

Youth and Parent Voices for Research Study

Instrument 6: Focus Group Guide for Parents

Introduction

Good afternoon, everyone! My name is [FACILITATOR'S NAME AND PRONOUNS] and I am a researcher at RTI International. RTI is an independent, nonprofit research institute. RTI is leading an initiative funded by the Administration for Children and Families or ACF. The project is called *Reimagining the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being*. I'm joined by [CO-FACILITATOR'S NAME] from [CO-FACILITATOR ORGANIZATION].

Everyone's privacy is very important to us. Before we start, I want to remind everyone to please make sure you are in a private place where no one else can hear our conversation and that you feel comfortable talking openly.

Can we go around and have the folks that are on right now and introduce yourselves and tell us one fun fact about yourself if you're comfortable doing it. I'll start and then pick the next person. My name is [NAME] and I [fun fact]. [Be sure that all participants introduce themselves by name].

Thanks, everyone for sharing! I'm going to get us started by telling everyone a little about why we are here.

Purpose of the research

As I just mentioned, we are working on a project called *Reimagining the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being* or NSCAW. NSCAW examines child and family well-being for folks who have been involved with the child welfare system. *Reimagining NSCAW*, the initiative we are talking about, is focused on research activities to better inform how we collect data. And that's why we have you here. You are our experts. We have you here today to hear your thoughts and opinions, openly and honestly, to make sure that we are asking the right information AND that if we are, we are asking about it in a way that others will understand.

When I say that you are our experts, I'm not exaggerating. Your life experiences, experiences with child welfare system, and Your views and opinions are considered expert information that will shape what our data collection looks like in the future. And that's important. Please be honest and know that we are not judging you or what you say. All of it is valuable.

Has anyone ever participated in a focus group? [PAUSE]

OK, it looks like we have a lot of folks who are new to focus groups. That's great! Let's go over some information about what a focus group is and then we'll talk about group norms in terms of participating in a focus group.

PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT OF 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13) STATEMENT OF PUBLIC BURDEN: *The purpose of this information collection is to gather feedback to inform future National Survey of Child and Well-Being data collections. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 2 hours per respondent, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information. This is a voluntary collection of information. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information subject to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB # is #0970-0356 and the expiration date is 01/31/2027. If you have any comments on this collection of information, please contact Melissa Dolan: mdolan@rti.org.*

Guidelines and rules

A focus group is a small group of unrelated people (that's each of you) formed and led by one or two facilitators (*that's me and [CO-FACILITATORS NAME]*), in a group discussion about a topic or topics. As the facilitator, I will be asking the group some questions for about 2 hours. I may read something or show you something and then learn what you think about it. So that we can all see each other, please be sure to have your video on. if you've got something you'd like to say, please raise your hand. You can do this using the "raise hand" function on Zoom or you can just raise your hand on the video until I get to you. We'll only speak one at a time, so please wait to be called on before you speak.

We are going to speak to each other respectfully. At some point, you might hear something that you don't agree with. Please don't interrupt the person you disagree with. Instead, raise your hand and tell us what you think once you've been called on.

We don't expect you to have thoughts or an answer for everything that we talk about today. It's OK if you don't know or don't have an opinion about something. if you feel that way, just let us know. That's important information too. If something makes you sad or feel uneasy and you don't want to answer, that's OK too. Your participation is voluntary, meaning that if you would like to stop participating for any reason, you have the right to do that. Just let us know.

To thank you for your participation, we will be emailing each of you a \$50 gift certificate to the email you provided earlier. We will send this out before midnight today.

We do many things to make sure your answers are private. Anything that is shared here today is private, meaning that we will not disclose your individual answers or provide quotes in any way that folks would be able to identify you unless we are worried about you or someone else's safety. We'll gather up the information from this focus group and summarize it into a report without using names to suggest ways that data collection might improve in the future. Likewise, what is shared in this focus group stays in this focus group. You are not allowed to share anyone's information or answers with anyone once we leave this focus group. We record focus groups as a backup and so that we can make sure that our notes are accurate. We keep the recordings private and destroy them at the end of the project.

