

INSTRUMENT 4: PARENT FOCUS GROUP FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

The Consumer Education and Parental Choice in Early Care and Education research team will use this Focus Group Facilitator Guide to conduct focus groups with parents/guardians of young children. The guide is written to accommodate a variety of different scenarios and includes a bank of questions and probes from which the Facilitator can choose based on who is in the focus group. Some focus groups may include only parents/guardians receiving child care subsidies, some groups could target parents/guardians who have accessed or interacted with a particular consumer education tool or resource to support their child care search and selection, whereas some groups may include a broader group of parents/guardians with young children to learn about their awareness of consumer education resources in their community. This protocol may be adapted for one-on-one interviews with parents/guardians in cases where a focus group is not possible.

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 90 minutes per response, including the time for introductions and completing the focus group. This information collection is voluntary. 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 Office of Management and Budget (OMB) control number. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to: NORC at the University of Chicago (Attn: Rupa Datta) 55 E. Monroe St, 30th Floor, Chicago, IL 60603.

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Consumer Education and Parental Choice in Early Care and Education Focus Group Facilitator's Guide

[Note: The interviewer will not read words in brackets. These are meant to be instructions to guide the interviewer.]

Hello and welcome, everyone.

Consent Language

1. *(Who is doing the research and funding it)* My name is [NAME], and my colleague here is [NAME]. We both work at the Urban Institute, a nonprofit research organization in Washington, DC. We have been engaged by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to conduct a research study to learn more about parents' experiences looking for and selecting child care. We have invited you here today to participate in a 90-minute discussion about your experiences.

Before we start, let me review a few points.

2. *(Voluntary)* First, your participation in this group is entirely voluntary. You are free to leave at any time and skip any question you don't want to answer.
3. *(If virtual meeting)* Please make sure you are in a private place where others cannot hear the discussion to protect the privacy of others here.
4. *(Privacy)* Our research team will keep the information you share with us private to the extent permitted by law. This means that when we write reports about what we hear during focus groups, all responses will be "anonymous"; nobody's name will appear. If we quote something you say, we will never use your name or other information in a way that someone could identify you. So, you can be as open as possible in sharing your thoughts with us. The only exception to the privacy rule is if you share that you intend to harm yourself or others, or that you or your children are being harmed or are at great risk of harm. Researchers may be required to take steps, including reporting to authorities, if there is an unsafe situation.
5. We cannot guarantee that other participants of this focus group will protect your privacy like the research team will. So, please keep that in mind when deciding whether to respond to a particular question and when deciding what you want to share. We will encourage you all to respect one another by keeping the information shared inside this group private. Please do not talk to others outside of this group about what you heard here today.
6. *(What we will do with the data)* We will take all the information you share with us today and combine it with information other people share, and then we'll write and publish a study report. Again, we will never use your name in our reports or describe you in a way that someone could identify you and what you shared.

7. *(Risks and benefits)* There are minimal risks to participating in this group. If you share something personal and sensitive, such as something about your child care provider, there is a risk of reputational harm if that information is shared beyond this group. However, you may benefit from sharing your personal experience and hearing from others, knowing this information will be shared with federal and state administrators who care about improving child care for families like yours. After completing the focus group, you will receive a \$60 gift card as a thank-you. We'll share more about that at the end.
8. *(Recording)* We're recording the session so we have a record of what you share for our data analysis. No one will have access to the recordings besides our research team, and your name will never be connected to the recording or notes. We will delete the recording once our analysis is complete. If you are not okay with being recorded, please let us know now so that you can be excused from the group.

At this time, I will ask for each of you to give your verbal consent to participate. You can unmute yourself and say, "Yes," to confirm that "yes" you understand the requirements and would like to participate. [*Confirm each person say "yes" and then proceed.*]

Additional Instructions

Okay, great. A few other things to keep in mind:

If virtual meeting:

- If you'd like, you can rename yourself in Zoom so others can refer to you by the name you'd like to be called. You may simply use your initials, first name, or a different name if you prefer not to show your full name to the group. [*Review instructions on renaming in Zoom if needed.*]
- When you are not speaking, please keep yourself on mute by pushing the little mute button of the bottom of your screen.

