

Part 7 Observations, coaching, mentoring

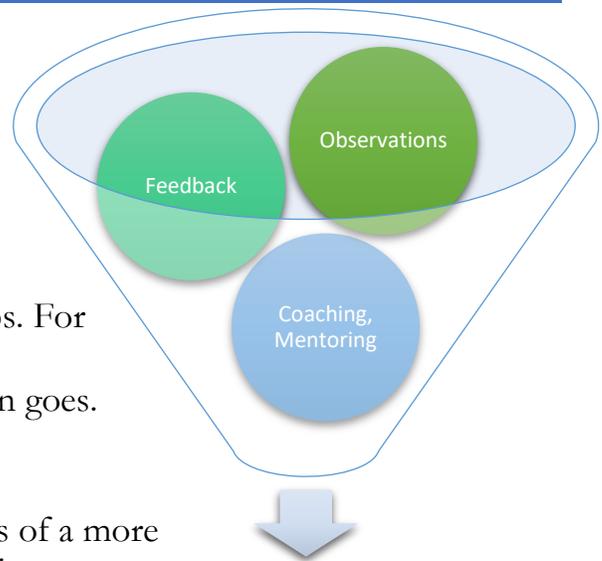
The shortest route to improved performance

The best way to learn how to do something is to do it yourself. That process is even better when you have someone who can engage in a reflective practice with you and provide helpful feedback on how you are doing.

In WIC, that means observing staff do their jobs. For certifiers, that means sitting in on participant appointments and observing how the interaction goes.

There are lots of ways to do observations:

- A new certifier can sit in on appointments of a more experienced certifier or even visit a certifier from another agency.
- A more experienced certifier can observe and provide feedback to a less experienced certifier.
- Certifiers can observe each other and discuss what they see as part of regular reflective practice.
- Training supervisors can schedule regular observations of certifiers.

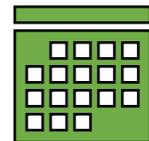


Improved Performance

Required observations

Training supervisors are required to observe every certifier at least once per year.

- You must observe certifiers in-person and observe the interactions between the certifier and actual participants. The observations cannot be conducted remotely, and cannot be role-played.
- Observations by the training supervisor provide an opportunity to provide feedback and identify any areas where training may be necessary.
- Training supervisors may use any observation tool or guide that is appropriate for the staff person being observed and for what they are working on.



- At least one completed observation tool per certifier must be kept with other required staff training records each year.
- Annual observations will assess if the certifier is using correct techniques, completing a full assessment, providing accurate nutrition-focused counseling, using participant centered counseling skills, making appropriate referrals, documenting as required, and staying within their scope of practice. These observations should have a debrief conversation within a timely manner to discuss what was observed, what went well and what changes could be made with future participant interactions.
- It is recommended that the training supervisor provide feedback to the staff person's supervisor to be considered as part of their staff evaluation, but these observations are about skill development, not discipline or critique.
- As training supervisor, you can delegate observations to another CPA who is a health professional.
- Annual observations can be included as a part of the program self evaluation conducted by each local agency every other year.

Learning activity

Find out the observation schedule or practice in your agency.



Being observed can be stressful

Being observed by others can be a stressful event, even for highly skilled certifiers. It can be especially difficult in a work situation where a staff person might be concerned about their performance being judged and it impacting their job. One of the best ways to make it easier for everyone involved is to frame observations as an opportunity to practice being a coach or mentor. Ideally both you and the person you observe will enter into the observation thinking that the intention is to help the staff person improve, rather than judge.



Considerations:

- It takes a while to get comfortable being observed, so making it a routine part of everyone's work may help.
- Keep observations for skill development separate from performance evaluation observations. If you are both the training supervisor and staff supervisor, make sure staff know which you are doing.

- When observing and providing feedback, model participant centered counseling skills. Use the guidance in this lesson for providing feedback.

