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USDA/FNS Formative Messaging Focus Group Guide (Low-income Mothers of 2-5 year-olds)

WELCOME AND GROUND RULES

Welcome everyone. My name is _____. I am an independent marketing researcher. Thank you for coming for this discussion. Before we begin, I'd like to explain a few things about how the discussion will work.

1. First of all, I want everyone to know there are **no wrong answers**. (We want to know your opinions and those opinions might differ. This is fine. We want to know what each of you thinks about the topics we will be discussing.)
2. You have probably noticed the microphones in the room. They are here because we are **audiotaping** the discussion. Afterwards, I have to write a report. I want to give you my full attention and not have to take a lot of notes. Also, because we are taping, it is important that you try to **speak one at a time**. I may occasionally interrupt you when two or more people are talking at once in order to be sure everyone gets a chance to talk and that responses are accurately recorded.
3. Behind me is a one-way mirror. Some of the people working on this project are observing this discussion so that they can hear your opinions directly from you. However, your identity and anything you personally say here will remain confidential. Your names, addresses, and phone numbers will not be given to anyone, and no one will contact you after this group is over. When I write my report, I will not refer to anyone by name.
4. Please turn off your **beepers & cell phones**. The group will last only 90 minutes. Should you need to go to the restroom during the discussion, please feel free to leave, but we'd appreciate it if you would go one at a time.
5. Feel free to say what is on your mind. If you have something negative to say, it is all right. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. We just want to hear your opinions.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Now, first let's spend a little time getting to know one another. Let's go around the table and introduce each of ourselves. Please tell me:
 - First name, and
 - What local area you live in,

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- Who you live with (ages of children), pets, etc. and
- A little bit about yourself—such as what you do for a living, a favorite hobby, and...

[MODERATOR: Make sure to get ages of other children in household, if any]

[MODERATOR: Instruct respondents that when questions in the guide refer to their pre-K (2-5 year-old) child/ren. REMIND THEM OF THIS THROUGHOUT SESSION.]

II. GLIMPSE OF SCHEDULE/FAMILY TIME/ROLE MODELING

1. We are going to begin our discussion this evening by learning a bit more about you.

- a. Take a moment and walk me through what a typical day is like for you.

[MODERATOR: Get a sense of the time crunch respondents feel during their days.]

2. What times do you consider to be “family time?”

- a. Tell me what family time is like?

i. What words/phrases would you use to describe “family time”?

ii. Do you consider meals to be “family time” for you? What makes you say that?

1. Does everyone in your family eat meals together at the same time?

a. How often would you say your family does so?

b. For what meal(s)?

2. [PROBE: Usually, does your 2-5 year old eat separately or with the rest of the family?]

iii. How challenging is it for your family to eat meals together? What makes you say that?

iv. What things do you try to do to make it easier for your family to eat together?

b. Again, let’s think specifically about your 2-5 year old child. What word or phrase would you use to describe what meal times are like with your 2-5 year old. [PROBE: fun, chaotic, happy, relaxed, stressful] What made you decide to choose those words?

3. Now, I am going to shift gears for a moment. When I use the phrase “role-model,” what are the first words, phrases, or pictures that come to mind?

a. As I mentioned, for this discussion, you will need to keep in mind your child/ren 2-5 years of age, even if you have children outside of that age bracket. Who do you think are role models for your 2-5 year-old children?

b. [IF NECESSARY:] Do you consider yourself to be a role model for your 2-5 year-old child/ren? What makes you say that?

III. HELPING CHILDREN STAY HEALTHY

1. Now let's shift the focus to discussing helping our 2-5 year-old children eat fruits and vegetables.
 - a. [If not previously mentioned:] Do you think that it is something easy/hard to do? What makes you say that? [BRIEF]
 - i. What can be hard about it? [PROBE: cost, goes to waste (spoilage), just won't eat]
 - b. Let's talk for a moment about snack time.
 - i. What do your 2-5 year-old children normally eat as a snack?
 - ii. To what extent do your 2-5 year-old child/ren ask for fruits and/or vegetables as a snack?
 - iii. Are fruits and vegetables usually snack options? What makes you say that?

NOTE TO MODERATOR: ROTATE PRESENTATION OF CONCEPT A AND CONCEPT C MESSAGES ACROSS GROUPS

VI. STRATEGIC MESSAGES & SUPPORTING CONTENT

Now we are going to shift gears for a moment and take a look at some statements. We are going to look at two different sets of statements. [FOR EACH SET OF STATEMENTS, DO THE SAME EXERCISE]

Concept A: Mothers, as role models, will offer a variety of fruits and vegetables to children

Each statement is written on a card. I would like you to sort these cards. Place the card that you think does the best job of **getting you to eat more fruits and vegetables** on top. Put the one that does the second-best job underneath that one, and so on and so forth, until you get to the card that did the worst job (which should be on the bottom).

