

Non-Participating Fathers Interview Protocol

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us. My name is [NAME] and this is [NAME]. We work for Child Trends, a nonprofit research center in Washington, D.C. We're interested in hearing about your experiences with [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM]. We don't work for [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM] – we have been contracted by the Administration of Children and Families (ACF) to learn more about how programs like [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM] can better address your needs as a father. As someone who is no longer participating in the program/someone who decided not to participate in all services offered by the program, we are particularly interested in hearing your feedback on [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM] and programs like this.

As we're talking today, please keep in mind there are no right or wrong answers to the questions we're going to ask. You're the expert, and we want to hear your honest answers – positive or negative. Honest feedback will help us the most. If there is a question you do not want to or do not feel comfortable answering, please let us know and we will skip to the next question. Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to stop the interview at any time. However, your opinions are important to us, so we hope you will stay for the whole time – today's conversation should take about 60 minutes, followed by a survey that will take up to 15 minutes.

What you say here will be kept private which means that your name will not be shared or associated with your opinions, and we will not share who participated in the interviews. Your responses will be combined with responses from others who are participating in these interviews and may be shared in published documents or with [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM]. Additionally, quotes from your interview may be included in published documents, but the quotes will not be attributed to you, so your information will remain private.

We will take notes and record the interview, so we can make sure that we don't miss important details. If you would like us to turn off the recorder at any point, please ask and we will do so. Only the study team will have access to the recordings. Once we capture all the information on paper, we will delete the recordings.

Have you had a chance to read the consent form [STAFF] sent by email? [WAIT FOR RESPONSE, THEN SAY:] This form covers much of what we just discussed about the goals for this study, how we will protect your privacy, and how we plan to use what we learn for our project. The consent form also has contact information for the study's Principal Investigator as well as the Institutional Review Board that is in charge of ensuring our study follows certain guidelines regarding participant rights. You can contact them with any comments or concerns you have about participating in this study. Because this is a federally-funded project, I have to read a couple of sentences to you before we begin. *According to the Paperwork Reduction Act, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB number for the described information collection is [NUMBER] and the expiration date is [DATE].*

Do you have any questions before we get started?
Do you agree to participate in this interview?
Do you agree to be recorded?

Here is a gift card to thank you for your time today. This is yours no matter whether you finish the interview or not. It is not tied to your answers in any way.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

INTRODUCTION

To get started...

- 1) We'd love to hear a little bit about your children. Specifically, how many children you have, their ages, and whether they are living with you full or part time? We would also like to know if there are any other children that live with you either full or part time?

BEING A FATHER

Thank you very much for sharing! Now we're going shift gears a little and ask you some questions about what it's like to be a father. We know that there are some easy things and some not so easy things about being a father and we'd like to talk to you about that more.

- 2) What are some of the things that are enjoyable about being a father?
 - a. **Probe:** What things are easy about being a father? [**Probe** by saying "Can you tell me more about that?"].
- 3) We know being a father can also be hard sometimes. What are some of the things that are hard or difficult about being a father? [As participant names issues, **probe** on each to make sure you understand. Sample probes are: "Tell me why you think that's a challenge" or "That's interesting. Can you tell me more about that?"].
 - a. **Probe:** What are some things that cause fathers stress?

COPARENTING RELATIONSHIPS

Thank you! Next, we're hoping to learn more about your relationships with other people who share responsibility for raising your child(ren). When we say raise, we mean helps make decisions about the child, like, around discipline, what the child will eat, and where they go to school.

- 4) Who are the people that you share responsibility for raising your child(ren) with? [CLARIFY THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE INDIVIDUAL(S) LISTED, IF NEEDED].
 - a. **Probe:** Anyone else?
- 5) We'd like to know more about what it is like to parent with each of these individuals. [IF ANY EX-PARTNERS]: Let's start with your ex-partner(s) who are the biological mother(s) of your child(ren). What is it like to parent with your ex(es)?
 - a. **Probe:** If they have trouble answering the question ask, "What is working well, and what is not working well?"

- b. **Probe:** If challenges are not mentioned, ask “Are there any difficulties parenting with your ex(es)?”
 - i. Follow up: “What do you think contributes to these challenges/successes?”
 - ii. **Probe:** What do you think would make your parenting relationships with your ex(es) stronger?

[IF HAVE A CURRENT PARTNER]: Now let’s talk about your current partner/spouse.

- 6) What is it like to parent with your current partner?
 - a. **Probe:** If they have trouble answering the question ask, “What is working well, and what is not working well?”
 - b. **Probe:** If challenges are not mentioned, ask “Are there any difficulties parenting with your ex(es)?”
 - i. Follow up: “What do you think contributes to these challenges/successes?”
 - ii. **Probe:** What do you think would make your parenting relationship with your partner stronger?

[IF LISTED OTHER COPARENTS IN Q4] Great, now let’s talk about [OTHER INDIVIDUALS LISTED IN Q4]

- 7) What is it like to parent with [OTHER INDIVIDUALS LISTED IN Q4]?
 - a. **Probe:** If they have trouble answering the question ask, “What is working well, and what is not working well?”
 - b. **Probe:** If challenges are not mentioned, ask “Are there any difficulties parenting with your ex(es)?”
 - i. Follow up: “What do you think contributes to these challenges/successes?”
 - ii. **Probe:** What do you think would make your parenting relationships with your partner stronger?

[IF PARTICIPANT MENTION MORE THAN ONE COPARENT] Okay, before we move on to talking about romantic relationships...

