

Measuring, Supporting, and Understanding Child and Caregiver well-being through Employment and Self-Sufficiency research (Measuring SUCCESS): Focus Group Discussion Guide

Introductory Script and Verbal Consent to Participate in a Focus Group

Hello, my name is _____ and I'm here to lead our discussion today. I'm going to start us off by explaining the purpose of today's activities and going over your rights as participants, and then get into a form we have for you and some questions because we are here to learn from you. We would like this to be a conversation.

Thank you for being part of this focus group. I work for a company called Mathematica. Mathematica is an independent research organization that does research studies under contract to the federal government. This study is sponsored by the Office of Planning Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

OPRE supports research to better understand what happens when families participate in programs aimed at increasing the economic/financial security of families. These types of programs typically provide adult-focused services, such as employment services or postsecondary education and training, in addition to a range of supportive services. As part of this goal, OPRE has asked us to help them learn more about what it means for participants to "be well" and have success beyond the program, and how future research studies should measure family and child well-being. By "be well," we mean personally, financially, emotionally, in your personal health, and so on. We also have a question about whether your participation in the program has been influenced by any aspect of who you are, such as your race, ethnicity, gender identity, age, or sexual orientation.

We have asked you here today because **you** are the experts. We would like to hear from you what it means to "be well" during and after participating in programs that aim to increase economic security, for yourselves, for children in your life, and for your family as a whole. Your participation today is voluntary. Once we begin the focus group, you may choose to leave the group at any time, and you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer.

We will do everything we can to keep everything you tell us private, meaning we will not link responses to any individuals by name. Everything you tell the researchers will be used for research purposes only, unless the researchers are required by law to release it for some other purpose (for example, disclosure of abuse or neglect of a minor). Our goal is to collect themes across the groups we meet with. However, privacy also depends on all of you. We **strongly request** that you and all other focus group participants not discuss what is said today with others outside of the group. However, we cannot guarantee that everyone here will follow this request.

As the facilitator, I will be asking questions, but I want the interaction to flow among you – let's have lots of open discussion. I encourage you to talk to and ask questions of each other.

Do you have any questions for me right now? If you have questions later, the phone numbers for the study director from Mathematica and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) are on the forms we emailed you ([for in-person groups] have provided to you when you arrived). We use an IRB to independently review the study and to help ensure your protection as participants in this research.

Does everyone here agree to participate in the focus group? If you do not want to participate, you are free to leave. **[Go around and get verbal or paper consent.]**

We would like to audio record our discussion to help us remember what everyone said when we go back to write our notes. We will use the recording for our notes. We will destroy the recording at the end of the project. Is anyone concerned about us recording the discussion?

If YES: Ok great, I will start the recording now.

If NO ask: Remember, we can pause the recording if you want to say something that you do not want recorded. Would you be ok with us recording the focus group if you have the choice to stop the recording later?

If still NO: That's okay. We won't record the group.

Ground Rules

- 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 and expiration date for this collection are OMB #: 0970-0356, Exp: 02/29/2024. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to:
Elizabeth Brown
Mathematica
1100 First Street, NE, 12th Floor
Washington, DC 20002-4221
- Before we start, I want to discuss the guidelines for today's discussion. Your participation today is voluntary. You don't have to answer any questions you don't want to, and you can leave at any time. At the end of the group, you will receive a \$50 Visa gift card (for virtual) or a \$65 visa gift card (for in-person) as a token of our appreciation for your participation.
- What you say in this room is considered private. We will summarize what we talk about today and put it together with information that we will gather from other groups like this. Nothing you say will ever be linked to your name. Also, nothing you say will affect your eligibility for [TANF] or any other programs.
- Please respect the privacy of others' comments and those that have different opinions from yourself.
- We want to hear different opinions, so if the rest of the group feels one way and you feel differently, please speak up. That information is really important to us because everyone here has probably had different experiences. There are no wrong answers.
- Please talk one at a time in a voice at least as loud as mine.
- Make sure everyone has a chance to talk. We need to hear from all of you at some point, but you don't each have to answer every question. We may call on you to participate.
- We have a lot to cover today and may need to interrupt you to keep the conversation moving. Please don't take it personally; we have to make sure we get through all the questions we have for you in a short amount of time.
- If you haven't done so already, please turn off your cell phones or set them to silent.
- Our discussion will take about 90 minutes.
- Any questions before we get started?

