

Coparents Focus Group Protocol

INTRODUCTION

- 1) We'd like to start by going around the room and doing introductions. Please tell us your first name, your favorite food, and what your relationship is to the father who is participating in [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM] and their children. For example, whether you are the children's biological mothers or if you have a different relationship to them.

BEING A COPARENT

Thank you for sharing. We'd now like to hear from you about what it's like to raise a child. We know that there are some things about raising kids that are easy and some that are not so easy.

- 2) What are some of the things that are enjoyable about being a parent or parent-figure (someone who plays a significant role in raising a child)?
 - a. **Probe:** What things are easy about it? [**Probe** by saying "Can you tell me more about that?"]
- 3) We know being a parent or parent-figure can be challenging. What are some of the things that are hard or difficult about it? [As participants list an issue, **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 parents or parent-figures stress?

COPARENTING RELATIONSHIPS

Next, we're hoping to learn more about some of the relationships in your life, specifically your relationships with the fathers who are enrolled in [PROGRAM NAME]. We will refer to these as "coparenting relationships" in the next questions.

- 4) What is it like to parent with the father of your children or the children you help raise? As a reminder, here we're interested in hearing about the father enrolled in [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM].
 - a. **Probe:** What kinds of interactions do you have?
 - b. **Probe:** [IF CHALLENGES OR SUCCESSES ARE MENTIONED, **probe** further into what the challenges/positive aspects are, by asking] "What do you think works well/does not work well?"
 - c. Follow up: [IF CHALLENGES ARE NOT MENTIONED, ASK] "All parents face challenges with others who help them raise their children. Are there any difficulties parenting with the fathers of your children or other children you help raise?"
 - d. Follow up: What do you think would help make [INSERT CHALLENGE] better?
 - i. **Probe:** What do you think would make your relationship with the fathers you parent with stronger?
 - e. Follow up [IF POSITIVE ASPECTS ARE NOT MENTIONED, ASK]: "Can you describe what works well about your parenting relationship with the fathers you parent with?"

COPARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAMMING

Now we are interested in learning more about the ways you are or could be included in services or activities offered at [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM]. In the next section we will use the term coparents to refer to you as individuals who share responsibility for parenting or raising a child or children.

- 5) Does [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM] offer services or activities that you, as coparents, could attend?
If participants say no, go to Q14 in the Looking Ahead section.
- 6) [IF SERVICES/ACTIVITIES ARE OFFERED]: What are these services?
 - a. **Probe** “Can you tell me more about that?” or “What does that look like?” *Facilitator should write down all services/activities mentioned on a flipchart paper or board and aim to understand the coparents’ role in these activities.*
 - b. **Probe** for whether services are offered for coparents separately or with the father.
- 7) [IF SERVICES/ACTIVITIES ARE OFFERED]: How did you first hear about [services mentioned in Q6]? *Facilitator should reference flipchart or board from Q6.*
- 8) By raising your hands, how many of you have participated in these services? *Facilitator should state the number raising their hands.*
 - a. [IF ATTENDED] How many classes/activities did you attend?
 - b. Tell me about some of the reasons you do or do not attend the services.
- 9) [IF ATTENDED]: What do you discuss or do in these classes/activities?
 - a. **Probe:** Can you tell me about anything that came up specifically related to coparenting relationships? *Facilitator note: we want to know about what is discussed related to the relationship with the father in the program, including anything related to coparenting more broadly (e.g., communication, getting along well enough to coparent).*

COPARENT ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATION OF SERVICES (COPARENT AND/OR HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP)

- 10) [IF ATTENDED] What, if anything, did you learn?
 - a. **Follow up:** Do you feel like what you learned was useful to you? [IF NEEDED] Tell me more about that. Do you feel like it would be relevant to the other coparents?
- 11) [IF ATTENDED]: What, if anything, did you really like about [SERVICES MENTIONED IN Q6]? *Facilitator should reference flipchart or board from Q6.*
- 12) [IF ATTENDED]: What, if anything, did you not like, or think could be better about [INSERT SERVICES MENTIONED IN Q6]? Is there anything missing? *Facilitator should reference flipchart or board from Q6.*
 - a. **Probe:** Tell me about the atmosphere participating in [SERVICES MENTIONED IN Q5]? (e.g., was it a friendly atmosphere to come to, describe the facilitation)?
 - b. **Probe:** Was it easy or more difficult to connect with the staff and other participants? [IF NEEDED]: Tell me more about that.
- 13) [IF ATTENDED] What do the fathers you parent with think about you attending these services?

LOOKING AHEAD

The next few questions are about things that programs could do to support coparents.

14) What could [PROGRAM NAME] or programs like it do to help support coparenting relationships?

Probe: What kind of services or activities related to coparenting would be most helpful?

- a. **Probe:** What do you think these kinds of services or activities should look like? **Probe** for number of sessions/classes they'd ideally attend, whether they'd attend with the father or separately, and what topics the services would cover.
- b. **Follow up:** Now thinking about the fathers you parent with, what services or activities do you think would be most helpful for [PROGRAM NAME] to offer to them?
- c. **Follow up:** If these services or activities existed, how could [PROGRAM NAME] or programs like it encourage fathers to participate?

CLOSING

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

15) [IF PARTICIPANTS MENTIONED ANY SYSTEMS OR AGENCIES EARLIER IN THE GROUP DISCUSSION]:

Earlier you mentioned [SYSTEM OR AGENCY]. Are there any ways in which [SYSTEM OR AGENCY] affects your coparenting relationships? Can you think of any [other] systems or agencies that affect your coparenting relationships, either positively or negatively? **[IF PARTICIPANTS ARE HAVING DIFFICULTY ANSWERING THIS, SAY, "For example, social systems, legal systems, community or school systems, child support, child protective services, domestic violence agencies, etc."]**

16) [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 relationships. Can you think of any external factors that affect your coparenting relationships, either positively or negatively?

- a. **Probe:** What about systems or agencies like social, legal, community, or school systems, or specific agencies, like child support, child protective services, or domestic violence agencies?

17) 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 [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM] or [COPARENTING SERVICES]?

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