

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 the services [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM] provides, your experiences with those services, and about how it might better serve fathers like you. We don't work for [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM] – we have been contracted by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to learn more about programs like [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM]. The study's overall goal is to better understand how fatherhood programs support and can better support fathers' healthy coparenting and romantic relationships.

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.

Before we start, I'd like to check to see if you received the consent form we sent?

[IF NO]: [GATHER INFORMATION NEEDED TO RESEND THE CONSENT FORM AND TELL PARTICIPANT WE WILL BE SENDING IT].

[IF YES]: Have you had a chance to read it? [WAIT FOR RESPONSE]

[IF PARTICIPANT **DID NOT** RECEIVE OR **HAS NOT** READ CONSENT] OK, I will read it to you. [READ CONSENT FORM, THEN PROCEED TO "ALL PARTICIPANTS" SECTION BELOW].

[IF PARTICIPANT **HAS** RECEIVED/READ CONSENT] Great. I'll just briefly summarize some of the main points from the consent form.

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 [**FOR FATHERS RECENTLY RELEASED FROM PRISON ONLY**: and your decision to participate in this study will not impact your parole or probation in any way]. 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 may take up to 90 minutes, followed by a survey that may take up to 15 minutes.

What you say here will be kept private. No one outside the study team will have access to the information you share with us. 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 aggregate in published documents or with [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM]. 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.

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.

[ALL PARTICIPANTS] 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 0970-0540 and the expiration date is 02/28/2021. If you have comments regarding this estimated interview length or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the interview length, please send them to Mindy Scott at Child Trends, 7315 Wisconsin Ave, Suite 1200W, Bethesda MD 20814; Attn: OMB-PRA [NUMBER].*

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Do you agree to participate in this interview?

Do you agree to be recorded?

INTRODUCTION

1) We'd like to start by learning a little bit about your children. Could you tell me how many children you have, their ages, and whether they are living with you 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.

2) What are some of the things you enjoy about being a father?

3) We know being a father can also be hard sometimes. What are some of the things that you find hard or difficult about being a father? [**Probe** by saying "Can you tell me more about that?"]

a. **Probe:** What are some things that can cause you or other fathers stress?

COPARENTING RELATIONSHIPS

Next, we're hoping to learn more about your relationships with other people who share responsibility for raising your 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. We will refer to your relationships with these individuals as 'coparenting' or 'parenting' relationships.

- 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. [IF PARTICIPANT MENTIONED EX-PARTNERS] 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 ex(es)?
a. **Probe:** [IF THEY HAVE TROUBLE ANSWERING THE QUESTION] What is working well, and what is not working well?
b. **Probe:** [IF CHALLENGES ARE NOT MENTIONED]: Are there any difficulties parenting with your ex(es)?
I. Follow up: What do you think contributes to these [INSERT CHALLENGES OR SUCCESSES]?
II. Follow up: What do you think would make your parenting relationships with your ex(es) stronger?

[IF PARTICIPANT MENTIONED CURRENT PARTNER] Now let's talk about your current partner/spouse.

- 6) What is it like to parent with your current partner/spouse?
a. **Probe:** [IF THEY HAVE TROUBLE ANSWERING THE QUESTION] What is working well, and what is not working well?
b. **Probe:** [IF CHALLENGES ARE NOT MENTIONED]: Are there any difficulties parenting with your current partner/spouse?
i. Follow up: What do you think contributes to these [INSERT SUCCESSES OR CHALLENGES]?
ii. Follow up: What do you think would make your parenting relationships with your current partners/spouses stronger?

[IF PARTICIPANT MENTIONED OTHER INDIVIDUALS] 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] What is working well, and what is not working well?
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 contributes to these [INSERT SUCCESSES OR CHALLENGES]?