Learning activity

Consider completing an assessment of how mentoring is going in your agency.



- Use the [Mentoring Assessment tool](#) to find areas you might focus on.
- Ask staff to complete the [Self Assessment for WIC staff](#) to learn their perspective.

Before starting an observation

Before the participant even enters the room, you can set the stage for a positive experience.



Here's what to do:

1. Before the participant is seen, establish rapport with the staff person you will be observing - help them feel comfortable being observed.
2. Make sure you have time for discussion after the appointment.
3. Explain the purpose of the observation.
4. Set the agenda with the staff person you will be observing. Here are some potential questions.
 - a. What are you working on?
 - b. What would you like me to watch or listen for?
5. Select which Observation Guide to use depending on the skill you are focusing the observation on.
 - a. Use the [Observation Guide – Assessment](#) if you are focusing on completing a full assessment.
 - b. Use the [Observation Guide – PCC](#) if you are focusing on the use of participant centered counseling skills.
 - c. Use the [Observation Review Tool](#) if you are reviewing the entire certification process. This tool is the one used by state WIC Compliance Reviewers during local agency reviews.
6. Ask the staff person to ask the participant's permission for you to observe.
7. Reinforce confidentiality.

Tips for the observer:

- Share that you are there to help with their skill development, not to critique or judge their performance.

- Tell them the notes you are taking are for your own use, so you can remember what happened and to document it.
- Choose a seat out of the participant’s line of sight, preferably where you can see both the certifier and the participant.

Learning activity



Compare the 3 different observation guides.

During the observation

Here’s what to do:

1. Watch for the specific skills staff are using.
2. Use the Observation Guide to make notes about specific examples of what you observe during the appointment.
3. Write quotes of what you hear the staff person or the participant say.
4. Note your affirmations for the staff person to share after the participant has left.
5. If appropriate, score the level of skill observed on the observation guide.
 - a. Assign a score from zero to three for each skill based on your observation.
 - i. 0- Inadequate: Not demonstrated
 - ii. 1- Minimal: Basic skill is observed
 - iii. 2- Effective: Strong skill is exhibited
 - iv. 3- Ideal: Optimal skill is displayed
 - b. After the appointment, add up the scores and divide by the number of skills evaluated to get the average score for each observation. An average score of at least 1 is considered acceptable.



Tips for the observer:

- Create and maintain a safe and supportive environment.
- Stay quiet. Don’t interrupt or offer information, even if the staff person gets something wrong, unless there is the potential for harm.
- If the participant turns to you, support the staff person by redirecting them to the person conducting the appointment.

After the observation, provide positive feedback

Here's what to do:

1. Demonstrate participant centered counseling skills when offering feedback.
2. Ask permission to share your observations and feedback.
 - Would you like to hear my feedback?
 - Would it be okay to talk about the appointment?
3. Ask what they think about the interaction.
 - a. How do you feel the appointment/visit went?
 - b. What do you think went well?
 - c. What might you do differently next time?
 - d. What are you working on or what help do you want in the future?
4. Find something to affirm, focus on skills staff are already using.
 - a. I appreciate you letting me observe you.
 - b. You really got the conversation off to a good start.
 - c. You did a nice job handling those kids.
5. Keep the conversation focused on what went well.
 - a. This is a great opportunity to affirm staff efforts and skills that they are already using.
 - b. If they don't come up with anything positive when asked how it went, point out what you observed that went well.
6. Provide clear, succinct, specific, positive feedback. Avoid feedback overload.
 - a. Specifically, I noticed...
 - b. Here are some examples of things I heard you say.....
7. Use collaborative language when offering suggestions.
 - a. Have you considered...?
 - b. I'm curious...
 - c. I wonder whether...
 - d. I've noticed that sometimes...
 - e. Some staff have found _____ helpful. Others have tried _____.
8. Avoid restrictive language when providing feedback. Restrictive language will raise resistance.
 - a. you should
 - b. don't
 - c. you need to
 - d. you have to



Permission

Ask

Affirm

Focus

Feedback

Collaborate

Neutral

Ask again

- e. always
 - f. never
 - g. you must
9. Keep advice neutral by focusing on behaviors rather than personality, letting go of assumptions or bias, and sharing without blame or judgment.
 10. Ask additional questions to help guide the staff person to look at the effect of their actions on the participant.
 - a. What did you notice about the reactions of the participants?
 11. Balance the feedback by offering positive feedback (identify strengths) in addition to eliciting and suggesting ideas for improvement. End on a positive note!

