

Intergenerational Approaches to Nutrition Education

-- Discussion group activity with nutrition educators--

Overview:

This fact sheet describes a discussion group activity designed to introduce nutrition educators and other professionals to some of the distinctive aspects and benefits of working with age-integrated groups. The overall goal is to encourage professionals to incorporate intergenerational communication components into their work where appropriate.

Rationale – Why Intergenerational?

Most nutrition education programs are designed for mono-generational audiences without the active participation of other family members. The emphasis tends to be on providing accurate, timely, and usable information to one generation at a time. However, the participants often face barriers at home when trying to apply what they learn; other family members who have not gone through the educational workshop experience are not likely to have the same enthusiasm for changing their behaviors as those who did participate. Also, the communication practices at home may not be open or effective enough to enable family members to share information and work collaboratively to change their family eating practices.

An alternative, *age-integrated* approach aims to provide children, parents, and grandparents from the same families with joint opportunities to learn about, discuss, and act upon the same nutrition and health information. They are encouraged to figure out how they can fit what they learn about healthful foods into their shopping budgets, work and play schedules, and family eating practices at home.

Items for discussion (to highlight differences between mono-generational and intergenerational approaches to nutrition education):

1. Consider a nutrition education program that is designed to encourage participants to **increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables**. The following introduction is used to introduce a group discussion about how to get people to eat more fruits and vegetables:

“Nutrition scientists and educators are urging people to eat more fruits and vegetables. **What are some ideas you have for influencing members of your family to eat more fruits and vegetables?**”

- a. Consider running a discussion group with three different types of groups:
 - i. Group 1: youth only.
 - ii. Group 2: adults only.
 - iii. Group 3: an intergenerational group (with children/youth, parents, and grandparents).

- b. What are some of the ideas that are likely to come up in each group discussion?
 - c. What are some of the advantages for each group (in terms of communication process, such as ease of communication, and the content of what is discussed)?
 - d. What are some of the disadvantages for each group (in terms of communication process and content)?
 - e. Which group(s) do you think will generate the most diverse ideas?
 - f. In which group(s) do you think participants will learn the most from one another (“convivial learning”)?
2. Consider a nutrition education program that aims to help people **plan out their meals in advance**. Let’s say the primary activity is launched by the following instruction:

“Make a shopping list of items that will provide enough ingredients for a family to eat for a week.”

- a. Consider conducting this activity with three types of groups:
 - i. Group 1: youth only.
 - ii. Group 2: adults only.
 - iii. Group 3: an intergenerational group (with children/youth, parents, and grandparents).
 - b. How do you think the shopping lists that are constructed will vary when developed by:
 - i. Group 1: youth only.
 - ii. Group 2: adults only.
 - iii. Group 3: an intergenerational group (with children/youth, parents, and grandparents).
 - c. Which group(s) do you think will generate the most diverse ideas?
 - d. Which group(s) do you think will generate the healthiest food selection ideas?
3. Consider how these same three groups (youth only, adult only, and an intergenerational group) might participate in conversations about the following topics:

What can be done to help prevent childhood obesity?

How to get people to prepare foods using methods other than frying?

How to get people to cut down on fatty foods, consume less sugar, etc.?

- What differences might you anticipate in conducting these conversations with multi-generational as opposed to mono-generational groups?

Some points for the facilitator (of this discussion group activity with nutrition educators) to make:

- **There are benefits to each of the educational delivery models:**
 - Mono-generational groups tend to be easier to organize. Scheduling is not a major problem, and language and delivery can be tailored according to a singular developmental level. However, there are also limitations as noted in the Introduction (above).
- **With an intergenerational approach to nutrition education:**
 - The cast of characters taking part in the training includes the same cast that is involved in everyday decision-making about food choice and food preparation.
 - There is a broader, more diverse range of perceptions and experiences that are incorporated into discussions about food and nutrition.
 - There is more buy-in from all family members.
 - More open family communication about food-related issues can contribute to improved communication about other aspects of family life.
- **With some planning and effort, nutrition educators can transform mono-generational groups into intergenerational groups and continue to incorporate/ adopt intergenerational strategies into their work.**

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