



Weigh of Life...Taking Action Together

Steps to Discussing Weight

A Step-by-Step Guide for Nutrition Counselors

This section is designed to help you, the WIC nutrition counselor, to be more connecting and sensitive in counseling sessions, and to establish a better understanding about how to talk with parents about their child's weight.

Contents of this section include:

- ✓ A step-by-step guide to discussing weight with parents
- ✓ Helpful tips from WIC moms
- ✓ Training activities for nutrition counselors

Talking about weight, particularly overweight, is difficult for parents and for nutrition counselors. Effective conversations with parents about their child's weight begin with you, the nutrition counselor. It's essential that you are aware of how sensitive the topic can be to parents and that you are prepared to approach it in a tactful way.

This step-by-step guide can help you approach the topic of overweight in an effective way without causing you or parents discomfort. This new style of discussing weight with parents will be challenging. It may not feel fun – or even comfortable – at first. It may be tempting to slip back into a fact-dispensing mode. But please don't. Remain patient and flexible, allowing yourself ample time to experiment and reflect. It is imperative that counselors embrace this approach to be successful in talking with parents about their child's weight.

You will find that most steps include words from WIC moms. Their thoughts were collected from focus group discussions and give you tips about best approaches to discussing weight.

This guide also contains training activities designed for training nutrition counselors, although the activities can be adapted for individual use. The activities are on separate pages for easy duplication.

Using this approach will reward you with thankful parents, meaningful conversations, and best of all, a generation of children who are at a healthy weight.





Step One: Put yourself in their shoes

What is a sensitive topic for you? Your credit rating? The number of shoes you have? Your sometimes messy home? Your weight? The death of a loved one? Your children – or lack of children? A divorce?

Just about any topic can be sensitive, depending upon the person you are talking with. This includes weight – especially the weight of a beloved child. Your comments may feel like an attack, rather than a discussion. Weight discussions can create a variety of feelings including:

- Pain
- Frustration
- Guilt
- Confusion
- Denial
- Embarrassment
- Anger
- Shock
- Sadness
- Disappointment
- Tearfulness
- Failure

The first step in communicating sensitive information about weight is to put yourself in the parent's shoes. Think about what approach would provide the most comfort to **you** when discussing a sensitive issue.

Make sure the setting is right. Sensitive topics are best discussed in private areas so that others can't hear. Sitting comfortably in a relaxed environment that allows for eye contact will make conversations easier.

Helpful Tips from WIC Moms:

- ✓ *Ask me about my feelings and opinions about my child's weight.*
- ✓ *Be sensitive of my feelings. Don't make comments that make me feel like I'm a bad mom or did something wrong because my child is overweight.*
- ✓ *Don't compare my child to 'the average child.' My child is special and I don't know what 'the average child' looks like.*

Training Activities:

1. Ask nutrition counselors to write their responses to the following questions, assuring them that they are for their use only and won't be shared with others. Read the following instructions slowly, allowing time for nutrition counselors to reflect on each step:
 - Write a topic that is sensitive to you. (Provide examples: divorce, problems with children, credit card debt, dysfunctional family, etc.)
 - Next, write down how you feel about the sensitive topic. (Provide examples: embarrassed, hurt, upset, grief, etc.)
 - Imagine someone wanted to talk to you about this topic. How would you feel about their offer? How would you want them to offer assistance to you? Would you be open and willing or reserved and hesitant?
 - What could they say that would make you want to discuss the topic?
 - What approach or words would cause you to shut down and not want to discuss it?
2. Without sharing specific topics or feelings, ask nutrition counselors to discuss these questions:
 - What words create a comfortable exchange of information?
 - What words cause negative feelings like pain, embarrassment, or failure?
 - Creating a climate for comfortable sharing goes far beyond words. What body language suggests a caring, compassionate person? What does a supportive environment look like?
3. Discussion: Weight, food, and eating are all sensitive topics. Ask nutrition counselors to identify:
 - words that would establish a comfortable conversation about a child's weight.
 - words that would cause feelings of pain, embarrassment, or failure if used in a conversation about a child's weight.
 - ways a comfortable environment and body language can show a caring and compassionate person.
 - ways they could change their office and counseling approach or environment to make a conversation about weight easier for parents.





