

# Talking Participants through the Healthy Start Screening Tools



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# Objectives

- 1. Discuss the importance of establishing rapport as a means for collecting the most accurate self-report data**
- 2. Identify effective communication skills important for administering the Healthy Start screening tools**
- 3. Describe effective strategies for approaching sensitive issues**

# Establishing Rapport

- Introduce yourself and explain your role in Healthy Start
- Ask participant how she would like to be addressed
- Set the tone with some casual talk
- Describe the screening tool(s) that will be used, how they will be used, and why they are important
- Assure participant that all responses will be kept **CONFIDENTIAL** (within legal limits)

# Make It a Conversation



Portray the screening tools as a way to get to know the participant better so her needs can be met

Adopt a demeanor that inspires trust

# Make It a Conversation

- The questions as written are suggestions. Rephrase them in a way that's comfortable for you and the participant.
- Provide opportunity for give and take
  - Be flexible but focused on achieving goals
- Keep in mind that many people like to talk about themselves, especially women and their pregnancies
- Remember that the woman may derive benefit from the screening itself
  - Talking about oneself can sometimes provide insights and even be therapeutic

# Data Collection Reminder

**Strive to obtain the best information you can,  
but remember that self report is never 100%  
accurate**



# Factors That Enhance Communication



# The Setting

- **Ensure privacy**

- A place where others can't overhear the conversation
- Away from partner, friends, and family members

- **Comfortable seating**

- Close enough for intimate conversation
- Allow for personal space
- Eyes at same level as participant



# Objectivity

## ■ Nonjudgmental

- There are no “right” or “wrong” answers
- Open to whatever the woman says, displaying no approval or disapproval

## ■ Avoid prejudices and preconceptions

- Expect the unexpected
- Frame questions without bias, e.g.  
“You don’t drink, do you?”

# Respect

- Unconditional positive regard
- Valuing an individual's traits and beliefs despite one's own feelings about them
- Recognizing them as valid responses to life circumstances

# Cultural Sensitivity

**Respecting and understanding differing value systems without imposing one's own attitudes or beliefs**

- Many attitudes and behaviors are intrinsic parts of a person's culture
- They may differ from one's own and even that of Healthy Start
- Recognize and respect those differences
- There is almost always a way to incorporate them into the care plan



# Genuineness



“I know what you mean. I have young children too.”

## ■ Clarify your role in Healthy Start

- Most of the information you obtain will be used to guide the patient to appropriate experts and services

# Empathy

- Different from sympathy, which is an emotional response - feeling sorry for someone
- Empathy is the ability to sense someone's experience and feelings accurately and communicate that understanding back to them
- Demonstrate empathy by really listening, then rephrasing what the woman has said, e.g.

“So you have a place to live now, but you're really worried about where you'll be able to stay after the baby comes.”

# Nonverbal Communication

- Look up from the screening tool!
- Make eye contact (but don't stare)
- Lean forward to show you're listening
- And note the participant's body language



# Timing

- **These are long forms**

- Plan enough time and set time expectations with the participant
- Keep the participant (and yourself!) on topic
- Offer to take a break if needed

- **You don't have to complete the tool all at once**

- Get as far as you can and schedule another appointment within 30 days
- But the sooner you complete it, the more time you'll have to meet the woman's needs



# Addressing Sensitive Issues





# Approaching the Questions

- **Many of the most significant risks in the perinatal period involve sensitive issues: drug and alcohol use, domestic violence, sexually transmitted diseases, etc.**
  - Obtaining information about these is essential to providing optimal care
  - Don't apologize for asking!
- **Tell the participant that you'd now like to ask some sensitive questions "if it's okay"**
  - Make sure she understands that you ask these questions of all women
  - Assure her that her answers are confidential and will only be used to support her

# Approaching the Questions

- **Maintain a confident and matter-of-fact tone to normalize the conversation**
- **Be aware that different questions may seem sensitive to different women**
- **Be conscious of your own reaction to the questions**
  - You may have experienced similar situations
  - You may already be aware of the participant's circumstances

# Employing the Techniques

## ■ Objectivity

- Before you begin the section, ask yourself, “Am I making any assumptions about how this part of the interview will go?”

