.

Looking at the graphic below you can see there is a lot connected to providing nutrition education in WIC. How do you choose what to talk about? Only after you have completed the assessment, will you have a complete list of potential topics to select from. Prioritizing topics to cover will help you manage your limited time with the participant.



Nutrition education versus nutrition-focused counseling

Nutrition education is a term used to describe all the different ways that WIC can provide nutrition information to participants. It includes both individual and group sessions, as well as providing educational materials. All nutrition education is designed to improve the health status, dietary habits and physical activity habits of participants. It emphasizes the relationship between nutrition, physical activity and health, while considering the individual's personal, cultural, and socioeconomic situation and preferences.

Nutrition-focused counseling is an interactive process between a participant and a WIC certifier. Since nutrition behaviors are influenced by more than just what a person knows, certifiers investigate the participant's feelings, life circumstances, and interests when they provide nutrition-focused counseling.

Nutrition-focused counseling helps participants connect the nutrition information offered with their feelings and motivation about changing a behavior.



Nutrition: The nutrition knowledge, content, and resources you bring to the conversation. Exploring why to do something or how it improves health. For example, you would want to consider why eating yogurt is beneficial, not just tell someone to eat yogurt.

Focused: Focuses on the participant's needs and experiences, rather than on what is happening with you, the clinic, or the computer. Considers why the participant eats, rather than just what they eat.

Counseling: The interaction with the participant. That means it is a conversation using all the participant-centered skills you have been learning about.

Nutrition-focused counseling requires you to keep asking questions

Just because you are done with the assessment, doesn't mean you stop using OARS to learn more from the participant. As you transition from the assessment to counseling, you will begin to evoke more from the participant about what they already know, have already tried, and what they want to do.

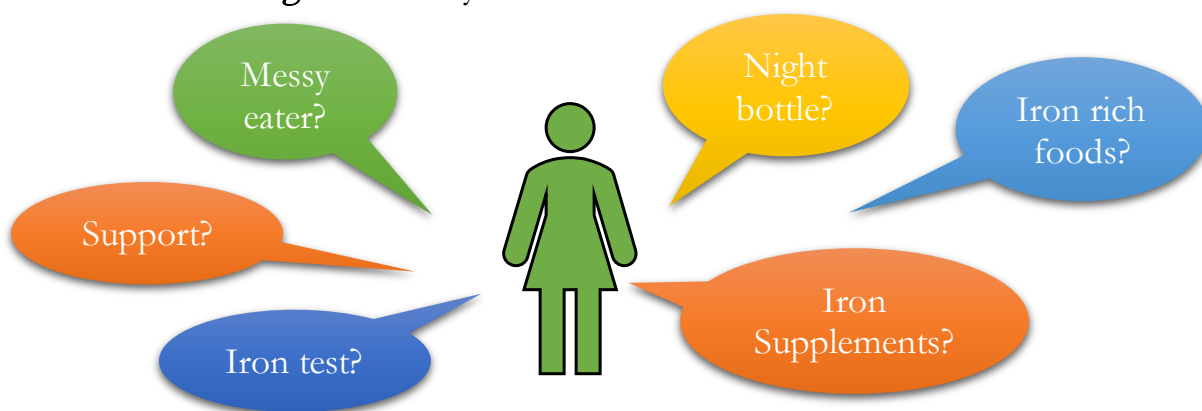
In this lesson you will learn more about some of the tools you will need to provide nutrition-focused counseling, such as:

- A way to keep track of potential counseling topics that come up during the assessment;
- The ability to prioritize what counseling topics are nutrition-focused and have the biggest impact on the health of the family;
- Curiosity, critical thinking and listening skills to find out what the participant wants to change;
- Reflections and evoking questions to explore potential topics further; and,
- If everything is fine, you need the ability to provide anticipatory guidance.

Keeping track of possible nutrition-focused counseling topics

One of the reasons certifiers start to provide counseling before they have completed the assessment is because the participant brings something up or asks a question during the assessment. The certifier wants to be respectful and answer the question before they forget.

Most certifiers find a way to track potential topics while completing the assessment. This allows you to stay focused on the participant and the assessment, rather than the computer and moving into counseling. In Lesson 4-4 you saw a *Job Aid: Conversation Tracking Tool* that you can use.