Step Two: Resist labels

A direct identification of a child's weight status may not be best. Determining if a child is at a normal weight, overweight or underweight is simple. It's a straightforward procedure that can be done accurately and quickly using a growth chart. A child's weight can easily be graphed for visual understanding. This makes it tempting to focus on providing facts in a straightforward way.

Discussions of weight are wrapped in layers of emotions, mostly negative. It's best to adopt a communication style that recognizes these emotions. Labeling a child by weight can stop communication.

Start by making sure the timing is appropriate for the discussion. If the parent is in a fragile emotional state as a result of life issues like miscarriage or divorce, or has been up all night with a sick child, wait until the parent is in a better frame of mind. WIC is a long-term behavior change program. It's better to wait until the time is right than risk ending communication.

Helpful Tips from WIC Moms:

- ✓ *Use professional language when talking about weight. I am offended when you use the word 'chunky.'*
- ✓ *Tell me you're concerned about my daughter and her weight. Don't just say that she's overweight since that offends me.*



Step Three: Be likeable

Before asking questions of parents, ask these questions of yourself:

- How can I be more likable to parents?
- Who do I want to be?
- What personality traits can I draw on to make discussions go more smoothly for me and for parents?

We're in the business of getting people to say 'yes' to behavior change. Research shows that people prefer to say yes to those they like. So, being likable is job number one for nutrition counselors. Other words describe the same thing – rapport, affection, and connection – but likeability is the foundation for being influential in behavior change discussions.

We all have different personality traits we can access — or hide — based on the situation. Here are some personality characteristics that make people more likeable and help make discussing sensitive topics easier:

- Empathetic
- Caring
- Hopeful
- Non-judgmental
- Gentle
- Sincere
- Respectful
- Good listener
- Honest
- Humorous

Speaking at a slower speed and a lower tone can reduce stress and increase your likeability. A tone that suggests a genuine smile also helps connect you with a parent. And remember, it's a discussion rather than a presentation of facts, so allow enough time for questions and listening.

Before discussing weight or any other topic, invest time in getting the parent to like you and take the time to appreciate the parent. Watch a parent's body language as she realizes you are genuinely interested in her and her child as people, not just as WIC participants. Enjoy these moments without guilt, knowing that this is part of your job and absolutely essential to future behavior change.

Finding similarities between you and the parent is a quick and easy way to establish rapport. It's especially useful in discussing the emotionally charged topic of weight. Perhaps you have struggled with your own weight and have been successful or

unsuccessful in reaching your target weight. Perhaps you've been unsuccessful in reaching another type of goal. Or maybe your child has emotional scars from being teased about her weight — or some other characteristic. Consider sharing your concerns and experiences with parents. They are likely to appreciate your honesty, respond more openly, and act on what you say. The exchange of social and emotional information may be more important to changing behavior than the sharing of facts.

Helpful Tips from WIC Moms:

- ✓ *Be warm and caring. I'll listen better.*
- ✓ *Always have a smile for me and for my children.*
- ✓ *Tell me you want to work with me. Don't tell me what to do.*
- ✓ *Don't make me feel you are judging or criticizing me.*
- ✓ *Respect my culture. I may not think like you do, but we may both be right.*
- ✓ *Treat me like a person, not a statistic or number.*
- ✓ *Give me time to process what you say. Hearing your child is overweight can be a surprise.*
- ✓ *Talk with me, not at me. Don't be abrupt or blunt as that upsets me.*
- ✓ *Admit it if you struggle with weight. I like to know that you're a real person.*
- ✓ *Learn about foods traditional to my culture. Talk about foods I already eat, not foods that I've never tried.*





Step Three: Be likeable (cont.)

Training Activities:

1. Ask nutrition counselors to write the following on a piece of paper:
 - Write the name of a person of influence who is/was likeable to them. (Provide examples: physician, teacher, spiritual leader, parent, etc.)
 - Next, list three personality characteristics of the person that allowed him/her to be likeable to you.
 - Write the name of a person who is/was not likeable.
 - What about that person's personality or communication style made them not likeable?

Ask nutrition counselors to share responses, recording them on a flip chart under these categories: likeable and not likeable.