After you have done that, you will notice that each card has a letter in the lower right-hand corner. On Handout 1, please write the letters of the cards in the order in which you have stacked them. Then, we'll talk about it.

[NOTE TO MODERATOR: To the extent possible, try to get respondents to ignore issues with grammar and/or word choice. The key is to have them focus on the concepts.]

Concept A Statements: Role-Modeling

They learn from watching you. Eat fruits and veggies and your kids will too.
Meals are a great time to play follow the leader. Eat fruits and veggies and your kids will too.

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They take their lead from you. Eat fruits and veggies and your kids will too.

1. Message Preferences

- a. [GO AROUND TABLE:] Which one did the best job? Take a moment and explain why you selected that one as your top choice? [PROBE: likes, main idea/takeaway]
- b. [GO AROUND TABLE:] Now, let's look at the other side of the coin. Which **ONE CARD** did not speak to you at all? [IF NECESSARY:] Which **ONE CARD** was at the bottom of your stack? Please explain why you thought it did a bad job.

2. Other measures

[GO AROUND TABLE:] Looking again at all of the cards, which ONE is the most believable?

- a. What made you select that one?

[GO AROUND TABLE] Finally, when you look at all of the cards, which ONE is the easiest for you to picture?

- a. What do you picture? What images first come to mind?
- b. Can you relate to that image? What makes you say that?
- c. What about this image is appealing to you?

3. Supporting Documentation: Concept A

For the moment, please put those cards to the side. We are going to look at some additional information that has been written to go with the messages you just read.

[DISTRIBUTE CONCEPT A, NARRATIVE PARAGRAPH]

First, read this paragraph written by a mom of a 2-5 year-old. **Circle** any statement, word, or phrase that you particularly like, and **draw a line through** any statement, word, or phrase that you did not like or did not understand.

- a. Before we talk about specifics. What did you think of this paragraph? [PROBE: Interesting? Informative? Boring?]
- b. Did it sound realistic? What makes you say that?
- c. What do you think about the ideas she talks about to get her children to eat fruits and vegetables? Are they believable? Doable?
- d. Would you try these ideas? What makes you say that?

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Now I am going to show you more information. Again, this information has been written to go with the messages you read on the cards. Don't worry about how they look on the page, for now, just focus on what is written.

I would like for you to take the next few moments to read this information and **circle** any statement, word, or phrase that you particularly like, and **draw a line through** any statement, word, or phrase that you did not like or did not understand. Then, we'll talk about them.

- a. Before we talk about specifics. What did you think of what was written on the pages? [PROBE: Interesting? Informative? Boring?]
- b. [GO AROUND TABLE] What stood out to you? Which TWO or THREE statements, phrases or words did you like best? Take a moment and explain why you chose those. [MODERATOR IDENTIFY WHAT PEOPLE CIRCLED] [PROBE: **Helpful, realistic, doable**]
- c. Now, let's look at the other side of the coin. Which statements, phrases or words did you cross out because you did not like or did not understand them? Take a moment to explain why you chose those. [MODERATOR IDENTIFY WHAT PEOPLE CROSSED-OUT]
- d. To what extent, if at all, does it convince you to eat more fruits and vegetables? What makes you say that?
- e. Let's say that you were creating a brochure and you had to select which of the information you just read to put into it. Since brochures are small, you can't use all of the information you read. What 1 or 2 pieces of information on this page do you think HAVE to be included? Why did you select those?

Concept C: Spend time with your child preparing meals together and eating together.

Now, we are going look at some other statements.

Again, each statement is written on a card, and I would like you to sort these cards.

But this time, place the card that you think does the best job of **making you want to make and eat meals together with your 2-5 year-old child** on top. Put the one that does the second-best job underneath that one, and so on and so forth, until you get to the card that did the worst job (which should be on the bottom).

After you have done that, you will notice that each card has a letter in the lower right-hand corner. On Handout 2, please write the letters of the cards in the order in which you have stacked them. Then, we'll talk about it.

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[NOTE TO MODERATOR: To the extent possible, try to get respondents to ignore issues with grammar and/or word choice. The key is to have them focus on the concepts.]

Concept C Statements:

Cook together. Eat together. Talk together. Make mealtime a family time.

Make meals and memories together. It's a lesson they'll use for life.

Stir up some family fun. Cooking together is a lesson they'll use for life. [OR REVISED VERSION]

Make it together. Taste it together. Try new foods together.