# Employing the Techniques

## ■ Respect

- When a woman declines to answer, recognize that there is likely a reason.
- Don't push too hard. If you can successfully maintain rapport, you may get a response later.

## ■ Cultural sensitivity

- Be aware that women from some cultures may give the answer they think you want, rather than the facts.

# Employing the Techniques

- **Genuineness**

- “I’m sorry to hear that.”

- **Empathy**

- “I understand this may be difficult for you to talk about.”
- “I can see that you’re angry. Please tell me why. I really want to know.”

# Employing the Techniques

- **Nonverbal Communication - note signs of the participant's and your own level of discomfort**
  - When a woman looks away or gets teary, it may be a clue to her response. Give her time to collect her thoughts. It's ok to remain silent for a while.
  - If you feel yourself tensing up, take a deep breath and try to remain objective.

# Handling the Questions about Medical Conditions & Medications



# Medical Conditions

- The conditions listed in the screening tools can pose significant risk to the baby, the mother, or both
- They need to be on record so Healthy Start can
  - Emphasize the unique importance of prenatal care in these situations
  - Follow up on clinic visits and medication recommendations



# Medical Conditions

- **Use the simplest possible terms when asking about the conditions**
  - Most participants will be familiar with the common problems, e.g. sickle cell, high blood pressure, diabetes, etc.
  - The names of rarer conditions, such as lupus and PKU, will be familiar to women who have them
- **A job aid with links to more information on conditions and medications is available**

# Medications



- The medications mentioned in the screening tools can cause problems in the fetus
- It is important that Healthy Start recognize participants who are taking these so they can be advised to discuss them with their healthcare provider
- A Healthy Start worker can then follow up with the participant

# Medications

**Medications that can cause birth defects should be stopped preconception, if possible**

- Accutane for acne
- Blood thinners
- Cancer drugs
- Drugs to lower cholesterol
- Male hormones
- Many seizure drugs
- Prescription pain medicines
- Some blood pressure medications
- Some psychiatric drugs