- ii. Follow up: What do you think would make your parenting relationships with [OTHER INDIVIDUALS LISTED IN Q4] stronger?
- 8) [IF PARTICIPANT MENTIONS MORE THAN ONE COPARENT] You talked about 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?
- 9) In what ways have your coparenting relationships been affected by any changes or disruptions caused by the coronavirus?
- a. **Probe**: How, if at all, have you had to change how you coparent because of changes or disruptions caused by the coronavirus? [IF NEEDED]: For example, have your and [COPARENT(S)] responsibilities for taking care of your child shifted or changed? If so, how?
 - b. Follow up: Are there any skills or strategies that you would like to learn to help navigate these changes?

ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

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

- 10) What does a healthy romantic relationship look like to you?
- 11) We know all relationships can be challenging. What are some challenges you have faced in forming healthy romantic relationships or keeping them strong?
- a. **Probe**: What are the sources of stress in your relationships?
 - b. Follow up: What could help with these challenges or sources of stress?
- 12) If you are in a relationship right now, in what ways has your romantic relationship been affected by any changes or disruptions caused by the coronavirus?
- a. Follow up: Are there any skills or strategies that you would like to learn to help navigate these changes to your romantic relationship?

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT RELATIONSHIP SERVICES

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

- 13) 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?
- 14) 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/is doing in terms of addressing these hopes?

- b. **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]?”
- c. **Probe:** What could they do/have done better?

15) *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. Have you attended any sessions or activities at [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM] where coparenting or romantic relationships were discussed?*

- a. Follow up: [IF FATHER HAS 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.
 - ii. Follow up: What, if anything, do you feel like you learned in [COPARENTING SERVICES]? In [ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP SERVICES]?
 - 1. 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?
 - 2. Follow up: Have you found yourself using any of the skills you learned about coparenting or romantic relationships from [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM] because of any changes or disruptions caused by the coronavirus? If so, can you tell me about how or why you used these skills?
 - iii. Follow up: What, if anything, did you like about [RELATIONSHIP SERVICES]?
 - iv. Follow up: What did you not like, or think could be better about [RELATIONSHIP SERVICES]? Is there anything missing?
 - 1. **Probe:** Tell me about the atmosphere participating in [RELATIONSHIP SERVICES] (e.g., was it a friendly atmosphere to come to, describe the facilitation)?
 - 2. **Probe:** Was it easy or more difficult to connect with the staff and other participants? [IF NEEDED] Tell me more about that.
- b. Follow up: [IF FATHER 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?

16) [IF COPARENTING WITH MULTIPLE PEOPLE WAS AN ISSUE RAISED IN PRIOR SECTION]: Earlier we talked about working together with more than one person to raise your child/ren. 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.

17) 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?

18) Are there services that current partners or spouses can participate in?

- a. [IF THERE ARE SERVICES FOR CURRENT PARTNERS OR SPOUSES]
 - i. What are these services like? How do you feel about them?
 - ii. Has your partner/spouse attended the services? [IF YES] How did they feel about them?
- b. [IF THERE ARE NO SERVICES FOR CURRENT PARTNERS OR SPOUSES]
 - i. Do you think it would be useful to have services that partners/spouses 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.

19) 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?

20) [IF PARTICIPANTS HAVE MENTIONED ANY SYSTEMS OR AGENCIES EARLIER]: 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. **Probe:** [IF PARTICIPANTS ARE HAVING DIFFICULTY ANSWERING] For example, social systems, legal systems or police, community or school systems, child support, child protective services, domestic violence agencies, etc.
- b. **Follow up:** What are the steps other systems or agencies can take to help make your coparenting or romantic relationships better?

21) [IF PARTICIPANTS DID NOT MENTION ANY SYSTEMS OR AGENCIES EARLIER]: Sometimes there are external factors that can affect people's coparenting and romantic relationships. We've already talked about how any changes or disruptions caused by the coronavirus have affected your coparenting and romantic relationships. Can you think of any other 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?

22) Do you think stigma or discrimination affects your coparenting or romantic relationships?

- a. **Probe:** [IF YES] Can you give me an example?

23) 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 [FATHERHOOD PROGRAM] or [COPARENTING AND ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP SERVICES] in general?

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

Before you go, we have a quick survey we'd like to complete with you. [ADMINISTER BRIEF QUESTIONNAIRE]