Waiting to counsel (listen first, then share)

If a participant asks you a “process” question during the assessment, just answer it. For example, if the participant asks if they have to have their weight taken, just answer the question. The questions that relate to nutrition or health are the ones to track and wait to provide counseling until you have completed the assessment.


Learning activity



Read the case study below. Use the tracking tool to identify the possible counseling topics that come up during the assessment.

Case study:

Mandy is in clinic today with her 13-month old child, Cade. Mandy is a single mom, new to the area, enrolling her child in WIC for the first time. Cade's hemoglobin was low, and it was difficult getting him to hold still for testing. Mandy has been working on increasing iron rich foods and doing well with vitamin C foods and meats but admits when looking at a food chart in the clinic room that he doesn't eat many grains or cereals. While she feels good about the progress she has made, Mandy is interested in learning more about what she can do to improve Cade's iron intake. As the assessment continues you discover Cade takes a bottle at night and Mandy admits that she is having a hard time recognizing he is a toddler now and no longer her little baby. When asked what other feeding questions she might have, Mandy states "If you can help me with how to deal with his dropping food on the floor when he is in the high chair, that would be great! It is driving me crazy" and laughs.

 Welcome to WIC!			
Date:		WIC ID:	
Caregiver name:			
Notes from check-in:			
Name:			
Appt. type:			
Weight			
Height/Length			
Head circ.			
Hemoglobin			
Notes from our conversation:			
A			
B			
C			
D			
E			

You don't need to know everything, but you will know a lot!

Participants will bring up many different areas of concern during counseling. Not all of them will be things that you can help with or that you have the expertise to provide good advice. The first thing you need to do is to decide if the issue they bring up is within your scope of practice. The second thing you need to do is realize that most participants do not expect you to know everything, or to solve everything.

You are not expected to be a social worker, but after completing your training you will have a lot of nutrition and behavior change knowledge that you can apply. Anything that is out of your scope of practice you will refer. Remember, providing participants with referrals is a key service we provide when their needs are outside our scope.

Framework for Nutrition-focused Counseling

WIC provides a framework to help you know what is within your scope of practice. The *5-1 Job Aid: Framework for Nutrition-focused Counseling* gives you the details.



The framework includes the following:

- **Content areas** – This describes the areas of nutrition-focused counseling we provide to participants.
 - Nutrition and breastfeeding
 - Feeding and eating environment
 - Physical activity, play and rest
 - Family environment and social determinants of health
 - Parenting
- **Foundational capabilities** – this describes basic knowledge and skills you need to provide counseling.
 - Evidence-based content knowledge
 - Critical thinking
 - Assessment and participant centered counseling skills
 - Cultural humility
 - Health literacy knowledge
 - Trauma and resilience informed practices
- **Required actions** – this describes what actions you need to take whenever providing nutrition-focused counseling.
 - Complete a thorough assessment first

- Provide nutrition-focused counseling, either by discussing a topic identified during the assessment or by providing anticipatory guidance based on what to expect in the future
- Make appropriate and effective referrals based on what you learned during the assessment
- Schedule appropriate follow-up or quarterly nutrition education appointments
- Document each action in the data system
- **Desired outcomes** – we provide nutrition-focused counseling in the content areas to get the kinds of outcomes listed in this section.
- **Resources** – this is a list of the types of evidence-based resources that are used to decide what the content and outcomes should be.

Prioritizing what nutrition-focused counseling to offer

Once you have a list of possible topics, then you decide which are the top priority to offer to the participant for further exploration. Busy participants will not be able to absorb information on every single topic that comes up. You will need to narrow down the options and offer them 2 to 3 highest priority options.

Based on your assessment, you will prioritize:

- What issue is the most urgent (e.g. medical, safety, living situation)?
- What issue has the biggest impact on the health of the family?
- What issue are they most interested in?

Learning activity

Based on the earlier case study, which of the topics listed below would you consider the 2 to 3 highest priority topics to offer to the participant?



Offering nutrition-focused counseling

Participant centered counseling means that we always want to make sure that the participant is deciding what they want to focus on. They have strengths, experiences and perspectives that have guided them through life. This means that we offer what we think is the highest priority and then let them choose the one or two that they want to explore further.