2. Discussion: Why is it important for WIC educators to be likeable? What personality and communication characteristics make a nutrition counselor more likeable to parents? What decreases their likeability? How does being likeable improve nutrition counselors' ability to facilitate behavior changes that promote a healthy weight?





Step Four: Provide praise

As nutrition counselors, we're skilled at noticing what parents can do to improve, but we often forget the power of praise.

Giving positive feedback — praise — is a powerful tool to establish a good working relationship and smooth the way to future behavior change. Compliments help form good relationships, the foundation of effective counseling.

Here's how to make praise more effective:

- **Be specific.** Don't make general statements like "you're doing a good job." Instead, say something like, "Ana, you're doing an amazing job of getting Carmen to love veggies! What's your secret?"
- **Praise often.** No need to dole out compliments and positive feedback sparingly. Lavish it on often! But — make it believable to the parent. It shouldn't sound unnatural or overdone.
- **Be sincere.** Because there is good in every person — attitude, intent, action or belief — it's easy to find ways to praise parents. Believing that it is there and looking for it allows moments of praise to happen often.
- **Validate parental efforts.** There are no perfect parents. And there are millions of ways to be great parents. Affirm the love and commitment behind parental actions whenever possible. Everyone likes to be complimented on parenting, the most challenging job on earth.

Helpful Tips from WIC Moms:

- ✓ *Let me know that you think I'm doing a good job as a mother.*
- ✓ *Being the best mom for my child is very important to me. I am doing what I think is best. Please acknowledge me as a mom. Remember I have feelings too.*
- ✓ *I must be doing something right. Can we talk about that first?*



Step Five: Seek input

The quickest and shortest way to identify a problem is to allow an expert to do so. In fact, that's the role nutrition counselors have assumed in the past. We made decisions based on nutritional standards, provided instructions on what needed to be changed, and monitored progress toward the goals we established. That approach, though factually sound, may not be effective.

Rather than appreciating an expert assessment of their child's weight, parents often react negatively to hearing that their child is overweight. They may feel:

- demeaned that you are telling them they aren't a good parent
- shocked at being told their beloved child isn't perfect
- angry at having someone intrude on their personal life
- frustrated that they can't change the situation
- angry that you don't really 'get it' and aren't in touch with their cultural norms

Parents don't appreciate it when nutrition counselors assume an 'expert' or 'boss' role. After all, they're the real experts on their lives and those of their children. It's better if we assume the role of a coach – here to help with problems parents identify on their own.

Many parents come to WIC primarily for the food package. They can be especially resistant to negative news when they don't expect or want it. This example may help you understand how they feel. You stop at your local store to pick up toothpaste and the store clerk informs you that your hair needs cutting and conditioning. You will certainly react less than enthusiastically to this unexpected and negative news.

Nutrition counselors have the challenge of getting parents to identify potential concerns, especially relating to their child's weight.

Ask parents to complete an assessment quiz

Ask parents to complete the quiz titled *Take This Quiz to See if Your Child is at a Healthy Weight*. This quiz allows parents an opportunity to assess their child's weight using clues they see and hear everyday.

take this QUIZ to see if your child is at a healthy weight

Check all statements that are true for your child.

Does your child:

- become short of breath when climbing stairs?
- prefer to watch TV or play alone rather than play with others?
- have a large belly or rolls of fat?
- have a nickname like "gordito" or "chubs"?
- seem "puffy" in the face or neck?
- have trouble running and playing?
- wear a size larger than her age?
(For example, size 4T pants at age 2)
- get teased about his weight?

Do you or family members say your child:

- is "stocky", "chunky", "thick", "solid" or "big boned"?
- will outgrow his weight?
- has to be big to be healthy?
- has "bad genes" or "slow metabolism"?
- is like other relatives who are large or heavy?

If you checked more than three items above, it may be time to take action.