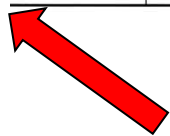
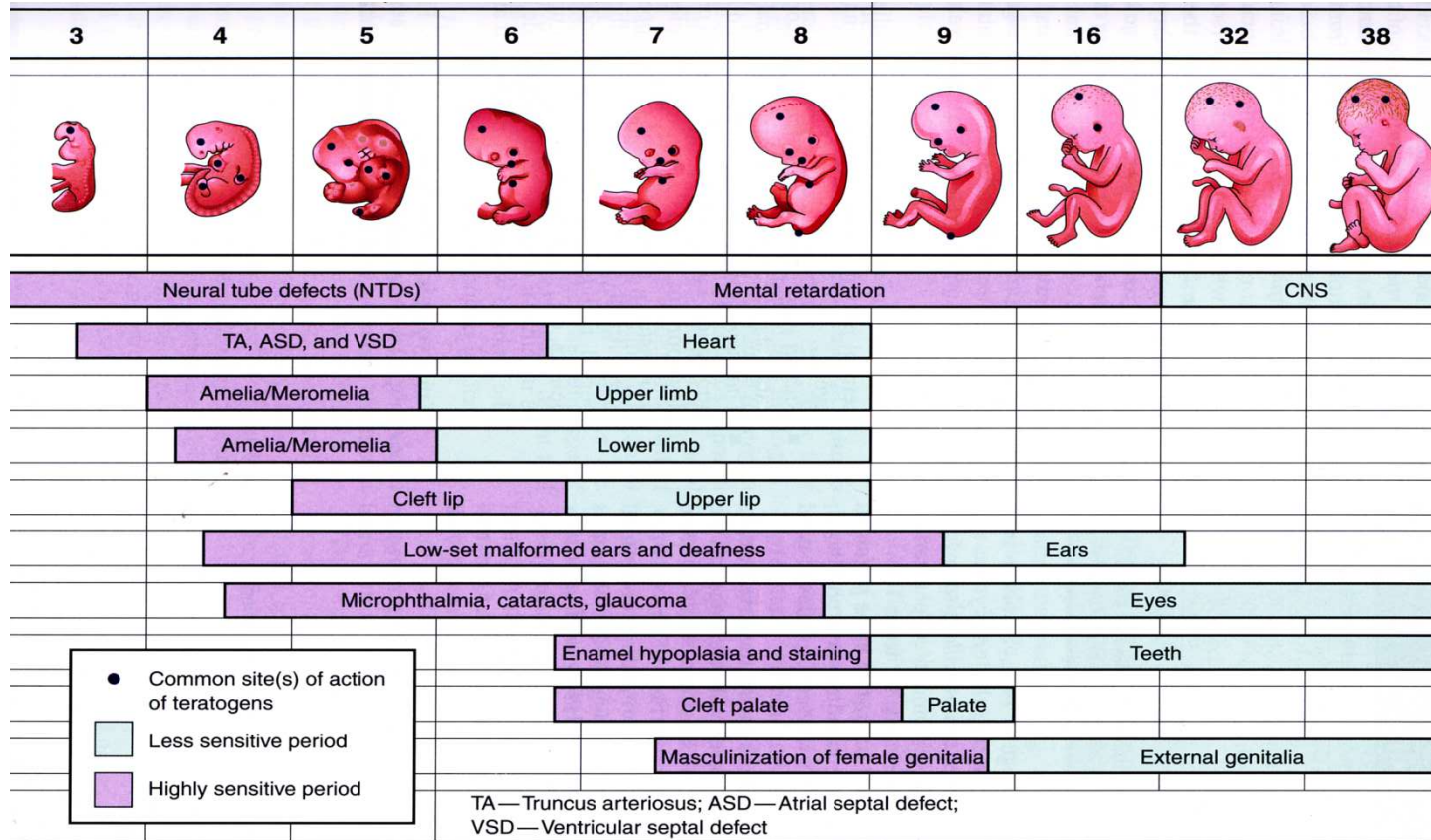


# Why Is It So Important?

- The embryo begins to develop at the same time a woman expects her next period to start – before she even knows she's pregnant!
  - Major birth defects can occur at that time
  - Brain and heart are the first organs to develop
- All major organs form in the first 2 months of development
- Prenatal care is often too late!

# Development of the Embryo

Weeks after Conception



The day a woman expects her period

# Interventions

- Many of the questions contain check boxes for education and referrals

**This is where the tools become operational**

- **Continue the conversation. Maintain your role as a resource sharing information**
  - Never lecture!
  - Elicit the woman's understanding of and reaction to the information, and her likelihood to follow-up
- **Utilize your CAN to develop and nurture referrals and strategic partnerships**

# How Are You Doing?

- **After you've conducted several screenings, evaluate yourself**
  - How have they been going? Are you getting more comfortable? What could you do to improve?
  - Do you record a lot of “Declined to Answer” or “Never”? How could you elicit better responses?
- **Consider talking with your supervisor if you need help**

# Conclusions

- **The screening tools were developed to**
  - Standardize Healthy Start practices across the nation
  - Ensure that all Healthy Start participants receive a comprehensive screening of their risks and needs
  - Enable customized care coordination for each Healthy Start participant
- **But they can also**
  - Enhance your relationships with participants
  - Help you grow in knowledge, confidence, and competence



# Conclusions

- Administering this kind of questionnaire is an art
- It will get easier and you will get better the more you do it



# Resources

- **HRSA - Culture, Language and Health Literacy:**  
<https://www.hrsa.gov/culturalcompetence/index.html>
- **CDC - Culture and Health Literacy:**  
<https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/culture.html>
- **Healthy Start Community Health Worker Course:**  
<http://healthystartepic.org/training-and-events/healthy-start-community-health-worker-course/>
- **Healthy Start Screening Tools Health and Health History: Medical Conditions and Medications**





# Questions

# Upcoming Webinars

**March 2: HS Division Sponsored Webinar - Data and Evaluation**