Does anyone have any questions?

Do you agree to take part in this focus group? Please say yes if you agree.

Do we have your permission to start recording? Please say yes if you agree.

Excellent! Let's get started.

Protocol

Positive Parenting

We want to get your reaction to a measure about parenting. Parenting is a big concept that covers a lot of ground. We are interested not only in what you think about this measure but also about whether it 'gets at' important aspects of being a parent. You will notice that some of the items are about things unrelated to providing care to a child, but they may influence how someone parents.

Parents being asked about these items would respond ranging from "not at all like me" to "very much" like me." I'll read through all the items first.

I feel positive about being a parent/caregiver
I take good care of my child even when I am sad
I find ways to handle problems related to my child

I take good care of my child even when I have personal problems
I manage the daily responsibilities of being a parent/caregiver
I have the strength within myself to solve problems that happen in my life
I am confident I can achieve my goals
I take care of my daily responsibilities even if problems make me sad
I believe that my life will get better even when bad things happen.

- Which items about parenting do you have questions about?
- How well do you think these kinds of questions get at the most important aspects of parenting?
- Are there things missing that should be on the list?
- How might a recent experience of child welfare system involvement influence parents' responses to questions about parenting?
 - o What might make parents more comfortable answering these questions?
- How well do you think these kinds of questions get at the most important aspects of parenting?

Material Hardship and Economic Stress

Something that can pose challenges to parenting is economic hardship or stress related to economic hardship. We are going to review two measures with you. The first lists a number of specific types of hardships and the second is more geared toward assessing someone's stress related to their financial situation. Please review these two approaches. Then, we'd like your feedback to some questions.

Approach 1	Approach 2
<p>Did any of the following hardships occur within the last 12 months?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phone service disconnected or you lacked a personal phone because you could not afford one or there wasn't enough money to pay the bill • Electricity, heating or gas disconnected because there wasn't enough money to pay the bill • Unable to pay the full rent or mortgage payment • Evicted or kicked out of your home, apartment, or living situation • Stayed at a shelter or in an abandoned building, a car or other vehicle, or any other place not meant for regular housing, even for one night • Someone in your household needed to see a doctor or go to the hospital but did not go because of the cost • Someone in your household was unable to fill a prescription or continue medication at the prescribed level because of the cost • Someone in your household had to miss work, a health care appointment, or other important appointment because they lacked transportation • Your household ran out of food before the end of the month on at least one occasion. 	<p>The following statements are about your finances. For each statement, please tell me whether you strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree or strongly agree.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have trouble affording the basic things that my family needs • I can usually afford to pay my bills on time • I feel overwhelmed about money issues • These days, I can generally afford to buy the groceries that my family wants • If I suddenly needed \$100 for an emergency, I could come up with it • I feel stressed about my financial situation • My family often struggles to have enough to eat

- Are there any hardship items you have questions about?
- How well do you think these kinds of questions get at the most important aspects of economic hardship?
- How well do you think these kinds of questions get at the most important aspects of stress?
- Which approach do you prefer? Why?
- Are there things missing that should be on either list?

- How might a recent experience of child welfare system involvement influence parents' responses to questions about economic hardships or financial stress?
 - o What might make parents more comfortable answering these questions?

Substance Use

Asking about someone's alcohol or drug use is always challenging. There are no 'gold standard' approaches to doing so. We'd like you to review a common measure of substance use, including the introduction to the measure, and let us know what you think about it. Please take a few moments to review the measure.

The next questions are about your use of alcohol and other drugs.

- Alcohol includes beer, wine, whiskey, gin, scotch, tequila, rum, or mixed drinks.
- "Other drugs" include: marijuana; other street drugs like crack, heroin, PCP, or poppers; inhalants like glue or gasoline; and any non-medical use of prescription-type drugs.
- Please do not include any prescription drugs you used only as instructed by a doctor.

