

The Hopes and Dreams Doors

Overview

A baby represents a new beginning. Mothers dream of better lives for their children. Listening and affirming the hopes and dreams of mothers allows you great insights into what motivates that mother and how to frame nutrition messages. The “hopes and dream doors” allow mothers to share their hopes and dreams for their children with you.

You, as a WIC counselor, may be the first person to hear mothers share their greatest desires for their babies. Honor and respect these personal words with attentive listening and sincere affirmations.

WIC is a five-year behavior change program. Understanding a mother’s hopes and dreams for her children allows you to connect in a powerful way for long-term change.

Tips from early adaptors

WIC staff members are often guided through the day by rules and regulations. Asking about hopes and dreams might seem scary, especially when there are no rules and regulations to keep you on the “right” path. Trust yourself and your intuition to find the path that is right for you and your client. Believe that you can respond in a way that connects hopes and dreams with key behavioral messages.

Objectives

Use the Hopes and Dreams doors to establish an emotion-based connection with parents. Connect behavior change ideas with hopes and dreams for greater attention and a higher probability of change. This activity has been found to be especially effective with pregnant women, but can also work well with parents of young children.

Activities

1. After greeting the mom warmly, lay out the door pictures on a table or desk. Tell the mother that the doors are special because they are “hopes and dreams” doors. Behind these doors lie all the hopes and dreams of mothers around the world. Ask the mother to choose a door that represents her hopes and dreams for her child. (Sample words: “Pick a door that says something to you about your hopes and dreams for you and your baby.”) Allow time for her to process your request and select the door that best represents her hopes and dreams.
2. Ask the mom to show you her hopes and dreams door. Ask her to unlock the door and ask “What hopes and dreams lie behind your door for your baby?” Listen carefully as she reveals her answer. (Jot it down for later reference after the session.)
3. Ask the mom what she is doing now to help move closer to her hopes and dreams. This acknowledges positive choices. Acknowledge her positive choices, reaffirming how important her actions are to her hopes and dreams. Sample dialogue:

“You said that you are walking every day during your pregnancy. That’s wonderful. Each step is a gift you give your baby. You said you wanted your baby to grow up to be happy and healthy, and what you do today makes a difference to your baby’s tomorrow. Your hopes and dreams are already coming true!”

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“Wow—you’re an amazing mom! You are already offering a veggie at lunch and dinner. That may seem like a challenge some days, especially when Sally won’t eat them. But you said you don’t want her to have weight issues later in life, and that small action is helping Sally move closer to your hopes and dreams for her. You must be very proud.”

Note: We could link to audio for examples too.

4. Ask the mom to identify challenges or concerns that might prevent her hopes and dreams from coming true. Sample dialogue:

“Sounds like you are doing so many great things for Sally, important things that are truly moving you and Sally closer to your hopes and dreams. Are there any things that concern you, things that may prevent your hopes and dreams for Sally from coming true?”

5. Address each concern identified by the mother. Devote more attention to issues that are of greatest concern to the mother or represent a significant or life-threatening situation. If you don’t have time to address all identified issues, ask the client for permission to record the concern in the chart for next time.

After identifying the issue, ask the mother to share what she has done so far to solve the problem. Resist the temptation to jump in with solutions, as the mother may have already tried them. Sample dialogue:

“You mentioned that Sally is a great veggie eater, but refuses to drink milk. You’re so wise to pay attention to this now! What have you tried to encourage Sally to drink milk? What’s worked? What hasn’t worked?”

6. Ask permission before offering suggestions on how to solve her challenge. Attribute the suggestions to other mothers for increased credibility. Connect the suggested behaviors to shared hopes and dreams. Sample dialogue:

“Sounds like you have tried many things already to help Sally learn to love milk. Sally is lucky to have you as a mom. Seems this is a very common problem. May I offer a few suggestions I picked up from other moms? Thanks. One mom said it helped to put the milk in a fun cup, complete with straw. Another mom had great success when she started drinking milk from a cup with her daughter. Isn’t it interesting how such small changes can make a big difference? How would you feel about trying one of those ideas? Let me know next time what worked for you so I can share your successes with others. So many moms want their children to grow up to be good eaters of the foods that will keep them active.”

One of the nutritionists introduced the doors at the initial prenatal appointment. They had a wonderful conversation. When the woman returned for her follow-up appointment, she brought the father of the baby. She asked the nutritionist “Where are the doors we discussed last time?” The woman brought the father of her child to the WIC appointment so that he could see the doors and share his hopes and dreams for their baby too.

Tara, Chelsea/Revere

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7. Offer the mother a picture of the Hopes and Dream Door she selected. Have the mother write the goal (or you could write it for her) on the back to reinforce the conversation. Thank the mother for coming in. Sample dialogue:

“Thanks so much for coming in today. Sally can’t thank you yet for all you are doing to help her be all that she can be, but I can. I am very confident Sally will love milk soon, thanks to you. Would you like a picture of your “hopes and dreams door” to take with you? I know your focus is always on those hopes and dreams, and this door may be fun reminder.”

Adaptations

The Hope and Dream doors can be used with individuals or in a group setting. Establish a safe environment for sharing before asking mothers to reveal their responses. Thank them for sharing their heartfelt thoughts. Remember that authentic listening and affirmation are essential components of any effective counseling session, so feel comfortable exploring mothers’ aspirations for their families by using your own words and style.

Evaluation

You will know you have mastered the Hopes and Dream Doors technique when you have amazing conversations that allow you to connect with the mother at a deeper level. You will feel the difference between a superficial conversation that leads to role-playing and an authentic conversation that is life changing for both you and the client. Our early adopters report, “It is an amazing experience to take people to a different level. It’s a unique and wonderful experience that makes me feel I have done it! I feel I am doing the right thing when I can help a client express how they feel.”