Discussion questions

As I mentioned before, we are having this group so that we can hear directly from families that have been involved with programs like TANF or similar programs that offer work or education and training supports. You are our experts and we want to learn from you. Our purpose is to learn more about what individuals and families who have participated in these programs care about and experience both during and after the program, and what it means to them to "be well" and have success beyond the program. We

will share our findings with the Administration for Children and Families, to inform their work and future research studies.

I also wanted to let you know that we are doing these groups with many families and trying to get diverse perspectives across different types of families, racial and ethnic groups, and ages of children. We know that experiences may vary for many reasons so we are hoping to hear as many different perspectives as possible.

Before we start our questions, we have a simple form that we would like you to complete.

[Note to facilitator: Skip a question if it does not seem appropriate for the participants in your group.]

1. Let's start by getting to know each other a little bit. Please, one at a time, share:
 - a. Your **first** name or the name you would like to go by (it does not have to be your real name) and the pronouns you want us to use when referring to you [*Facilitator say: For example, mine are (she/her or he/him).*]
 - b. How many children are in your life and how old they are? What about the children in your life makes you proud?
2. Imagine (or think of a time) when a close friend asks you 'How are you and your family doing?' and you are honestly able to respond that you are doing really well. What does "well" look like for you and your family?
3. We want to know about your experience during the TANF work, or education and training program. Think about your experience during and after the program.
 - a. What did you experience through your participation in the program, both positive and negative?
 - b. Why do you think you had those experiences?
 - c. If negative, how did you overcome those challenges?
 - i. [*Facilitator can say, for example, increased stress in completing the program, issues finding child care*]
 - d. What contributed to the positive experiences? How did this improve your sense of well-being?
 - i. [*Facilitator can say, for example, were you able to spend more or less time with your children, have more money to pay the bills or higher expenses, experience less stress around changing work schedules, have increased or reduced tension or stress in your personal relationships, spend more quality time with children, notice behavioral changes in your children, find changes in how you interact with your children, or increased or decreased substance use*]
 - e. What supports did the program provide and what do you find helpful? Were there supports for you or your family, beyond direct supports for your employment?
 - f. How could you have been better supported while you were participating in the program?
4. Do you feel that your experience in the program has been influenced by any aspect of who you are, whether it's your race, ethnicity, gender identity, age, or sexual orientation? How?
5. How has participating in the program changed the way you to interact with your family, or your family members interact with each other? (or, how everyone 'gets along?') What do you think contributed to this change? Or, if it has not changed, why not?

6. How has participating in the program changed your physical, mental, and emotional health, if at all? Why do you think that did or didn't happen? In other words, what do you think contributed to that change?
7. What does it look like to be connected and safe in your community? How important is this to your overall feeling of well-being? How did the program contribute or not contribute to this?
8. How has participating in the program affected your sense of belonging, inclusion, and respect based on who you are? How did the program contribute or not contribute to this?
9. You said being well to you means [fill in from question 2 items that have not been discussed]. What do you think helps you become well? What do you think contributes to that?
10. What accomplishment of your own or of a family member has made you feel proud in the last six months? We welcome a range of responses from small wins to major victories. [*Facilitator note: If the accomplishment seems linked to the program, please clarify that is true. If it seems broader than their program participation, no need to clarify.*]
11. What would you recommend that people doing research about or overseeing programs like [program focus group participants engaged in] consider when thinking about how participating in the program improves well-being?
 - a. Should this be the same or different for different people? Why or why not?
12. That is all of our questions. Before we end, is there anything else that you would like to share today that we haven't covered?

Thank you for your time today!