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Youth and Family Focus Group-Youth Version

Youth Assent Form

ICF, a research company, is doing a study for a project called Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education (AWARE) and Trauma-Informed Services in Schools (TISS) programs. The study is being done for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). We want to invite you to be part of the Youth Focus Group. Your parents have been told about the focus group, and they agreed to allow you to participate if you would like to take part. The focus group we are doing today will help us understand what you think about what your school does, or resources at your school, that help students feel safe and supported and that support you in overcoming challenges and feeling like you can bounce back from hard times. We want to understand what you and other students think is available at your school—for example, mental health programs, resources, and services, how students can get to use the services, how you think the services could be better, and how we can make sure more students know about and can use them. You are invited to be a part of the focus group because you might have been a part of activities for all students through the (AWARE or TISS program, as relevant) or received other services similar to that program.

Before we begin, I want to check with you to see if you were able to look at the information that was sent to you about the focus group. What you were sent was a description of the study that the focus group is a part of, how the information you might talk about during the focus group would be used, and how we will keep what you share private. (*Note: the assent form and background information about the focus group will be sent to participants in advance.*)

Let's review the information in that material together now. Here are some things we want you to know about the focus group before you decide if you want to participate:

Purpose

We invited students from schools across the country to take part in the Youth Focus Group. The purpose of the focus group is not to decide if you or your school are doing anything right or wrong, it is just to learn more about your school. At the end of this study, we will write a report with information we got in a way that shares what we learned without saying personal details about who was in the focus group and which person said what.

Risk and Benefits

Being in this focus group is unlikely to cause any problems for you in any way. If answering any of these questions makes you want to talk to someone about your feelings and experiences, you can talk to a school counselor or teacher. If talking to someone at school is not the best plan for you, you should talk to a grown-up you trust, such as a parent or family friend. Your answers during the focus group will not change anything that you are doing or getting at school and won't make you get more or less than what you get at school right now. What you share during the focus group will be used to help make mental health programs in schools better.

Rights Regarding Decision to Participate

Your being part of this focus group is totally voluntary—meaning, it is your decision to be part of it or not, and your grades will not be affected if you decide to be in the focus group or not. If you decide to be in the focus group, you can choose not to answer any question for any reason. You can also choose to leave the focus group at any time, for any reason.

Compensation

If you agree to take part in this focus group, you will receive a \$25 gift card at the end.

Privacy

We will keep your answers private, and we will not use your names in the report about the focus group. We will not tell your parents, teachers, or anyone else at your school how you answer. We also ask that you do not talk about what anyone says in the focus group outside of the group to protect the privacy of other students who are in today's focus group.

Time and Recording

The focus group should take about an hour to an hour and a half. Your answers are very important to us to make sure we learn a lot from this study. Since we want to make sure we hear everything that you and others say and get it exactly right, we are going to take notes and also record the focus group. If you want to tell us something in private at any time, we can turn off the recorder.

Ground Rules

When you answer a question, please wait until the other person is done speaking. We want to be sure that everyone who would like to speak has a chance to share their ideas.

Contact Information

If you have any concerns about being in this focus group or have any questions about the study, you can email the project director, Colleen Murray, at colleen.murray@icf.com.

Does anyone have any questions about anything that we just said or about the focus group in general?

Do you each want to continue with the focus group? (Assent for each participant)

Are you okay with having the focus group recorded to make sure that we get exactly what everyone says during the focus group?

Focus Group Questions

Opening Question

1. First, please tell us your first name, and let us know what grade you are in.

Mental Health Literacy/Availability of Positive Health Supports (AWARE only)

2. Can you tell me a bit about what your school does to help students feel safe and supported when they are at school? By “safe,” we mean without fear of physical or emotional harm. (Probe: list examples tailored to each school's specific approach.)

How much does what your school does help students feel safe and supported?

What makes students feel safe at this school?