Tips to help your child be at a healthy weight:

- Take a walk each day.
- Offer water instead of soda, fruit drinks, or juice.
- Buy low-fat instead of regular milk.
- Serve child-sized amounts of food.
- Suggest active play instead of watching TV.
- Serve low-fat milk with meals instead of juice.
- Offer bananas, mangos, and apples rather than candy, cake, and cookies.
- Reward your child for good behavior with a trip to the playground.
- Set a timer for 30 minutes. Turn off the TV when the 30 minutes are up.
- Buy whole-wheat bread.
(The extra fiber helps kids feel full.)
- Crunch on carrots rather than chips.
- Encourage your child not to overeat.
- Skip bedtime snacks.
- Spoil them with love rather than food.
- Treat them with a game of soccer rather than ice cream and candy.
- Ask loving family members to help your child by offering fruit instead of candy.
- Plan family events around activities rather than food.
- Dance and sing with your child during TV commercials.

Please note that the quiz provides no summary information that pronounces a child to be 'healthy' or 'overweight.' Some parents may want to share their concerns about their child's weight shortly after completing the quiz, or they might ask for your assessment of their child's weight. That's an opening for you to gently echo their concerns.





Step Five: Seek input (cont.)

Questions to help parents assess their child's weight:

- Some moms have told me they were surprised by some of the question on the quiz. Were you surprised by anything on this quiz?
- Did taking the quiz relieve you of any concerns you have about Maria's weight?
- Do you feel differently about Maria's weight now that you've taken the quiz?

Questions to spur action:

- Sounds like you're ready to take steps to help Maria be the best that she can be. What do you plan to do first? Who can help you with that? What might be a problem you encounter when starting to take action? How will you get around that problem? When will you start?
- Were any of the suggested actions surprising to you?
- Would you share some of your successes in keeping Maria active each day so I can help other moms who are struggling with this issue?
- Do you feel taking action will make a difference in Maria's life? If so, which action(s) will have the biggest payoff for you and Maria? Why is that important to you?
- Looking over this list of actions, which fit in the 'can do' group, the 'maybe on a weekend' group, and the 'not a chance' group?

Some parents may need more time to reflect, evaluate and change their own thinking about their child's weight before discussing it with you. In that case, don't probe or jump in with your assessment. These questions may be useful to bridge to a new topic:

- Other moms have told me they needed time to think about the quiz or share it with their family. I'd love to hear what you feel about it next time. Is there another topic that's more important to discuss today?
- It sounds like taking action isn't something that will fit into your life right now. Do you think there might be a time in the future that you would be able to take action?



Step Five: Seek input (cont.)

Training Activities:

1. Ask nutrition counselors to form pairs. Decide who will be the nutrition counselor and who will be the WIC participant.

- Provide the following directions to the ‘counselors’ on an index card:

This card is confidential! Do not share it with your partner.

Ask the ‘participant’ to identify a recent personal or professional challenge that she is facing, such as deciding to go back to school, saving money for a down payment on a house or sticking to a weight loss plan. Ask her to share that challenge with you. For the next five minutes, use probing questions such as “can you tell me more about that?” or “can you give me more details?” or “why is that a challenge” or “what concerns do you have?” to get the ‘participant’ to further discuss and solve her own challenge. Do not offer advice; only ask questions.

After five minutes, reconvene the group. Ask ‘participants’:

- What did your partner do that made you feel you were being listened to?
- How did it feel to have someone listen to you completely?
- Would input (beyond questions) from the ‘counselor’ have enhanced or hindered the conversation? Why?

Ask ‘counselors’:

- How hard was it for you NOT to jump in and give advice?
- Were you surprised at the depth of the conversation?
- How did the ‘participant’ progress through her own problem solving by being allowed to talk and for you to be committed to listening?

2. Discussion: How do you think WIC parents would feel if counselors listened to them with their full attention, respect and regard? How can you take this experience and incorporate it into your everyday counseling sessions with participants? How can you use this technique to have better conversations with parents about their child’s weight? The best way to seek input is to ask questions that allow WIC parents to identify and solve their own problems. An important role of the nutrition counselor is to ask questions that keep the parent talking and to listen fully.





Step Six: Seek commitment

Pushing parents to acknowledge their child's weight and make action plans can result in frustrated parents and nutrition counselors. Why push when you can pull?

Emotions enter into all decisions, especially those related to children. The deepest concerns of parents — such as their child's health — arouse emotions, boost motivation, guide actions and uphold values. 'Pulling' parents toward actions that support healthy weight requires emotion.

