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**USDA/FNS Evaluative Messaging
Focus Group Guide (Low-income Mothers)
Division of Feeding Responsibility**

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

[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

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.]

- b. Thank you for those answers. Now, again thinking about a typical day, what is the first word or phrase that comes to mind if I asked you to describe mealtime with your family?

- i. Why that word/phrase?
- ii. Is that all mealtimes or one in particular? Which one(s)?

III. MEALTIMES

1. Let's talk a bit more about mealtimes. Again, thinking about a typical day,

- a. How often would you say you eat breakfast as a family, if at all?
- b. How often would you say you eat lunch as a family, if at all?
- c. What about dinner?

- i. How often would you say you eat dinner as a family, if at all?

ii. [PROBE: Weekdays, weekends]

- iii. For typical dinners, does your 2-5 year old eat separately or with the family?

2. Let's talk a bit more about dinner.

- a. What are the types of foods you make for your 2-5 year old to eat at dinner time?

- b. Does your 2-5 year old typically eat the same foods the rest of the family eats at dinner?

i. [AS APPROPRIATE:] What foods are the same? What foods are different?

ii. [AS APPROPRIATE:] What are some of the reasons why your 2-5 year old eats different foods from the rest of the family [PROBE: likes/dislikes, nutrition needs]

- c. Now, when it is dinner time, who usually puts food on everyone's plate?
 - i. [PROBE: serving family style vs. placing food on plates]
 - ii. Do you let your 2-5 year old serve him/herself?
 - 1. [IF YES:] How often do you let him/her serve him/herself? When did you start letting him/her do so?
 - 2. [IF NO:] Why not?
 - 3. [IF NO:] When do you think children are old enough to serve themselves?
 - 4. [IF NO:] What do you think would happen if you let your 2-5 year old child serve themselves?
- d. How do you decide how much to serve your child?
 - i. [PROBE:] Do you ask your 2-5 year old how much he/she wants before you serve him/her? What makes you say that?
 - ii. [PROBE:] Does it depend on what the meal is? How so?

IV. EATING WHAT IS SERVED

1. In your eyes, how often, if at all, does your 2-5 year old not eat "enough" for dinner?
 - a. First, what do you define as "enough"?
 - b. What do you do in these situations? What, if anything, do you do to try to get him/her to eat more?
 - c. [IF APPROPRIATE] Is that more of everything, or more of just certain foods?
 - d. [IF APPROPRIATE] Let's pretend that I was at your home during a typical meal, and you were trying to get your 2-5 year old child to eat more of something. Before we talk about what the conversation would be like, I want you to complete a handout [DISTRIBUTE HANDOUT 1]. It has a picture of a child sitting at a table with the statement, "But I don't want to eat this, Mom," in the speech bubble. Let's pretend the picture of the mom represents you. Take a moment and write down what your typical response would be.
 - i. [GO AROUND THE TABLE:] What did you write?
 - ii. So, in your house, what are these conversations like?
 - iii. [PROBE: Do you ever offer a reward? If so, what kind?]
 - iv. [PROBE: Do you ever tell your child that they will lose a privilege if they don't eat something? If so, what type of privilege do you tell them you will take away? [PROBE: no dessert, no TV]
2. What if it is a new food, one your child has not eaten before? How hard is it to try to get your 2-5 year old child to eat a new food? What makes you say that?
 - a. What sort of things do you try to get your 2-5 year old child to eat a new food?

- b. Are these tactics similar to or different from when you are just trying to get your child to eat “enough” at dinner? How so?
3. Are there any foods that you do not allow your 2-5 year old child to eat or restrict the amount that she/he can eat? What are they? Why do you limit the amount of these foods?

V. AFFECT OF WHAT PARENTS SERVE AND HOW THEY GET THEIR CHILDREN TO EAT

1. I am going to ask you a few questions, and I want you to answer them using a scale. If a “1” means you disagree completely and a “10” means you agree completely, which number would you use to answer the following questions:
 - a. Do you think that **what** you feed your child today will affect what foods your child will like/dislike in the future? [GO AROUND ROOM AND TAKE HAND COUNT] Why did you select that number?
 - b. Do you think **how** you feed your child today will affect what foods your child will like/dislike when they are older? In other words, do you think that making your child eat something today will affect whether he/she eats when they are older? [GO AROUND ROOM AND TAKE HAND COUNT] Why did you select that number? [PROBE: affects what they like/dislike, impact in a positive way versus a negative way]

VI. STRATEGIC MESSAGES

1. Now we are going to shift gears for a moment and take a look at some statements.

Each statement is written on a card. I would like you to sort these cards.

Read all of the cards and place the card that is the **most convincing** on top. Put the one that is the second-most **convincing** underneath that one, and so on and so forth, until you get to the card with the statement that is the least **convincing** (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 A, please write the letters of the cards in the order in which you have stacked them. Then, we'll talk about it. [DISTRIBUTE HANDOUT 2]

[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.]

Division of Feeding Responsibility Statements:

INSERT STATEMENTS – IF MORE THAN 1 CONCEPT IS TESTED, CONDUCT THIS EXERCISE SEPARATELY FOR STATEMENTS OF DIFFERENT CONCEPTS (Statements based on data from May focus groups. Will forward to OMB when available.)

TEST NO MORE THAN 8 STATEMENTS AND TWO CONCEPTS, TOTAL

- a. [GO AROUND TABLE:] Which one did you find to be the most convincing? Take a moment and explain why you selected that one as your top choice? [PROBE: likes, main idea/takeaway]

- i. Did this one rise to the top, or were there others that you thought were just about as good as this one was? Which others, if any, were close to the top for you? What did you like about them?
- b. [GO AROUND TABLE:] Now, let's look at the other side of the coin. Which **ONE** did you find to be the least convincing? [IF NECESSARY:] Which **ONE** card was at the bottom of your stack? Please explain why you placed this one at the bottom
- c. Were any of the statements confusing to you? Which one(s)? What about them were confusing?
- d. How realistic did you find these statements to be?
- e. Are some statements more believable than others? Which are the most believable? The least? What makes you say that?
- f. Think about the next mealtime at home. Could you really see yourself doing what the statements say? Which statements would be the easiest to try? The hardest? What makes you say that?

2. Now, I want to ask a few more questions about these statements.

INSERT STATEMENT-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS/PROBES BASED ON FINAL LIST OF STATEMENTS.

3. Earlier, we talked about how believable these statements are, but tonight, we are just reading this information off of cards. What if you received this information in other ways? Would it matter who gave you this information?
 - a. For example, let's say a close friend or family member talked to you about what the statements were communicating. Would you be more likely to believe the information then? Would you be more likely to try them at home? What makes you say that?
 - b. What if the information came from your doctor/pediatrician?
 - c. What if it came from the government?
 - d. What if you saw this information in a brochure at a WIC Clinic? Would that make a difference? 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, "Of all of the ideas we talked about this evening, which one would most likely try in your own household?"

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