Use a summary to offer possible topics:

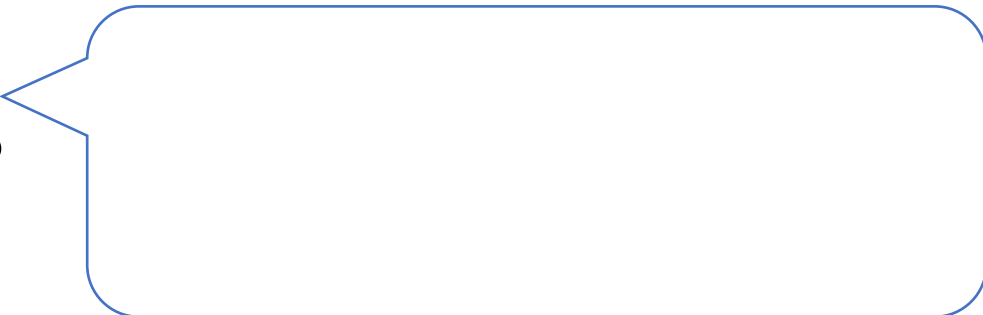
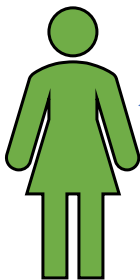
- Summarize the 3-4 ideas that you prioritized
- Offer these as possible topics for further exploration
- Ask the participant which of these they are most interested in exploring further

Example

“Mandy, so far we have talked about what is going on with Cade. You talked about being new to the area and not having a lot of support, improving Cade’s iron level, your concerns about the bottle, and Cade feeding himself. I have some ideas that I could share if you would like. Which of those topics would you like to explore, or is there another topic you are more interested in that I haven’t mentioned?”

Learning activity

Use the topics you prioritized in the earlier learning activity to write a summary to offer them to the participant.



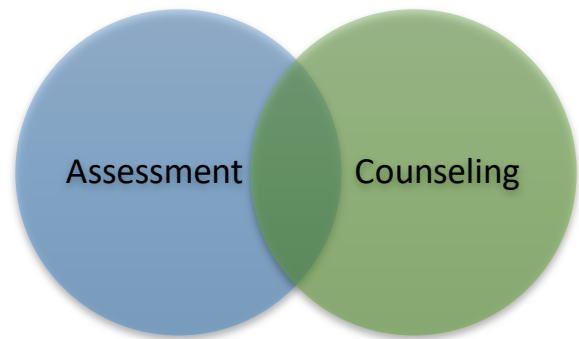
Evoking the participants ideas and concerns

Before you start providing nutrition education and sharing your own ideas and suggestions, it is important to find out more from the participant about:

- What have they already tried?
- How do they feel about what is happening?

- What resources do they have that support making any change?
- What reasons do they have to stay the same and not make any changes?

This is where assessment and counseling overlap. You continue to use OARS to focus your counseling. This process can be referred to as unpacking. Just like taking things out of a suitcase, unpacking allows you to learn more about everything that could be influencing the participant.



Skills you need to focus counseling:

- Active listening skills
- Curiosity
- Critical thinking
- Probing questions which explore and evoke (See *4-3 Job Aid: Probing Questions*)

Why do this? You will provide more meaningful and targeted counseling which is more likely to fuel behavior change. You are also less likely to miss opportunities to connect participants with information, resources and motivation to change their behaviors.

Learning activity



For each of the following topics from the previous case study, develop questions to explore Mandy’s knowledge, experience, attitude, and beliefs.

Topic	Exploration questions you might ask
Iron status, iron-rich foods	
Weaning	
Child feeding behaviors	
Social supports	
Other possibilities?	

Not every topic is nutrition education

You may talk with the participant about many different things and not every one of them is considered providing nutrition education. Some of the things you talk about are related to other parts of a WIC certification.