Here are steps to seeking commitment to behavior change:

- **Label parents using positive attributes:** Gently give the parent a label that is consistent with the desired actions. Example: "You look like the type of mom who loves her child and will do anything for her." The intent of labeling is not to flatter them or create positive feelings but rather to connect the parents' identities to a course of action. Research suggests that people internalize this type of labeling feedback and are more likely to make commitments in line with the label.
- **Tap into existing commitments:** Talk about something the parent desires for her child and how that reflects an enormous personal commitment by her and her family. Every parent has dreams for their child. Ask parents to share their dreams for their child and what they're doing to help them come true. They may smile with pride as they share how they read to their child daily as preparation for school or always sit down and eat with their child each night for dinner. After listening, connect their dreams and commitment with the desired action. For example, suggest that a daily dose of activity or fruits and vegetables represents a commitment to their child, much like helping their child be a good reader or listening to their child at dinner.

Recommended actions are more likely to be accepted once you identify them as consistent with a parent's values. The motivation to accept and make changes is then strong.

- **Lead parents to voluntary commitments:** Voluntary commitments are more likely to lead to lasting changes than pressured commitments. The *Take This Quiz to See if Your Child is at a Healthy Weight* is designed to lead parents to a personal examination of their child's weight indicators and a voluntary commitment to change eating behaviors. Parents who 'own' their commitment are more likely to change their behavior.

- **Ask for public commitments:** People who publicly commit to a course of action are more likely to maintain that course of action into the future. Once people make a public commitment, people tend to believe it more. Encourage parents to share (with you, a group or with their child) what they plan to do and how they plan to do it. Ask parents to also write down what they plan to do and show it to another person, or display their commitment on the refrigerator. This increases the likelihood they will act on their plan.
- **Ask parents to identify action steps:** If parents seem resistant, ask them to identify what they are willing to do to help their child achieve a healthy weight.





Step Six: Seek commitment (cont.)

Training Activities:

1. Ask nutrition counselors to think about commitments they have made.
 - What actions did they take because of this commitment? What words, phrases or behaviors were used to encourage them to stick with the commitment? How do they feel when they make a commitment and their actions are consistent with that commitment?
 - What actions conflicted with their commitment? What words, phrases or behaviors were used that discouraged them from sticking with the commitment? How do they feel when their actions are not consistent with that commitment?
2. Have the nutrition counselors role play obtaining a commitment by using the above steps to seeking commitment to behavior change.
3. Discussion: How can nutrition counselors get parents to make commitments – take a stand, to go on record – to practice behaviors that are consistent with a healthy weight?





Step Seven: Be persuasive

Martin Luther King's '*I Have a Dream*' speech touched hearts and changed history. Imagine if his speech had been titled '*I Have a Goal*' or '*I Have a Strategy*.' It's likely his words would have soon been forgotten.

Martin Luther King understood how to be persuasive. Nutrition counselors can learn and apply principles of persuasion too. Consider these persuasion/influence tools and use them throughout discussions with parents:

- **Personalize your messages.** Use the word 'you' and the child's name often. It's a simple yet powerful way to make your message more relevant, increase parent involvement, and boost attention.
- **Talk about hope.** Help parents FEEL they can successfully and dramatically change the course of their child's life. Ask them to identify ways their child would be happier if she were at a healthy weight.
- **Present the situation as temporary.** No one is inspired to act on something they consider a permanent situation. Ask parents to share how long they're willing to take action to help their child reach a healthy weight AND when they think such actions will produce positive results.
- **Use peer power.** Cues from people around us help us decide how to think, feel and act. People we perceive to be most like us are likely to be most persuasive since they 'walk in the same shoes.' Rather than trying to convince parents to take a course of action, share testimonials from other parents who have been successful at taking that same action, and discuss emotional payoffs that they received.
- **Make the challenge seem manageable.** Ask parents to share practical suggestions about what they could do tomorrow with little time, effort or money.

Try these techniques if parents still seem resistant to taking action to help their child achieve a healthy weight:

- **Ask parents to generate arguments *against* healthy weights:** Rather than placing yourself in the position of arguing *for* healthy weights, ask parents to suggest reasons for children to be at above-average weights. This strategy may increase parents' receptiveness to ideas, identify barriers to action, reveal important perspectives, and increase sharing during discussions.