How do these supports (probe: refer to the specific supports under discussion) make all students feel included? For example: 1) students from different cultures or backgrounds or who grew up speaking a different language, including not English 2) students who identify as LGBTQ+? This term includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning, and more identities.

What are some reasons students may not feel safe at your school? (Probe: Bullying, peer pressure, discrimination [being judged because of something that has to do with who they are], something happening at home or in their neighborhood, not having support from the school administration [such as the principal, vice-principal and others who run the school], student-to-student conflicts or relationships? Student-teacher relationships?) How does the school help students who are having any of these issues?

3. What do you think are some of the biggest challenges students your age are having that have to do with their health? When we say health or healthy, we are talking about being mentally, physically, and emotionally healthy. Another way to think about it might be health in mind, body, and soul. (Probe for substance use, violence-related behaviors, mental health-related behaviors)
 - a. In what ways does your school support students in being healthy?
 - b. How comfortable are students talking about mental health? Mental health is how we think and feel about ourselves and our relationship to the world around us.

4. Did you learn about any of the following topics at school this year:

Warning signs of suicide and how to get help? If yes, what are some examples of what you learned?

Causes of mental illness (such as depression, anxiety, or mood disorders)? If yes, what are some examples of what you learned?

- e.g., family history, stress, substance use

Symptoms or signs of mental illness? If yes, what are some examples of what you learned?

- e.g., sadness, loss of interest, stress, restlessness, irritability

Things a person can do to improve their own mental health? If yes, what are some examples of what you learned?

- e.g., physical exercise, balanced diet, getting enough sleep, talking about problems

Things a person can do to help someone who is showing signs of mental illness? If yes, what are some examples of what you learned?

- e.g., offer to help, encourage him/her to get help from an adult at school, talk to an adult at school about it yourself

5. How much do these activities and resources (probe: refer to resources under discussion and specific to the grantee context) help students from all different kinds of cultures and background? For example, are resources offered in more than one language?

- a. How much do these activities and resources (*probe: refer to resources under discussion and specific to the grantee context*) help students who identify as LGBTQ+?

Availability of Mental Health Services/Targeted or More Intensive

6. What kind of support does your school have for students who might need help with a personal problem?

For example, what about a school counselor? Teacher? Health center? School psychologist? Student support group?

7. How do these supports work for students from all cultures and backgrounds? For example, are resources or services (*note: refer to services under discussion and specific to the grantee context*) available in more than one language?
 - a. Tell me what you know about supports for students who identify as LGBTQ+. How do the supports meet the needs of these students?
8. If you need help with a personal problem, what support is there at your school that you can rely on? Please explain.

Trauma-focused Services (TISS only)

9. Can you tell me a bit about the types of services available at your school for students who have had a traumatic experience? By “traumatic experience,” I mean an event or series of events that cause a lot of stress and may even make a student feel threatened about serious injury or death.

Access to Services

10. How easy is it for students to get connected to supports or services provided through your school if they need them?

If a student had a personal problem, would they know what to do or who to talk to?

What challenges, if any, make it more difficult for students to get the services they need?

What makes it easier for students from different cultures—or who grew up speaking a language other than English—to access the services they need? What makes it harder for students who didn't grow up speaking English to access services?

Experience with Services/Satisfaction

11. If you could change something about the services provided at your school, what would that be?

What other services would be helpful?

12. What could have made it easier to be connected to these services?

13. How satisfied do you feel overall with the services provided at your school?

Perceptions: Outcomes

14. Do you think the services provided through your school make a difference in students' lives?

Can you share an example?

15. Thank you so much for sharing your stories with us today. Is there anything that we missed?

Is there anything that you came wanting to say that you didn't get a chance to?

Youth Resiliency and Outcomes Study Module (Option Year 3)

Next, we would like to talk about student resiliency and coping skills. Resiliency means a person being able to cope and bounce back during or after a difficult time in their life. Coping skills means the way that we deal with our feelings or emotions and how we deal with stress.

