

# Participating Fathers Focus Group Protocol

## INTRODUCTION

- 1) We'd like to start by going around the room and doing introductions. Please tell us your first name and a little about your children. Specifically, how many children you have, their ages, and whether they are living with you full or part time?

## BEING A FATHER

*Thank you for sharing. We'd now like to hear from you 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.*

- 2) What do you enjoy about being a father?
  - a. **Probe:** What are some of the things that are enjoyable being a father? [As fathers list a strength, **probe** on each to make sure you understand. Sample probes are: "Tell me why you think that's a strength for fathers" or "That's interesting. Can you tell me more about that?" or "Does anyone else feel that way?"]
- 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 fathers list a challenge, **probe** on each to make sure you understand. Sample probes are: "Tell me why you think that's a challenge for fathers" or "That's interesting. Can you tell me more about that?" or "Does anyone else feel that way?"]
  - a. **Probe:** What are some things that can cause fathers stress?

## COPARENTING RELATIONSHIPS

*Next, we're hoping to learn more about fathers' relationships with other people who share responsibility for raising their children. When we say raise, we mean people who help 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 the responsibility for raising your child or children?
  - a. **Probe:** What about (ex-partners, current partners, or other relatives)?

*We'd like to know more about what it is like to parent with each of these individuals. Let's start with ex-partners who are the biological mothers of your children. In the following questions, we will refer to these individuals as exes.*

- 5) What is it like to parent with your exes?
  - a. **Probe** [IF CHALLENGES OR SUCCESSES ARE MENTIONED]: "What do you think contributes to these [INSERT SUCCESSES OR CHALLENGES]?"
  - b. **Probe** [IF CHALLENGES ARE NOT MENTIONED]: "Are there any difficulties parenting with your exes that you want to share?"
    - I. Follow up: What do you think would help make [INSERT CHALLENGE] better?
    - II. Follow up: What do you think would make your parenting relationships with your exes stronger?

Now let's talk about your current partners/spouses.

- 6) What is it like to parent with your current partners?
  - a. **Probe** [IF CHALLENGES OR SUCCESSES ARE MENTIONED]: "What do you think contributes to these [INSERT SUCCESSES OR CHALLENGES]?"
  - b. **Probe** [IF CHALLENGES ARE NOT MENTIONED]: "Are there any difficulties parenting with your current partners/spouses that you want to share?"
    - i. Follow up: What do you think would help make [INSERT CHALLENGE] better?
    - ii. Follow up: What do you think would make your parenting relationships with your current partners/spouses stronger?

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 CHALLENGES OR SUCCESSES ARE MENTIONED]: "What do you think contributes to these [INSERT SUCCESSES OR CHALLENGES]?"
  - b. **Probe** [IF CHALLENGES ARE NOT MENTIONED]: "Are there any difficulties parenting with [OTHER INDIVIDUALS LISTED IN Q4] that you want to share?"
    - i. Follow up: What do you think would help make [INSERT CHALLENGE] better?
    - ii. Follow up: What do you think would make your parenting relationships with [OTHER INDIVIDUALS LISTED IN Q4] stronger?
- 8) [IF PARTICIPANTS MENTION MORE THAN ONE COPARENT] For those of you who are raising children with more than one other person, can you tell me what that is like?
  - a. **Probe**: What works well in that situation, and what doesn't work well?

## ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Okay, now we want to talk about fathers' relationships with people they 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]?

## PERCEPTIONS ABOUT RELATIONSHIP SERVICES

Now we would like to talk about [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM].

- 11) How did you first hear about [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM]?
  - a. **Probe**: How long have you been in [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM]?
  - b. **Probe**: How often do you go?
  - c. Follow up: When you signed up for [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM], what did you expect or hope to get out of it?

- I. Follow up: How do you think [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM] did in terms of addressing these hopes?
  - i. **Probe** on specific benefits (what they learned, other benefits). Sample probes are: “What are some things you have learned in [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM]?” or “What are some things you have gained from attending [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM]?”
  - ii. **Probe**: What could they have done better?

