

# Metaphor Images

## Overview

“Life is a roller coaster.”  
“He has a heart of stone.”  
“I’m feeling blue.”

We use metaphors everyday to express how we think and feel. Metaphors can also be used in the WIC clinic to help clients express how they feel and think.

The metaphor images provided suggest positive and negative feelings that can be useful in describing any nutrition or activity topic. They can also be useful for parents to express their feelings about sensitive topics like their child’s weight.

“Both clients and staff enjoy the Metaphor images. Asking clients about pictures and how they relate to eating is some-thing they have never been asked to do. It’s a fun and effective tool.”

Kerri, Springfield, MA

## Objectives

Use the metaphor images to understand parents’ emotions about any nutrition or activity-related behavior. Since emotions drive behaviors, metaphors are a short-cut to the rich land of behavior change. Once parents have revealed how they feel about a topic, you can move quickly to provide solutions for negative feelings or recognize positive feelings.

## Activities

1. After greeting the mom warmly, lay the metaphor images on a table or desk. Tell her that the images represent how many mothers feel about how the topic. (Topic examples: their child and veggies, weight gain during pregnancy, how active their child is, healthy snacks, etc.) Ask the mother to choose an image that represents her feelings about the topic. (Sample words: “Pick a picture that says something to you about how you feel about Tommy and vegetables.”) Allow time for her to process your request and select the image that best represents her feelings.
2. Ask the mom to show you the metaphor image she selected. Ask: “What does that picture say about how you feel about Tommy and vegetables?” Listen carefully as she reveals her answer.
3. Probe, as needed, to get more information. These statements lead to more depth: “Tell me more.” “Help me understand.”
4. Recognize positive responses with sincere congratulations. Example: “You picked the picture of a woman crossing the finish line in victory. Wow. You must feel so proud that Tommy loves veggies so much. What’s the secret to your success?”
5. Acknowledge negative feelings without judgment. Example: “You picked the ball and chain. Sounds like Tommy’s dislike of veggies is a worry you would like to get rid of.”
6. Ask permission before suggesting solutions: “Would you like to talk about some easy ways that have worked for other moms who also felt like veggies were a “ball and chain” in their life?”
7. Provide simple, practical ideas for solving the problem identified by the mother. Attribute the suggestions to other mothers for increased credibility. Wrap the suggestions with positive emotions. Example: “Other amazing mothers have told me that they like to mix veggies in foods their child likes. It’s an easy way to get veggies in and eliminate that “ball and chain” feeling that keeps you from feeling successful.”

# Metaphor Images

8. Ask about other concerns. Recognize successes. Example: “Are there other things that are “ball and chain” moments for you that we could talk about today? And, I know there are many “victory” moments too, like this woman crossing the finish line. What’s a “victory” for you that we could celebrate today?”

9. Thank the mother for coming in. Sample dialogue:

*“Thanks so much for coming in today. Every mother has “ball and chain” moments in their day and I’m happy we could talk about ways to remove them. And I’m really happy to celebrate the good things too.”*

## Adaptations

The metaphor images can be used with individuals or in a group setting. If using with individuals, choose a topic that is specific to the child or one that is common to children of that age and ask the parent to pick a picture that represents how they feel about that topic or behavior.

You can use metaphor pictures in the same way with groups. Simply ask participants to choose a picture that says something about how they feel about their child’s eating. Once everyone has selected an image, ask them to show their images with the group and explain how that image related to their child’s eating.

Here’s another way to use the images in the group. Show the images to the group and ask questions like these:

**Image of overwhelming wave:** “What makes you feel overwhelmed by the way your child eats—or doesn’t eat?”

**Image of man carrying heavy boxes:** “What makes you feel that feeding your child is like this man who is balancing a heavy load?”

**Image of two hands tugging on a rope:** “Does mealtime ever feel like this? What are the struggles that keep you pulling in opposite directions?”

**Image of stop sign:** “What stops you from feeling like an amazing mom at mealtimes? What can you celebrate about mealtimes?”

**Image of one leaf:** “What gives you hope that tomorrow will be a new day with your child eating or being active in the way you hoped they would be?”

**Image of ball and chain:** “What makes mealtimes feel like a ball and chain for you?”

**Image of stopwatch:** “What would you do to help your child be more active if you had more time? What can you do in the time you have that would help your child learn to love being active?”

**Image of arrows going in multiple directions:** “What confuses you about the way your child should eat? Maybe you’ve heard different advice that makes you wonder what direction to follow?”

**Image of raging river:** “What about your child’s eating makes mealtime seem like a roaring river? What can you do to calm the raging river?”

**Image of boxing gloves:** “What makes mealtime feel like a battleground? What would need to change so everyone can take off their boxing gloves?”