1. How does your school talk about resiliency or being resilient? (Another option: What have you learned in school about resiliency or being resilient?)
 - a. [If school does not cover resiliency] Have you learned about resiliency or being resilient outside of school? (Probe for: home, community program, or health professional)
 - b. What do you wish your school taught about resiliency or being resilient?
2. What coping skills have you learned to help you manage feelings and handle stress?
 - a. What are some things you (or other students you know) have learned from [insert resource] that have helped you work through challenging situations?
3. Tell me about how the [insert resources] has helped or not helped with student resiliency and coping skills?
4. Besides what was shared today, what else, if anything, do you think your school can do to help students feel healthy, safe, and supported at school?

Closing

Again, thanks to everyone for being in the focus group. If you have more information you want to share, or questions about how this study is going or the information we got from the focus group, please feel free to contact us. Our contact information is in the materials you got before the focus group (refer group to materials provided in advance), and we can also give you those materials or information again now.

Also, I want to check in with everyone now that the focus group is over and remind you that if answering any of these questions or being in the group has made you want to talk to someone about your feelings and experiences, there's a lot of ways you can do that. For example, you can talk to a school counselor, teacher, or another adult you trust such as a parent or family friend. We are also giving each of you a list of resources that offer counseling and support here in [CITY] that may be useful to you. Please come talk to me or [NAME - OTHER ICF STAFF] if you would like any additional information or have questions or if we can help connect you with someone to support you right now.

Note: After the focus group is completed, the moderator will send the participant a thank you communication and a \$25 gift card for their participation.

Youth and Family Focus Group—Debrief and Crisis Protocol

Questions included in the youth and family focus group are unlikely to cause distress. However, the ICF team will closely monitor the group for signs of distress and pause the focus group if necessary to support individual participants in suspending or ending their participation in the focus group if feeling distressed. As part of the introduction and informed consent procedures in advance of the focus group, the moderator will review the following information with youth participants: *“Participating in this focus group is unlikely to cause any problems for you in any way. If answering any of these questions makes you want to talk to someone about your feelings and experiences, you can talk to a school counselor or teacher. If talking to someone at school is not the best plan for you, you should talk to a grown-up you trust, such as a parent or family friend.”*

Following the focus group, the ICF moderator will note, *“I want to check in with everyone now that the focus group is over and remind you that if answering any of these questions or being in the group has made you want to talk to someone about your feelings and experiences, there’s a lot of ways you can do that. For example, you can talk to a school counselor, teacher, or other adult you trust such as a parent or family friend. We are also giving each of you a list of resources that offer counseling and support here in [CITY] that may be useful to you. Please come talk to me or [NAME - OTHER ICF STAFF] if you would like any additional information or have questions or if we can help connect you with someone to support you right now.”*

The ICF team will provide a list of resources offering behavioral health counseling and support for each focus group participant. ICF will tailor the list of resources for local sites once the participating sites are selected. For example, a sample list of resources developed for a site in Milwaukee is included below. In the case of participants who appear distressed following the focus group, the ICF team will approach the participant privately and offer support including asking, *“Can I help connect you with someone to support you right now?”* (Whitney and Evered, 2022) The team will support the participant in connecting directly with a school counselor, teacher, or other trusted adult such as a parent or family friend and/or with local behavioral health counseling services.

Sample List of Resources

Milwaukee School System-Specific Resources

- School Social Worker/Psychologist
 - You can reach out to your school social worker/psychologist for support. Your school social worker/psychologist can help you with any type of issues, including things related to your experiences at school or at home. They can also connect you to other resources for additional support.
 - Name: [INSERT SCHOOL NAME}
 - Contact information: [INSERT CONTACT INFO]
- Department of Gender & Identity Inclusion (GII) Case Management
 - GII is an MPS department that supports students and their families. GII can work with you and/or your family to understand your needs and connect you to appropriate resources.
 - Website: <https://mps.milwaukee.k12.wi.us/en/District/About-MPS/Departments/Office-of-School-Administration/Gender-and-Identity-Inclusion.htm>
- Froedtert Inclusion Health Clinics
 - Provide medical care to meet the health care needs of the LGBTQ community.