For all focus groups:

- We ask you to please put your cell phones on "vibrate/silent" mode to not disrupt the conversation.
- We understand emergencies come up, so just excuse yourself if you need to take care of something. If you need to use the restroom, please do so at any time; you do not need to ask permission.
- We would like to encourage everyone to participate, because these groups work best when everyone contributes. You don't have to answer each and every question.
- But if some of you are shy or don't get a chance to speak, I may call on you to give you a turn, because I'd like to know what everyone here thinks. Naturally, some of us like to share more than others do, so just be mindful to give others a turn.
- There are no "right" or "wrong" answers to the questions I'll be asking you today. Please feel free to share your views, even if they are different from what others have said. We want to hear your thoughts and opinions, whether they are positive or negative.

- We have many topics to cover, so I may have to interrupt from time to time and move us along to another topic. But don't let me cut you off. If there's something important you want to say, let me know before we change the subject.

Do you have any questions? Okay, great.

I'm going to start the recording now.

[Start audio recording].

By a show of hands, have any of you ever been in a "focus group" before?

Just so you know, a "focus group" is an informal discussion with a facilitator (me) who will guide the group through a series of questions about a special topic, in this case—looking for child care. This focus group and others we are doing in your state are an important part of our study. We are here to learn directly from all of you about your experiences. Over the next 90 minutes, we will ask you questions about how you found your child care provider, the resources that were helpful or not helpful as you looked for care, and recommendations you have to make it easier for parents. *[Add content based on the consumer education innovation being examined.]*

SECTION 1. INTRODUCTIONS

1. To start, let's go around the room and each introduce ourselves. You can tell us your name, how long you've lived in this area, and a little about your family, such as how many children you have, their ages, and if they are in school, a child care program, or some kind of in-home care with a relative or neighbor. I'll start. *[Facilitators introduce themselves to model for group.]*

SECTION 2. CHILD CARE SEARCH EXPERIENCE

2. Great. Thank you for sharing. Next, I'd like to talk about looking for child care.

Think back to when you looked for child care and ended up picking the programs and caregivers that you use now. [If you're not using child care right now, that's fine, too. We still want to hear about your recent experiences looking for care.]

Let's go around and have you each share your story. Tell us why you needed care at the time and what you did to look for care. Share anything you remember about how you learned about these programs and caregivers and that they could care for your children. Maybe you saw an advertisement. Maybe your friend recommended them. Maybe you searched online. Who would like to start?

SECTION 3. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

3. Parents make decisions all the time. Like what kind of diapers to buy, what to feed their children, what TV shows are okay for children to watch. We use information to help us make

those decisions—sometimes it is based on what we learned from our family or experiences our friends have shared, or something we read or heard on the TV or radio. We get information from all kinds of places, all the time.

We are interested in knowing about all the people and places where you've ever gotten information about child care. Who have you talked to? Where have you looked?

[Facilitator Instructions: Wait until everyone who seems interested has contributed. If not mentioned, use the following probes to learn more about each participant's experiences.]

- a. Did you hear about any of your child care providers from someone you know? Like a recommendation from a friend or neighbor? A parent group?
 - b. Did you see any of your providers listed or advertised somewhere? If you remember, where was that—a sign on the street, on a community bulletin board, on a bus or subway, on the radio or TV, where you go to worship?
 - c. Did you learn about any of your providers on social media, like Facebook? Which sites?
 - d. Have you ever posted on social media to ask about where to look or to get recommendations?
 - e. Have you ever posted an announcement on a website that you were looking for a caregiver, like on Care.com?
 - f. Was anyone given a list of child care providers from someone in your community? If you remember, where did the list come from? *[If group includes parents receiving subsidies, probe if the local subsidy program office provided a list of providers or any referrals.]*
 - g. Did any kind of agency help you learn about programs? If you remember, what kind of agency was it?
 - Have any of you ever received help from a child care resource and referral agency? In your area, this may be called _____.
 - h. Did you search online? What websites did you use?
 - i. Have any of you ever used your state's child care search website [NAME OF WEBSITE] to look for child care?
 - [If yes]*
 - How did you come across it?
 - Did you find the information on [STATE SEARCH WEBSITE] useful?
 - What was useful/not useful about?
 - How did you use the information you found?
4. Thinking back, what did you want to know about the different programs and people who could provide care? What questions did you ask or wonder about? Who wants to start?
- a. Who/what resources were most helpful in answering your questions, and why?
 - b. Were any resources you used not helpful at all or confusing? Why?
 - c. Which questions felt difficult to find answers to?
 - d. What information was hard to find?
5. Now, I want you to think about after you started using your child care provider.

