

Session 14: Make Social Cues Work *for* You.

Objectives:

In this session, the participant will:

- Review examples of problem social cues and helpful social cues.
- Discuss ways to change problem social cues and add helpful ones.
- Review strategies for coping with social events such as parties, vacations, having visitors, and holidays.
- Make an action plan to change a problem social cue and add a helpful one.

To Do Before the Session:

Ask the participant to invite a family member to this session if you and the participant think that would be helpful in planning strategies for handling social cues.

Have materials ready:

- Keeping Track book (new and last weeks to return).
- Pages for Session 14 participant notebook.
- To record participant weight, Lifestyle Balance Update for each participant and or Group Session Update log begun at Session 1.
- Optional handouts that are appropriate for the participant (for example, with tips for handling parties, holidays, vacations, and other social events; low-fat/calorie recipes for entertaining; helpful ideas for low-fat eating and staying active while traveling).

Weigh the participant. Graph.

Receive and review Keeping Track records. Discuss successes and difficulties in meeting the study goals. Review the last session, including home activities. Graph activity.

Did you have any trouble Keeping Track last week? Were you able to stay under your fat gram budget? Reach your goal for physical activity?

What was it like taking your pulse or **heart rate**? Were you able to stay within your target heart rate?

Praise all progress, no matter how small. Discuss barriers and problem solve with the participant.

Graph physical activity.

Review the concept of food and activity “cues” and define social cues.

In an earlier session we talked about **how to “take charge of what’s around you.”** We took an imaginary video camera through your house and where you work, and we looked for problem food or activity “cues,” things that would prompt you to think about eating or to be inactive, like a TV set or a bag of cookies on a kitchen counter. We planned some ways to get rid of problem cues and add positive cues (for example, watch less TV, keep high-fat foods out of the house, and keep your walking shoes in sight).

In that session we focused on the sight and smell of food or certain activities that make you think about food. Today we’re going to talk about **social cues**, or **what other people say or do that affects your eating and activity.** Again, we will plan some ways to **reduce problem social cues** and some ways to **add positive ones.**

Give examples of problem social cues and positive social cues.

Problem Social Cues

One of the most powerful **problem social cues** is:

- **The sight of other people eating problem foods or being inactive** (for example, you go to a bar where you see other people eating potato chips and watching TV).
Can you think of an example in your own life? Is it difficult for you when you see someone in your family or a friend eat certain foods? (Record examples briefly on the work sheet.)
- **Being offered (or pressured to eat) problem foods or being invited to do something inactive** are also negative cues (for example, your spouse buys you candy for your birthday or a friend asks you to come over to watch football).
What are some examples in your own life?
- **Being nagged** is a negative cue (for example, your spouse says, “You shouldn’t be eating that bacon. It’s too high in fat.”). Some people may think that nagging is helpful, but actually it tends to cause the behavior it’s designed to stop. Does anyone nag you about your eating or activity?

- **Hearing complaints** is a negative cue, too (for example, your daughter says, “I hate this frozen yogurt. Real ice cream is better,” or your spouse says, “You’re always outside walking. You don’t have any time for your family any more.”). Do you hear complaints from anyone about your eating or activity?

Now let’s compare problem social cues with **positive social cues**.

Positive social cues include:

- The **sight of other people eating healthy foods or being active** (for example, you go out to dinner with another DPP participant who orders low-fat foods or you go to an aerobics class). Can you think of any people who are good examples for you? In what way? (Record on the work sheet.)
- **Being offered healthy foods or being invited to do something active** (for example, your mother offers you fruit salad for dessert or asks you to go for a walk). Does anyone do this for you?
- **Being praised** (for example, your spouse says, “The oatmeal was delicious this morning, honey.”). Who praises you for your efforts and accomplishments?
- **Hearing compliments** (for example, your daughter says, “Thanks for buying frozen yogurt, Mom. It’s a lot healthier than ice cream,” or your spouse says, “You’re really committed to walking every day. I’m proud of you.”). Does anyone compliment you?

When you respond to a social cue in the same way over and over again, you build a habit. The cue becomes paired with the way you respond, and your response becomes more and more automatic. In an earlier session, we used the example of eating popcorn whenever you go to the movies as a food cue that over time becomes a habit for many people. It works the same way with social cues.

Let’s say that since childhood, your mother has offered you second helpings of food at the dinner table. You developed a habit of accepting her offer. Now when you return home as an adult and your mother offers you second helpings, it is hard for you to refuse.

It’s important to understand that with social cues, the **other person has also learned a habit**. So in the example we’ve just used, your mother has learned to offer you second helpings and expects that you will accept the offer. **This makes social cues even harder to change than other cues.**

Discuss ways to change problem social cues.

How can you change problem social cues?

1. As with problem food cues, one of the best things you can do is to **stay away from the cue, if you can**. For example:
 - Move to a different room if a family member eats problem foods in front of you.
 - Skip certain parties that are just too tempting for you.
 - Socialize with people by going bowling, dancing, or to the movies. Don't go out to eat as a way to socialize.
 - Change the subject when someone starts talking about food or your weight or activity.