1. Message Preferences

- a. [GO AROUND TABLE:] Which one did the best job? Take a moment and explain why you selected that one as your top choice? [PROBE: likes, main idea/takeaway]
- b. [GO AROUND TABLE:] Now, let's look at the other side of the coin. Which **ONE CARD** did not speak to you at all? [IF NECESSARY:] Which **ONE CARD** was at the bottom of your stack? Please explain why you thought it did a bad job.

2. Other measures

[GO AROUND TABLE:] Looking again at all of the cards, which ONE is the most believable?

- a. What made you select that one?

[GO AROUND TABLE] Finally, when you look at all of the cards, which ONE is the easiest for you to picture?

- a. What do you picture? What images first come to mind?
- b. Can you relate to that image? What makes you say that?
- c. What about this image is appealing to you?

3. Specific Message Probes

- a. When you look at these messages, you will notice that one says "make meals," another says "cook." When you think about getting a meal ready for your family, which word do you use – cook, prepare, make, fix?

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- b. Now, think about the times when your 2-5 year old helps you in the kitchen. What words do you use to describe this time? Is he/she helping you cook, prepare, make, fix a meal?

4. Supporting Documentation: Concept C

[NOTE TO MODERATOR: ROTATE COOKING TOGETHER AND EATING TOGETHER]

For the moment, please put those cards to the side. We are going to look at some additional information. [MODERATOR DISTRIBUTE SUPPORTING CONTENT – *COOKING TOGETHER*]. These pages include some information that has been created to go with the overall idea the messages you just read are trying to say.

I would like for you to take the next few moments to read this information and **circle** any statement, word, or phrase that you particularly like, and **draw a line through** any statement, word, or phrase that you did not like or did not understand. Then, we'll talk about them.

- a. Before we talk about specifics. What did you think of what was written on the pages? [PROBE: Interesting? Informative? Boring?]
- b. [GO AROUND TABLE] What stood out to you? Which TWO or THREE statements, phrases or words did you like best? Take a moment and explain why you chose those. [MODERATOR IDENTIFY WHAT PEOPLE CIRCLED] [**PROBE: Helpful, realistic, doable**]
- c. Now, let's look at the other side of the coin. Which statements, phrases or words did you cross out because you did not like or did not understand them? Take a moment to explain why you chose those. [MODERATOR IDENTIFY WHAT PEOPLE CROSSED-OUT]
- d. Think about the information you just read. Is it believable?
- e. Would you say this information made you more or less likely to make foods or meals with your 2-5 year-old child, or did it have not effect? What makes you say that?
- f. Let's think about making a brochure again. Remember, we have a small amount of space. From what you just read, what 1 or 2 pieces of information on this page do you think HAVE to be included? Why did you select those?

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Now I am going to show you one other piece of additional information. [MODERATOR DISTRIBUTE SUPPORTING CONTENT – *EATING TOGETHER*]. As did the other page, this was created to go with the overall idea the messages you just read are trying to communicate.

As before, please **circle** any statement, word, or phrase that you particularly like, and **draw a line through** any statement, word, or phrase that you did not like or did not understand. Then, we'll talk about them.

- a. Before we talk about specifics. What did you think of what was written on the pages? [PROBE: Interesting? Informative? Boring?]
- b. [GO AROUND TABLE] What stood out to you? Which TWO or THREE statements, phrases or words did you like best? Take a moment and explain why you chose those. [MODERATOR IDENTIFY WHAT PEOPLE CIRCLED] [**PROBE: Helpful, realistic, doable**]
- c. Now, let's look at the other side of the coin. Which statements, phrases or words did you cross out because you did not like or did not understand them? Take a moment to explain why you chose those. [MODERATOR IDENTIFY WHAT PEOPLE CROSSED-OUT]
- d. Think about the information you just read. Is it believable?
- e. Let's think about making a brochure again. Remember, we have a small amount of space. From what you just read, what 1 or 2 pieces of information on this page do you think HAVE to be included? Why did you select those?
- f. Would you say this information makes you more or less likely to eat with your 2-5 year-old child, or does it not have an effect? What makes you say that?
- g. What types of things do you say to get your kids talking at the dinner table?

[ASK AFTER LAST PIECE OF SUPPORTING CONTENT HAS BEEN DISCUSSED] Of all of the information you just read, which set of information was the most interesting to you? What makes you say that?

FALSE CLOSE

1. Tonight we discussed a number of issues. While I step out of the room for a moment to see if I need to cover any additional information, please answer the question on Handout 3. [DISTRIBUTE HANDOUT 3] The question on this handout reads, "What is the most important reason to make sure that your 2-5 year-old child eats healthfully?"

Thank you very much for your participation! Have a great evening!

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