

# Attachment B. Family Focus Group Guide

## Focus group for families

This protocol will be used to talk to two groups of participants: MIECHV-funded home visiting program participants, and families not participating in home visiting but who have similar shared experiences as participants. Throughout the protocol, we use three headings to indicate which group(s) of participants will respond to the questions that follow:

- o For all families
- o For families participating in home visiting
- o For families not participating in home visiting

## Introduction

Hello, thank you for taking the time to speak to us today. My name is [NAME OF INTERVIEWER] and I'm with Child Trends. We were contracted by the Health Resources and Services Administration, or HRSA, to learn about how home visiting can address challenges from COVID-19. Specifically, we are learning about how home visiting can help address health inequities arising from COVID-19, including how home visiting programs have supported families in your community. Understanding your experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic is very important to the study.

We plan to record this focus group, but the information you share today will not be identified in any recordings, notes, or transcriptions. The transcript from this focus group will only be seen by the study team. Only the study team will have access to this information, and your individual answers will not affect any services you may be receiving. Researchers within Child Trends will analyze the data, and your identity and responses will not be included in any reports. We will also plan to take out any language that could possibly identify you in some way.

Before we start, I would like to set a couple of guidelines for our conversation today. First, there are no right or wrong answers and we are interested in hearing both positive and negative comments and opinions – or whatever you think is important to share. Second, I ask that you wait until one person has finished speaking before you comment. Third, some questions in our discussion ask you to share about your experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and may be upsetting for some people. It is up to you to share as you feel comfortable. You do not have to answer any questions you don't want to, and you are free to leave the discussion at any time. Lastly, we ask all participants to please respect the privacy of other focus group members by not disclosing any content discussed during the focus group.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Are you willing to take part in the focus group? By agreeing, you are providing consent for us to record the call.

Let's do introductions before we begin. Please tell us your name and one word that describes your community.

## Experiences during COVID-19

### For all families:

Today we will talk about some of your experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. As we go, we will do an activity. Before we get started, since so much time has passed since the start of pandemic, we want to set the scene by reviewing some of the major milestones over the last 2 and a half years.

**FACILITATOR'S NOTE: Share the following events on a paper timeline or via slides.**

Key pandemic milestones:

- March 2020: COVID-19 pandemic began in the US, shutdowns and “social distancing” begin; many schools and child care facilities close
- April 2020: Many people begin wearing masks in public spaces
- November 2020: President Biden is elected into office
- Early 2021: Vaccines became widely available for adults (all adults eligible in April)
- Summer/fall 2021: Delta variant peaks
- November 2021: Vaccines become widely available for kids ages 5-11
- Winter 2021/2022: Omicron variant peaks
- Spring 2022: Restrictions begin lifting

1. Based on your experiences and your memories of the pandemic so far, what is missing from this list of milestones? What other events were important to you and your family, or within your community?
2. Thinking back since the start of the pandemic, how concerned have you been about getting sick with COVID-19 yourself or about someone in your family getting sick?
  - How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your sense of safety, if at all?
    - o How has this changed over time, if at all?
  - Have you or anyone in your family been sick or hospitalized with COVID-19?
    - o Have you lost any family members to COVID-19?
    - o What impact did these experiences have on you, if any?
3. At different times during the COVID-19 pandemic we have experienced social distancing, stay-at-home orders, quarantines, and the shutdown of businesses, schools, and child care. How have you and your family been affected by these measures, if at all?
  - What impact have they had on your financial situation, if any?
  - What impact has the pandemic had on your housing situation, if any?
4. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your family dynamics, if at all?
  - If you have children, how has it impacted the role of older adults, like your children's grandparents, or others with medical conditions in your family?
  - If your child/ren's father or father figure doesn't live with you, how has the pandemic impacted the role he plays in your family?
5. In what ways have you noticed the pandemic affecting your health, including your physical and mental health, if at all?
  - How has the pandemic affected your experiences of medical conditions besides COVID-19?

- How has the pandemic affected your experiences of stress, depression, anxiety, or isolation?
  - How has the pandemic affected the mental health of your family members, including the health of your children and partners?
6. We'd like to ask about your thoughts and experiences receiving COVID-19 vaccinations. As a reminder, we are interested in hearing everyone's perspectives, and you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to. Have you or anyone in your family been vaccinated against COVID-19?
- If yes, what motivated you to get vaccinated?
  - If no, why have you not been vaccinated?
7. Currently, what needs does your family have, if any?
- What physical or mental health needs do you have, if any?
  - What other needs do you have, if any? For example, needs related to housing, paying bills, accessing food, employment, transportation, accessing child care, or accessing social support.
  - How have your family's needs changed since the pandemic began, if at all?
8. What barriers to meeting these needs have you faced, if any? Some examples of barriers could include not knowing what resources are available to meet your needs, not having access to transportation, language barriers, scheduling conflicts, services that are closed or have long wait lists, , or others.
- What has been the impact of these barriers on you and your family?