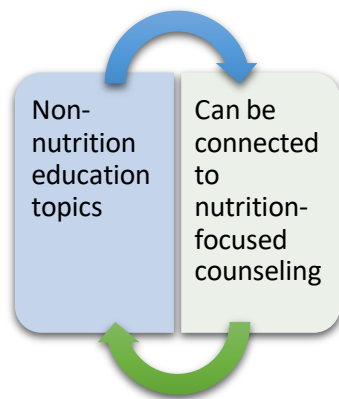
Examples of topics that are not nutrition education:

- Explaining growth grids and blood test results;
- Topics related to, but not covered in the framework, such as potty training or smoking cessation;
- Providing information about OHP or SNAP;
- Changing food packages such as types of juice or adding tofu.

These examples are all important WIC services, they just don't count as nutrition education. However, many of these topics can be connected to nutrition education. It is up to you to make the connection to nutrition related content during counseling.

Examples of connecting non-nutrition education topics to nutrition education

- Potty training can be linked to nutrition by discussing the role of liquids in the diet or connecting it to weaning from the bottle.
- A change of food package assignment can be connected to nutrition education if you discuss why that food is included or how that food fits in the meal pattern.
- A referral to SNAP can be connected to food insecurity.



Learning activity



Take a look at each of the common topics that come up during a WIC appointment. Decide whether each is part of the assessment, nutrition-focused counseling, referrals, or assigning a food package. Is there a way to connect things to nutrition-focused counseling?

Topics that come up:

1. Immunizations
2. Growth grids
3. Adding yogurt to the food package
4. Dental providers
5. OHP information
6. Changing formulas
7. Picky eating
8. Weaning
9. Potty training
10. Starting solid foods
11. Iron status
12. Breast milk supply

Assessment

Nutrition-focused counseling

Referrals

Assigning a food package

Ideas for connecting topics to nutrition-focused counseling

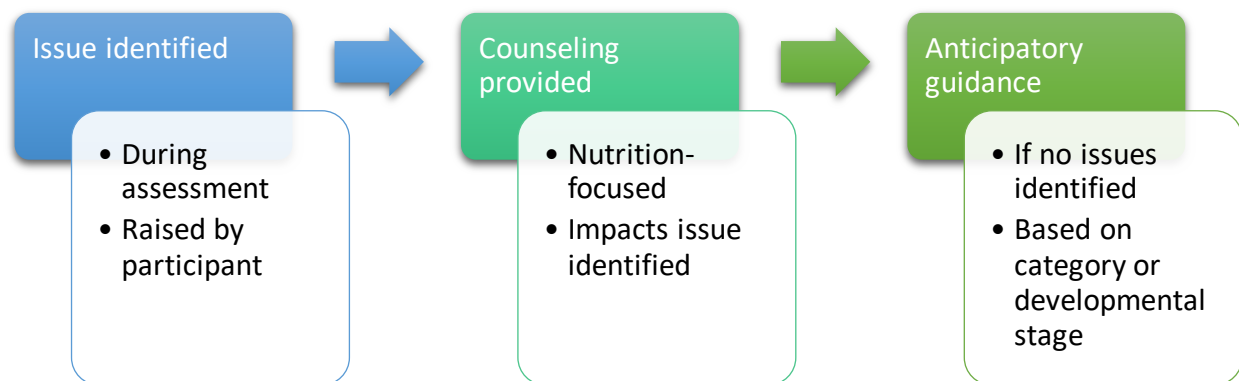
Applying nutrition knowledge to counseling based on the assessment or anticipatory guidance

At every certification, you must provide nutrition-focused counseling, either by discussing a topic identified during the assessment or by providing anticipatory guidance based on what to expect in the future.