2. **Change the cue, if you can**. This means trying to influence the other person's habit, if you can. For example, when someone nags, complains, eats problem foods in front of you, or pressures you to eat:
 - **Discuss the problem. Brainstorm options.** For example, "It's hard for me when you eat ice cream in front of me. It really tempting. Is there a way we could get together and have fun, but not eat ice cream?" **Be willing to compromise** to find a solution that will work for everyone.
 - **Tell people about Lifestyle Balance, your efforts to lose weight and be more active, and why this is important to you.** Many people will be willing to help if they understand that you are trying to change your eating and activity and why.
 - **Ask others to praise you for your efforts and ignore your slips. This is KEY to your success.** Explain to your friends and family that this is what would be most helpful to you. In turn, be sure to thank them when they notice your efforts and overlook your slips.

(Role play this with the participant, using an example that is meaningful to him or her.)

3. If you can't stay away from the problem social cue or change it, **practice responding in a more healthy way**. Over time you will **build a new, healthier habit** and **the other person will learn a new habit, too**, because of your new response. For example:

- **Say “No” to food offers.** If you are consistent and continue to say “No,” others will eventually stop offering.
- One of the most important things you can do is to **show others you know they mean well, and suggest something they can do to help you. Be specific.** Most people mean well when they nag, offer food or pressure someone to eat (for example, many people think that being a good hostess means insisting that guests have second helpings). If you recognize that they mean well and give them a specific, positive alternative, they can still feel helpful and you are more likely to reach your goals, too. For example, when a hostess offers you second helpings, say, “Thanks so much for offering. You know what I’d really enjoy is some coffee.” **If you can, give them specific ideas of how to help ahead of time,** before you are confronted by a challenging situation.

Role play saying “No” to food offers, using an example that is meaningful to the participant. Illustrate that the participant should be prepared to say “No” several times to someone who continues to offer, e.g., “Are you sure you don’t want a piece of cake?”

Remember that **it takes time to break an old habit or build a new one.** Change doesn’t happen overnight. And with social cues, there are at least two people involved in making a change: yourself and someone else. **Don’t expect other people to adjust instantly** to a new way of relating, any more than you expect yourself to change instantly.

Discuss ways to add positive social cues.

Not all social cues are problems. You can use social cues to *help* you eat healthier and be more active. For example:

- **Spend time with people who are active and make healthy food choices.** For example, at parties stand next to people who spend most of their time talking and dancing instead of eating.
- **Put yourself in places where people are active.** For example, join an exercise club or sports league. Come to the DPP activity sessions.
- **Set up a regular “date” with others to be active.** You will be more likely to be active because you won’t want to disappoint them by cancelling.
- **Ask your friends to call you to remind you to be active or to set up dates to be**

active.

- **Bring a low-fat/calorie food to share.** For example, bring a fruit salad to a potluck dinner.
- **Be the first to order when you eat out at a restaurant** and order healthy foods. This is much easier than waiting until after others order high-fat foods and then trying to make a healthier choice. In addition, you will provide a positive social cue for other people.
- **Be social by doing something active.** For example, take a walk and talk. Go out dancing instead of going out to dinner. Start a family tradition of taking a walk after dinner instead of watching TV.

An important way to change negative social cues and add positive ones is to **ask people who want to support you for help.**

What people in your life want to support you? *[Record a few names.]*

What could they do to help you? Here are some ideas. Would any of these be helpful to you?

Review the ideas on the work sheet. Check a few that the participant thinks would be helpful. Add other ideas at the bottom of the chart. Some participants may want to copy the work sheet to give to a supportive friend or family member.

Discuss ways to handle social events such as parties, having visitors, or holidays.

Social cues are especially powerful at social events such as parties, holidays, vacations, and when you have guests in your home or are a guest in someone else's home. These events:

- **Upset our routine** (for example, you usually walk after dinner, so how do you fit walking in on a day when you're going to a party after dinner?),
- **Challenge us with unique food and social cues** (for example, your family serves appetizers whenever there are guests in the house but not at other times; you go on vacation to a place you've never been before and you're not familiar with any of the restaurants),

- **May involve habits that have developed over many years and so can be very powerful** (for example, for the past 30 years on Thanksgiving, your family has watched the parade on TV and had pumpkin pie with whipped cream for dessert).

What are some social events that are difficult for you?

Get an idea of the kind of social events the participant attends. If it is near a holiday or vacation, you may want to focus during the remainder of the session on brainstorming options and making an action plan for that specific event.

To handle social events well, try to anticipate the problems that will occur. What exactly might be difficult for you? Then brainstorm your options ahead of time. Here are some ideas: *[review the examples on the work sheet]*:

- **Plan ahead.**
- **Stay away from problem cues when you can.**
- **Change problem cues.**
- **Respond to problem cues in a more healthy way.**
- **Add helpful social cues.**

Stay positive. Think of every social event as an opportunity to learn what works well for you and what doesn't. Remember, you are building healthy habits for a lifetime.

For participants that entertain, you may want to distribute some low-fat/calorie ideas and/or recipes (for example, recipes for low-fat dips and a list of low-fat crackers). Participants who travel often may appreciate the optional handout on helpful ideas for low-fat eating and staying active while traveling.

Assign home activity.

With the participant, develop and record on the work sheet two action plans to:

- Change a problem social cue.
- Add a helpful social cue.

If it is near a holiday, vacation, or particular social event, include an action plan for that event.

Assign home activity.

This week:

- Keep track of your weight, eating and activity.

- Try your two action plans for making social cues work for you.
- And before the next session, answer the questions (Did it work? If not, what went wrong?) for both action plans.

Any questions?

Collect completed Keeping Track book from last session and review and make comments in the Keeping Track book before the next session.