*For the following questions, we will be asking more specifically about [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM RELATIONSHIP SERVICES]. We will be talking about times when either romantic or coparenting relationships have come up at [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM]. 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’.*

- 12) How many of you have attended any sessions or activities at [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM] where coparenting or romantic relationships were discussed—raise your hands? *Facilitator should count and state number who raise hands.*
  - a. Follow up: [FOR THOSE WHO PARTICIPATED] What types of topics were discussed? (**Probe** on both coparenting and romantic relationship services, if both are mentioned)
    - i. Follow-up: Did these topics come up in a class, lesson, or activity that was focused on these topics? Or did they come up some other way?
      1. [IF IN SOME OTHER WAY] **Probe** into what those other ways were.
  - b. Follow up: What, if anything, do you feel like you learned in [COPARENTING SERVICES]? In [ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP SERVICES]?
    - i. Follow up: Do you feel like what you learned is useful to you? [IF NEEDED]: Tell me more about that. Do you feel it would be relevant to other fathers?
  - c. Follow up: What, if anything, did you like about [RELATIONSHIP SERVICES]?
  - d. Follow up: What did you not like, or think could be better about [RELATIONSHIP SERVICES]? Is there anything missing?
    - i. **Probe**: Tell me about the atmosphere participating in [RELATIONSHIP SERVICES] (e.g., was it a friendly atmosphere to come to, describe the facilitation)?
    - ii. **Probe**: Was it easy or more difficult to connect with the staff and other participants? [IF NEEDED] Tell me more about that.
  - e. [FOR THOSE—IF ANY—WHO DID NOT PARTICIPATE IN SERVICES]: What are some reasons you didn’t participate in these [RELATIONSHIP SERVICES]?
    - i. Follow-up: Do you think services related to coparenting or romantic relationships would be useful to you? Why or why not? What do you think the program could do to support fathers in these areas that would be helpful?
- 13) [IF COPARENTING WITH MULTIPLE PEOPLE WAS AN ISSUE RAISED IN PRIOR SECTION]: Earlier we heard that fathers can sometimes work together with more than one person to raise their children – for example, an ex-partner and a current partner. Were there any conversations or activities at [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM] where issues around coparenting with multiple parents came up?

- a. Follow up: [IF CONVERSATIONS/ACTIVITIES DID ADDRESS THIS]: Were these conversations/activities helpful? Tell me more about that.
  - b. Follow up: [IF NO CONVERSATIONS/ACTIVITIES ADDRESSED THIS]: Would you like to hear more about coparenting with multiple coparents? Tell me more about that.
- 14) Are there services that coparents can participate in?
- a. [IF THERE ARE SERVICES FOR COPARENTS]
    - i. What are these services like? How do you feel about them?
    - ii. Have any of your coparents attended the services? [IF YES] How did they feel about them?
  - b. [IF THERE ARE NO SERVICES FOR COPARENTS]
    - i. Do you think it would be useful to have services coparents could participate in? Why or why not?
  - c. When should coparents be invited to join [COPARENTING SERVICE], if at all? (**Probe**: Immediately, or after the fathers have attended the service for some time)?
  - d. Would it be better to have coparents in the same room for these services, or separate?
- 15) Are there services that partners or spouses can participate in?
- a. [IF THERE ARE SERVICES FOR PARTNERS OR SPOUSES]
    - i. What are these services like? How do you feel about them?
    - ii. Have any of your partners/spouses attended the services? [IF YES] How did they feel about them?
  - b. [IF THERE ARE NO SERVICES FOR PARTNERS OR SPOUSES]
    - i. Do you think it would be useful to have services partners could participate in? Why or why not?
  - c. When should partners/spouses be invited to join [ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP SERVICE], if at all? (**Probe**: Immediately, or after the fathers have attended the service for some time)?
  - d. Would it be better to have partners/spouses in the same room for these services, or separate?

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND CLOSING

*Thank you for telling us about these services. We are coming now to our last few questions.*

- 16) In thinking about fathers like you, what do you think would make them want to participate in [RELATIONSHIP SERVICES]?
- a. **Probe**: What do you think might push other fathers away?
    - i. Follow up: What can programs do about that?
- 17) [IF PARTICIPANTS HAVE MENTIONED ANY SYSTEMS OR AGENCIES EARLIER IN THE GROUP DISCUSSION] Earlier you mentioned [SYSTEM OR AGENCY]. Are there ways in which [SYSTEM OR AGENCY] affects your coparenting or romantic relationships? Can you think of any [other] systems that affect your coparenting or romantic relationships, either positively or negatively?
- a. [IF PARTICIPANTS ARE 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."]

- 18) [IF PARTICIPANTS DID NOT MENTION ANY SYSTEMS OR AGENCIES EARLIER IN THE GROUP DISCUSSION]: Sometimes there are external factors that can affect people's coparenting and romantic relationships. Can you think of any external factors that impact 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?
- 19) Do you think stigma or discrimination affects your coparenting or romantic relationships? [IF YES]: Can you give me an example?
- 20) Is there anything that we didn't touch on today that you want us to know? Do you have any final thoughts to share with us about [PROGRAM] or [COPARENTING AND ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP SERVICES] in general?

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