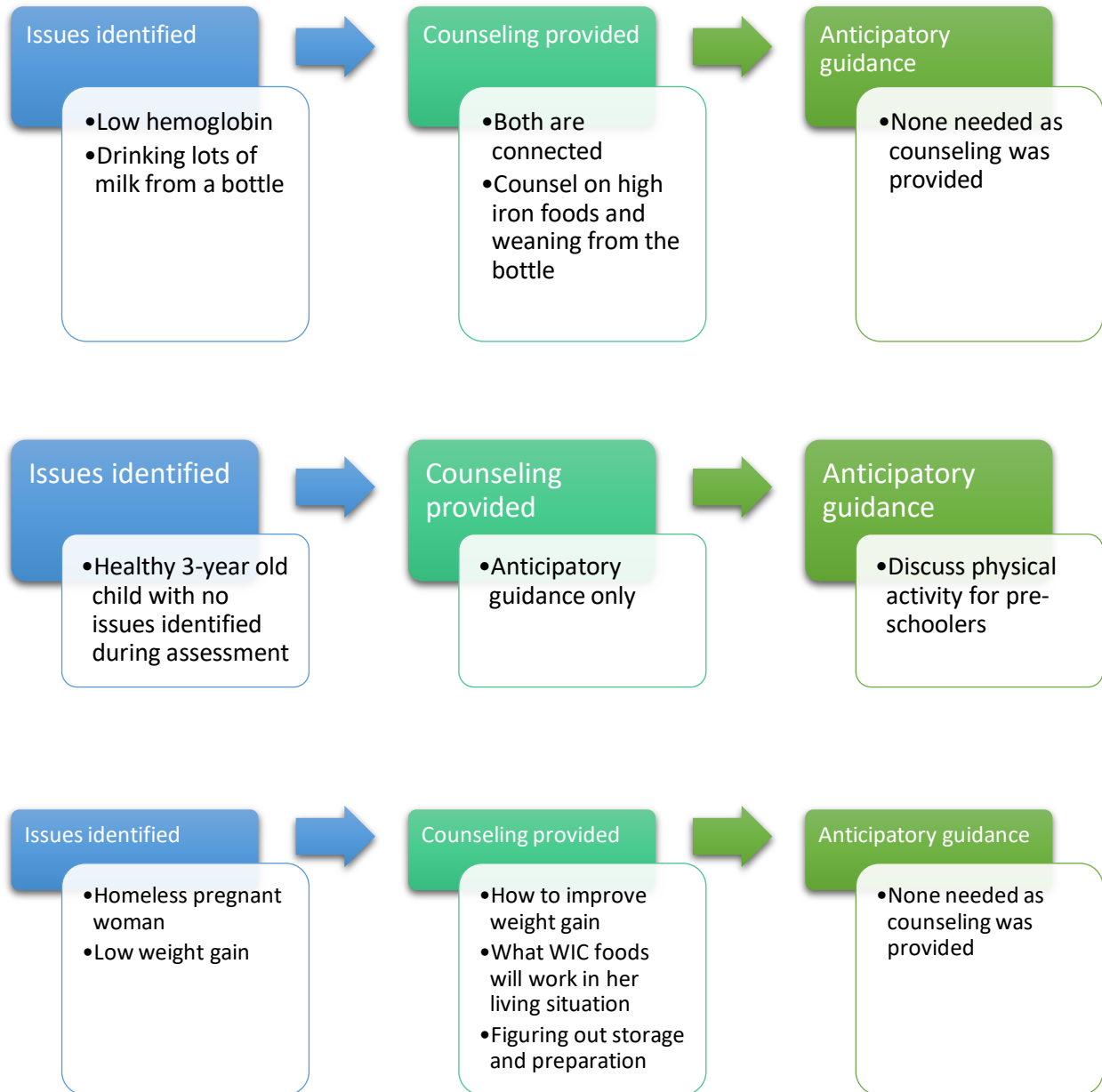
Your nutrition-focused counseling will be based on everything you have learned as you completed all of the nutrition modules and other types of training.

The counseling a WIC staff person provides will be:

- **Nutrition-focused** – which means it covers topics identified in the counseling framework;
- **Participant-centered** – which means it will be focused on the participant’s needs, not just what you are most comfortable sharing;
- **Evidence-based** – that means it is based on facts that have been proven by research and science, not based on your personal opinion;
- **Age and developmentally appropriate** – which means it will fit with the age and developmental stage of both the caregiver and the child;
- **Culturally responsive** – which means it will respect the participant’s cultural values and belief systems;
- **Sensitive to the family environment**– which means it considers other factors that can influence their nutrition and meal patterns, such as living situation, food preparation resources, food insecurity, and support systems;
- **Anticipatory** – which means if there are no current issues identified during the assessment or concerns raised by the participant or the caregiver, you will consider what might be of interest based on the category or developmental stage and offer counseling in anticipation of what can be expected.