**For families not participating in home visiting services:**

9. We'd like to ask about your experiences with barriers related to structural racism or barriers related to your identity or other lived experiences. By "structural racism," we are referring to the different ways that systems in society promote racism or discrimination, including the housing system, education system, criminal justice and legal system, health care system, and the media. You may use other terms or discuss in other ways. Are any of the barriers discussed related to structural racism or other inequities in your community?

## Experiences with home visiting

**For families participating in home visiting services:**

Now we'd like to hear more about your experiences receiving home visiting services during the pandemic.

10. When did you sign up for home visiting?
- a. Were the visits virtual or in person when you started?
  - b. [If they were in person when they started] Was there a transition to virtual visits at any time? If so, please describe what that was like.
11. How has your home visitor supported you in meeting your family's needs during the pandemic, if at all?

- How has your home visitor helped you meet your needs related to mental and physical health? For example, how have they helped you meet needs related to housing, food, and health care?
  - How has your home visitor helped you to overcome the barriers to meeting your needs that we talked about earlier, if at all?
  - What form of support from your home visitor has been most helpful?
  - What form of support from your home visitor has been least helpful?
12. What needs have you had during the pandemic that your home visitor has not helped you meet, if any?
- Have you discussed these needs with your home visitor?
    - o If yes, what was their response?
    - o If no, why not?
  - What type of support would you have wanted from your home visitor to help you meet these needs, if any?
13. We'd like to ask about your experiences with barriers related to structural racism or barriers related to your identity or other lived experiences. By "structural racism," we are referring to the different ways that systems in society promote racism or discrimination, including the housing system, education system, criminal justice and legal system, health care system, and the media. You may use other terms or discuss in other ways. How often do you talk with your home visitor about how your needs, and the barriers you have faced in meeting them, are related to structural racism? How often do you talk with your home visitors about barriers related to your identity or other lived experiences? These could include barriers related to your race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability status, nationality, or other characteristics.
- If you have talked with your home visitor about this:
    - o How have these conversations affected your ideas about this topic, if at all?
    - o Were you comfortable talking about this topic?
  - If you have not talked with your home visitor about this:
    - o Would you be interested in having a conversation on this topic with them?
    - o Would you be comfortable having a conversation on this topic with them?
14. In general, what have been some positive parts of your experience with home visiting during the pandemic that we haven't discussed already, if any?
15. In general, what have been some negative parts of your experiences with home visiting during the pandemic that we haven't discussed already, if any?

## Family network mapping activity

As a reminder, one of the goals of this study is to inform a more responsive home visiting system and more equitable health and family support systems. We're going to do an interactive activity to better understand the available services and resources in your community and your experiences using these services. We'll start by reviewing a list of services and resources developed with the help of key informants and our community researchers. Then, we'll use the paper, post-it notes and sticky notes available to you to complete the activity.

### For all families:

16. Now, take out your own poster papers, post-it notes, and markers (or virtual equivalents), and we will do an activity together. Of the services and resources listed on the flip

chart/Jam Board, which have you used or accessed since the pandemic began? Write these services/resources on separate post-it notes and place them on your poster paper.

**For all families:**

17. Thinking back to the process of enrolling in the services you listed on your poster paper, what were your experiences like?
18. Next, think about your experiences with each of the services you've used. For each post-it note on your paper, add a colored sticker that matches how you feel about the service or resource. Use a green sticker for services or resources you feel mostly positive about, a red sticker for ones you feel mostly negative about, and a yellow sticker for services you feel neutrally or have mixed feelings about. When you're deciding what color sticker to use, you should go with your gut feeling, and think about things like how much of a hassle it was to access the services, the kind of interactions you've had with employees, and what communication is like with staff.

**For families not participating in home visiting services:**

- a. What has prevented you from participating in home visiting services?
19. In general, what makes you feel like you have had a positive experience with a service or resource?
20. In general, what makes you feel like you have had a negative experience with a service or resource?

**For families participating in home visiting services:**

21. Now, look at your paper again, and add a purple sticker to every service that your home visitor has helped you with in any way. For example, helping you by referring you, helping you to access the service, helping you to troubleshoot problems, etc.

## Conclusion

**For all families:**

22. Lastly, we want to finish on a positive note. During the pandemic, what about your community, your family, or yourself have made it easier to cope or be resilient, if anything?
  - How has the culture of your community contributed to its resilience, if at all?
  - How have traditions in your community contributed to its resilience, if at all?
  - How have religion and religious institutions in your community contributed to its resilience, if at all?
23. What questions or topics that we discussed today were most important to you? Which were least important?
24. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us that we haven't talked about already?

Thank you all for your time today! In appreciation of your time, we will be sending each of you a \$75 e-gift card to Amazon.