- 8) You mentioned [A COUPLE OF/SEVERAL] people you raise your children with. Can you tell me more about what it is like to raise your children with more than one other person?
 - a. **Probe:** What works well in that situation, and what doesn’t work well?

ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Okay, now let’s talk about your relationships with people you are dating, committed to, or married to. I will refer to these as romantic relationships.

- 9) What does a healthy romantic relationship look like to you?
- 10) We know all relationships can be challenging. What are the challenges to forming healthy romantic relationships or keeping them strong??
 - a. **Probe:** What are the sources of stress in relationships?
 - b. Follow up: What could help with [list challenges or sources of stress identified]?

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN RELATIONSHIP SERVICES

Now we'd like to ask you some questions about your participation and experiences with [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM].

- 11) How did you first hear about [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM]?
 - b. **Probe:** How long have you been in [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM]?
 - c. **Probe:** How often do you go?
- 12) When you signed up for [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM], what did you expect or hope to get out of it?
 - a. Follow up: How do you think [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM] did in terms of addressing these hopes?
 - b. **Probe:** What could they have done better?
- 13) We'd like to now talk specifically about [INSERT RELATIONSHIP SERVICES]. Did you attend of these services?
 - d. Follow up: What are some reasons you participated/didn't participate in these [services or sessions]?
 - b. [IF DID NOT ATTEND] Tell me more about that.
 - a. **Probe:** What made it difficult for you to participate in [RELATIONSHIP SERVICES]?
[IF NEEDED] Was it hard for you to get to [RELATIONSHIP SERVICES]?
 - c. Follow up: What do you think might push other fathers away or make it hard for them to participate in [RELATIONSHIP SERVICES]?
 - d. Follow up: What, if anything, could the program have done differently to make you want to participate/keep participating?
 - e. [IF ATTENDED] What made you attend [RELATIONSHIP SERVICES]?
 - i. Follow up: What did you know about it before attending?
 - ii. Follow up: What do you think would make other fathers want to participate?
 - f. [IF ATTENDED] What, if anything, did you really like about [RELATIONSHIP SERVICES]?
Was there anything you found beneficial?
 - g. [IF ATTENDED]: What, if anything, did you not like, or think could be better about [RELATIONSHIP SERVICES]? Is there anything missing?
 - h. [IF ATTENDED] Can you tell me more about what you discussed at these services?
 - i. **Probe:** Can you tell me about anything that came up specifically related to the coparenting relationships you have with the people helping you to raise your child(ren)? When we refer to coparents, we mean the individuals you identified earlier that work to help you raise your children. We will refer to your relationships with these individuals as 'coparenting relationships'.
 - ii. **Probe:** Did you discuss anything about how to manage coparenting when you have multiple coparents? [IF YES AND HAS MULTIPLE COPARENTS] How useful was this discussion to you?

- iii. **Probe:** Can you tell me about anything that came up specifically related to your romantic relationships?
- i. **Probe** [IF ATTENDED]: Tell me about the atmosphere (e.g. was it a friendly atmosphere to come to, describe the facilitation) participating in [RELATIONSHIP SERVICES]?
- j. **Probe** [IF ATTENDED]: Did you feel like what you learned was relevant to you? [IF NEEDED] Tell me more about that. Do you feel like it would be relevant to the other fathers?
- k. **Probe** [IF ATTENDED]: Did you relate to the staff and other participants? [IF NEEDED] Tell me more about that.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RELATIONSHIP SERVICES

Now we'd like to wrap up by asking you some questions about how you think programs like [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM] can improve coparenting and romantic relationship services and activities.

- 14) In your opinion, do you think [PROGRAM] should be discussing coparenting and romantic relationship topics?
- 15) [IF YES TO Q14] What are the main needs that fathers have related to **coparenting** that you think [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM] or programs like it could address?
 - a. **Probe:** What kind of services or activities related to coparenting would be most helpful?
- 16) [IF YES TO Q14] What are the main needs that fathers have related to **romantic relationships** that you think [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM] or programs like it could address?
 - a. **Follow up:** What kind of services or activities related to healthy relationships would be most helpful?
- 17) [IF NO TO Q14] Can you tell me more about that?

CLOSING

Thank you for sharing your thoughts on this. We are coming now to our last few questions.

- 18) [IF PARTICIPANT MENTIONED ANY SYSTEMS OR AGENCIES EARLIER IN THE INTERVIEW]: Earlier you mentioned [SYSTEM OR AGENCY]. Are there any ways in which [SYSTEM OR AGENCY] affects your parenting or romantic relationships? Can you think of any [other] systems that affect your parenting or romantic relationships, either positively or negatively? **[IF PARTICIPANT IS HAVING DIFFICULTY ANSWERING THIS, SAY, "For example, social systems, legal systems or police, community or school systems, child support, child protective services, domestic violence agencies, etc."]**
 - a. **Follow up:** What are the steps other systems or agencies can take to help make your coparenting or romantic relationships better?
- 19) [IF PARTICIPANT DID NOT MENTION ANY SYSTEMS OR AGENCIES EARLIER IN THE INTERVIEW]: Sometimes there are external factors that can affect people's coparenting and romantic relationships. Can you think of any external factors that affect your coparenting or romantic relationships, either positively or negatively?
 - a. **Probe:** What about systems like social, legal, community, or school systems, or specific agencies, like child protective services or child support?

20) Do you think stigma or discrimination affects your coparenting or romantic relationships? [IF YES]: In what ways?

21) Is there anything that we didn't touch on today that you want us to know? Do you have any final comments or suggestions related to getting fathers to come to the program or about the program itself?

We really appreciate you taking the time to talk with us today, thank you.