- **Frame possible *losses* to spur action:** Some people are more motivated by the thought of LOSING something rather than by the thought of GAINING something. Ask parents to share what their child might lose by being overweight, what parents might lose by not establishing healthy eating and activity habits in their children, etc.

Helpful Tips from WIC Moms:

- ✓ *Give me hope. Tell me that my child's weight can be normal and I can make a difference.*
- ✓ *Convince me that I need to do something. I am very busy and won't take action until I feel there is a problem.*





Step Seven: Be persuasive (cont.)

Training Activities:

1. Read this paragraph from Martin Luther King's famous 'I Have a Dream' speech:

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.' I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.

- Next, read this logical, factual version of the same paragraph:

The United States of America has failed to comply with the constitution. Currently, 92% of African-American men in Georgia are not dining with men of other cultural groups. NHAN data suggest that the prevalence of this behavior is even greater in Mississippi. This behavior results in negative short and long-term consequences. (Harvard, 2003) A well-documented evaluation plan is needed to assure that children are assured equal rights based on criteria other than race. This project should receive high priority in the STAR five-year plan.

2. Discussion: Which speech would be more effective in persuading people to make changes? Why? How can we use the techniques that made the first speech more persuasive to change behaviors related to a healthy weight with WIC parents?





Step Eight: Offer educational materials

Six emotion-based materials and a child-size placemat are available for your use. The manual section entitled *Using Educational Materials to Promote Behavior Change* contains information on each handout, as well as how to use them in a counseling or group session.

The educational materials can be used in these ways:

- **During a counseling or group session:** *A Healthy Weight is Something to Smile About* was designed to help parents determine for themselves if their child is overweight. *Grow a Healthy Child* can be used during the session to help parents identify what they are already doing ‘right,’ as well as actions they can take to help their child maintain a healthy weight.
- **After a counseling and group session:** All educational materials present key messages and address potential barriers to taking action. Offer the materials to parents to reinforce information introduced in your session.

Training Activities:

See manual section entitled *Using Educational Materials To Promote Behavior Change: A Guide for Nutrition Educators* for activities on how to use the emotion-based materials and child-size placemat.





Step Nine: Plan actions

In the counseling session, you will have:

- Used tactful, gentle words because you know how sensitive the topic of weight is for parents
- Established a warm and friendly rapport with the parent, resulting in a like-like relationship
- Chosen an emotional, persuasive approach
- Highlighted positive things the parent is already doing well
- Encouraged the parent to assess her own child's weight using the handout quiz
- Persuaded the parent to commit to making her child's weight a higher priority in her busy day
- Used persuasion tools to influence parents to take action
- Provided emotion-based materials related to your discussion

It's now time to move from ideas to action. Consider these tips as you guide your parent from commitment to action:

- a. **Let the parents set their own goals:** Parents know their lives better than we do and they are in the best positions to determine what they can — or can't — do.
- b. **Ask questions:** Your role in determining an action plan is to ask questions and listen. Start with general questions like:
 - What are you willing to do tomorrow to make sure Maria has the best chance at living her life at a healthy weight?
 - What will you do tomorrow that will make you proud AND help Maria achieve a healthy weight?
 - Some people set a goal of being better at SOMETHING every day. What would allow you and Maria to be better at being more active? Eating better?



Step Nine: Plan actions (cont.)

Helpful Tips from WIC Moms:

- ✓ *Let me suggest foods my child can have, not only those he can't. I feel guilty when I deny him foods he enjoys.*
- ✓ *Help me with suggestions that are practical. I can't always fit in a home-cooked meal and activity after a long day at work or afford expensive fruits and vegetables.*
- ✓ *When you offer me solutions, make them specific. Don't say 'eat more' or 'eat less.' Give me specific amounts like 'three ravioli.'*



The list below summarizes the nine steps to discussing weight with parents. Place this tool in a visible area at your desk to refer to during counseling sessions.

Steps to Discussing Weight with Parents

Step 1: Put yourself in their shoes

Step 2: Resist labels

Step 3: Be likeable

Step 4: Provide praise and validate parent's love for their child

Step 5: Seek input

Step 6: Seek commitment to a course of action

Step 7: Be persuasive

Step 8: Offer educational materials

Step 9: Plan actions