Tips for the observer:

- Allow staff to identify the areas they want to make changes.
 - Remember, people are generally better persuaded by what they themselves say than by what others say to them.
- The questions you use should be authentic and reflect your own conversational style.
- Vary the words as appropriate and use consistent neutral nonverbal communication.
- Make questions a genuine inquiry that are not aimed at judgment but are focused on self-development.
- If the WIC staff person asks you how they did, ask them how they felt it went or reflect any concerns.
- If the WIC staff person expresses concern about trying something, try brainstorming with them reasons why it might be useful to them.

Finishing up the observation

Here's what to do:

1. Encourage self-reflection
 - a. What do you think about my observations?
 - b. What, if anything, do you see yourself doing differently because of my feedback?
 - c. What else would you like to add?
2. Thank the staff person for their willingness to be observed and receive feedback.
3. Summarize feedback and learnings that came up.
4. Express confidence in their abilities.
5. Ask what they need to in the future.



- a. What kind of support could you use in the future? How can I help?”
6. Arrange follow-up, if appropriate.
7. Make notes on the observation guide of what was discussed and then file the completed observation guide with other training records.

Tips for the observer:

- Primary outcome – Do no harm! Leave them feeling good about having someone to observe them again.

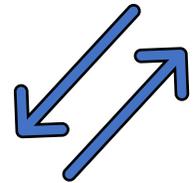
Learning activity

Use the [Steps for Mentoring job aid](#) to practice an observation without using an observation guide.



Ways to provide feedback

There is no right or wrong way to provide feedback, but there are some techniques that you might find helpful.



Simple Feedback

This is the easiest and most straightforward way to provide feedback.

1. Present positive feedback
 - a. Specifically, you did an excellent job...
2. Present observations and recommendations
 - a. I noticed...next time you might try...
3. Encourage reflection
 - a. Anything else you want to add?
 - b. What do you think about my observations?

Split Feedback

This type of feedback allows you to explore both what went well and what the staff person might want to change.

1. Ask the staff person what they felt went positively.
 - a. What went well?
 - b. What did you like about...?
2. Agree, summarize what you heard, and then add an affirmation.
 - a. I agree with _____, and you did a good job with...
3. Ask the staff person what could be done differently next time.

- a. As you think about how it went, what might you do differently next time?
 - b. If you could go back and do it all over again, what would you change?
4. Agree, summarize what you heard, and then add a suggestion.
 - a. Great insight (I agree with _____). I'd also like to suggest that you...
5. Encourage reflection
 - a. What do you think about my observations/recommendations?
 - b. Anything else you want to add?

Scaling Feedback

Scaling feedback allows you to learn how the staff person felt things went and gives you an opportunity to explore why they felt that way. You can follow up by asking why they gave themselves that score, why not a score that was lower or higher, and what they would need to change in order to change the score.

- Overall rating of the interaction
 - On a scale of 0-10, how do you think this interaction with the participant went, overall?
- Participant success rating
 - On a scale of 0-10, what are the chances that this participant will succeed, change, adhere?
- Peer-to-peer rating
 - On a scale of 0-10, how would other certifiers rate this interaction with the participant?
- Observer rating
 - On a scale of 0-10, how do you think I would rate this interaction with the participant?

What you need to do

- Observe every certifier at least once per year.
- File the completed Observation Guide with other training documentation.