- a. Were there things you learned about that you wished you knew earlier? And if yes, what are those things?
[Probe if participants mention possibly changing providers and where they looked for information to switch to a new provider.]
6. If a close friend with a child the same age as yours asked you where to go for information about finding child care, what would you recommend, and why?
[Probe on different sources group identified; e.g., word-of-mouth recommendations, certain websites.]
 - a. What makes it trustworthy? How did you know you could trust that resource?
 - b. How did you know that information was reliable and accurate? *[If a website, probe if they know whether information is updated regularly and checked by experts or monitored by government agency.]*
7. Are there any sources of information that you **wouldn't** suggest that your friend use? And if so, why? What makes a good source for child care information?
[Depending on sources mentioned, probe on other sources not mentioned.]
 - a. What about websites where you can search?
 - b. What about social media, like Facebook groups?
 - c. What about calling a child care resource and referral agency in your community?
 - d. What about asking your pediatrician or other health care provider?

SECTION 4. EXPERIENCE WITH AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE SELECTED CONSUMER EDUCATION

STRATEGY *[To be asked of focus group participants that have seen/used/participated in the innovative or promising strategy we are focused on studying.]*

Everyone in this focus group has been invited because you have *[participated in/used/seen]* [NAME OF PROGRAM OR STRATEGY] in the last *[give time frame]*. We will ask you some questions about your experiences and what you think about it. There are no right or wrong answers. The information you provide will be used to help us learn about what you thought was most helpful, and least helpful, and what you think would be more helpful.

1. To start, tell me how you learned about [STRATEGY]. Where did you first see it or hear about it? How long ago was that?
2. Tell me more about [STRATEGY]. What information does it provide?
3. How did you use the information you got from it? *[Probe, depending on strategy; e.g., did it teach you about something? Did it help you narrow down child care options?]*
4. Did you find the information it provided useful? What was useful/not useful about it?
 - a. Did you find information or learn something that you didn't already know? Were you specifically looking for that information?
5. What do you like best about [STRATEGY]?

6. What do you like least about [STRATEGY]?
 - a. Was there anything missing that you wished it had?
 - b. Was there anything confusing or hard to understand?
7. If you could make one recommendation about how to improve [STRATEGY], what would it be?
8. Have you ever recommended [STRATEGY] to a friend, or would you? Why or why not?
9. What types of families do you think would benefit the most from [STRATEGY]? Why is that?
10. What else would you like to tell us [STRATEGY] that we did not ask?

SECTION 5. CLOSING

1. What do you think is the most useful thing that could be done to help other parents like you learn about and find child care?
2. How can information about child care options be improved? Does the information need to be more accurate, easier to find, provided to parents earlier? *[Probe on dimensions of information: format/mode, availability, ease of access, content, accuracy, quality, timeliness, language.]*
3. Anything else you want to share about finding care?

[Facilitator will distribute Instrument 5: Self-Administered Questionnaire.]

Thank you so much, everyone.

For virtual meeting:

Before we end, I'm going to put a link in the Chat box that will take you to a brief online survey that asks a few questions about you and your family. This helps us with our analysis, so we know a bit more about the people who joined this group. We'd appreciate it if you could fill this out before leaving. This will be anonymous and not be connected back to you and your name. I will keep the Zoom meeting open while you fill this out in case you need any help.

Also, as a thank-you for participating, we will send a Visa e-gift to the email address you provided when you signed up to participate in this study. Please check your email inboxes and junk folders for a message with the e-gift card. You can use this gift card for any online purchases. You should receive it within the next two weeks. If you don't receive it or have any questions, please contact us at cepc@urban.org. I will put this email address in the Chat box for you.

We'll end now and you may click to complete the brief online survey. Thank you again!

For in-person meeting:

Before we end, I'm going to hand out a sheet with a few questions about you and your family. We'd appreciate it if you could fill this out before leaving. This will be anonymous, so please do not put your name on it.

We're also handing out a receipt for your gift card. You can write your initials on the receipt and today's date, [DATE]. We don't need your full name on the receipt. The receipt tells us you accepted the gift card. When you are done responding to the questions and initialing the receipt, you can hand both to me or [partner's name], and then you're done. Thank you again.