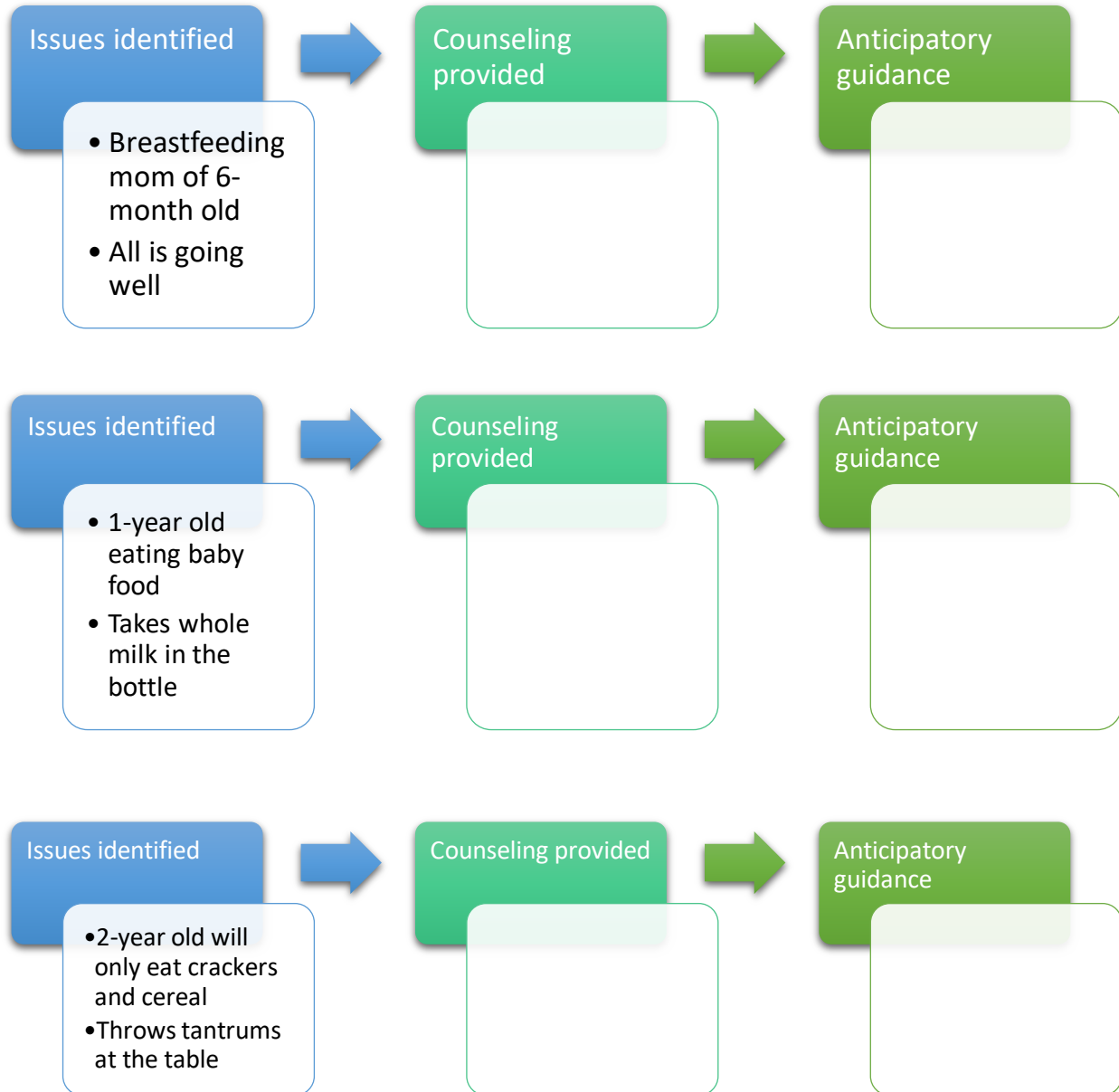


Examples

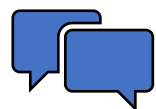


Learning activity

Identify the counseling or anticipatory guidance you might provide in the following situations.



Talk it over



Talk with your supervisor about any questions you have from this lesson. It is highly recommended that you observe several different certifications to learn how nutrition-focused counseling can be offered.