When was the last time:

- a. You used alcohol or other drugs weekly or more often?
- b. You spent a lot of time either getting alcohol or other drugs, using alcohol or other drugs, or recovering from the effects of using alcohol or other drugs?
- c. You had withdrawal problems from alcohol or other drugs?
- d. When was the last time you received treatment, counseling, medication, case management, or aftercare for your use of alcohol or any other drug?

- Are there any substance use items you have questions about?
- How well do you think these kinds of questions get at the most important aspects of substance use?
- Are there things missing that should be on the list?
- How might a recent experience of child welfare system involvement influence parents' responses to questions about substance use?
 - o What might make parents more comfortable answering these questions?

CWS Experiences

In any potential future NSCAW data collection(s), we hope to explore how adults feel about their involvement in different systems. Systems could include the child welfare system, but also the justice system. This could include experiences with police, courts, detention facilities and jails. This also includes health care, education, and systems that help families pay for food, housing, etc. Consider the following questions and tell us what you think others your age might say in response to these questions.

- Thinking about the child welfare system, how might parents refer to it?
 - o Sometimes it is referred to as CPS, or DCF, DCFS, DYFS or something similar. What do people tend to call this system?
- Are there things that other adults might view as helpful, not helpful, or harmful that happen to an adult involved in the child welfare system?"
- Thinking about the first few months following a contact by the child welfare system, what concerns might a parent have about participating in an independent study (that is, a study not associated with the child welfare system) that asks about the kinds of topics we've discussed?
- Thinking about the child welfare system, what kinds of things do parents experience that are especially challenging or helpful?
- Which other systems should we be asking adults about in any potential future NSCAW data collections(s)?

Other topics?

What other ideas that have not been discussed are relevant to your own well-being? [*Asked after all measures are discussed*].

We are now moving away from discussing well-being to asking you about things that may make it more likely for you to complete a survey.

Survey Participation

- What are some good ways to get information from adults? (e.g., online like this, on the phone, in person)? Why?
- What is a reasonable length of time for participating in a survey from start to finish?
 - o What might make you willing to spend more time taking a survey?
- How often would you feel comfortable with a project team contacting you (for example, to notify you of an upcoming survey)?
- What types of gifts of appreciation or rewards would you prefer to receive as a thank you for the time you spend taking the survey?
- What types of things might make you feel comfortable enough to share honest opinions and information?

Response and Engagement

We want to make the survey the best experience it can be for people who are taking it. We would like to know your preference for how you might take the survey or what you might need to feel comfortable answering honestly.

- Are there things that you can think of that might increase or decrease a parent's likelihood of answering questions about the kinds of topics we have discussed?
- We'd like to know your thoughts on whether survey questions on sensitive topics, other than the ones we have already talked about, would be answered truthfully by parents involved in the child welfare system. Here are a few example topics, which we will talk about one at a time:
 - o Sexual orientation and gender identity¹. Same questions as before—how likely is it that questions about sexual orientation and gender identity would be answered honestly? Are there concerns parents might have about answering these questions about themselves? What about answering these questions about a specific child?
 - o Intimate partner violence, sometimes called domestic violence. Do you think parents would answer questions about this topic? What concerns might they have?
 - o [*optional, time permitting*] Service needs that parents may have. How likely do you think it is that parents would answer survey questions about their needs and the needs of their family? What concerns might they have?
 - o [*optional, time permitting*] Benefits that parents and caregivers may receive, like WIC (Women, Infants, and Children), SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; sometimes called “food stamps”), childcare subsidies, or housing vouchers. Do you think parents would answer questions about this topic? What concerns might they have?

Closing

Those are the last of the topics that we'll talk about, and We are down to our last question for this group.

¹ Should time be limited, a discussion on SOGI will be prioritized.

- Are there other topics that we haven't talked about that would be important to adults who have been impacted by the child welfare system?

Thank you all very much for your participation in the focus group and for sharing your thoughts and perspectives on these topics. We will be sending out the gift cards by email no later than midnight. If you have not gotten your gift card by tomorrow, please reach out to Teresa Johnson at tjohnson@rti.org.