- Website: <https://www.froedtert.com/locations/clinic/inclusion-health-clinic-sargeant-health-center>
- Call: 414-805-2018
- PRISM Program
 - A mental wellness resource for LGBTQ+ youth in Wisconsin. The PRISM Program is a team of queer and/or trans Certified Peer Specialists trained to use their lived experiences with mental health and substance use struggles to support others in their recovery journey. You can call or text their number for support between 10am-10pm Sunday-Friday or 12pm-10pm Saturday.
 - Website: <https://www.mhawisconsin.org/prism>
 - Call or text: 414-336-7974
- Brady East STD Clinic (B.E.S.T.D Clinic)
 - Provides high quality sexual health services to all in an affirming environment and at no cost.
 - Website: <https://www.bestd.org/>
 - Call: 414-272-2144
- Diverse and Resilient
 - Works to achieve health equity and improve the safety and well-being of LGBTQ people and communities in Wisconsin.
 - Website: <https://www.diverseandresilient.org/>
 - Call: 414-390-0444
- The Milwaukee LGBT Community Center
 - Offers services to meet the needs of LGBT youth, adults, and their allies in the Greater Milwaukee area.
 - Website: <https://www.mkelgbt.org/>
 - Call: 414-271-2656
- Courage House MKE
 - Wisconsin's first home for displaced LGBTQ+ youth who have suffered mental or physical abuse, have no means to support themselves, and/or need a place to temporarily call home.
 - Website: <https://www.couragemke.org/>
 - Call: 414-240-2882
- Children's Hospital Gender Health Clinic
 - A multidisciplinary clinic focused on children and youth seeking assistance with gender identity development and transition concerns. Staff meet with new patients through age 16 on an individual basis for comprehensive evaluations, mental health consultations and education. Services also include puberty-suppressing hormone therapy, gender-affirming hormone therapy, surgical treatments, and speech/voice training. The clinic can also provide children and adolescents with connections to other resources and support within Children's Wisconsin and the community.
 - Website: <https://childrenswi.org/medical-care/endocrine/gender-health-clinic>
 - Call: 877-607-5280

- FORGE
 - Reduces the impact of trauma on trans/non-binary survivors and communities by empowering service providers, advocating for systems reform, and connecting survivors to healing possibilities. FORGE strives to create a world where ALL voices, people and bodies are valued, respected, honored, and celebrated; where every individual feels safe, supported, respected, and empowered.
 - Website: <https://forge-forward.org/>
 - Call: 414-559-2123
- Pathways Counseling
 - State certified, outpatient mental health clinic. Pathways provides many LGBTQ+ mental health services. Individual, couple, family, and group therapy options are available.
 - Website: <https://www.pathwayscounseling.com/>
 - Call: 262-641-9790
- Hmong American Women's Association
 - Organizes Southeast Asian women, girls, Queer and Trans people to champion gender justice and collective liberation.
 - Website: <https://www.hawamke.org/>
 - Call: 414-930-9352

National Resources

- The Trevor Project
 - Offers information and support to LGBTQ+ young people. The Trevor Project is available 24/7 every day of the year. You can contact them by call, text, or online chat.
 - Website/online chat: <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help/>
 - Text: text "START" to 678-678
 - Call: 1-866-488-7386
- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
 - The Lifeline provides 24/7 free and confidential support for people in distress. You can contact them by call, text, or online chat.
 - Chat: <https://988lifeline.org/chat/>
 - Call or text: 988
 - Website: <https://988lifeline.org/help-yourself/>

Reference

Whitney, C., & Evered, J. A. (2022). The Qualitative Research Distress Protocol: A Participant-Centered Tool for Navigating Distress During Data Collection. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221110317>.