



Focus Group Protocol

Overview

- **Objective:** Understand participants' experiences with community violence
- **Time Required:** 90 minutes
- **Facilitators:** At least two facilitators are needed (i.e., one youth researcher and one staff member from Child Trends or Sasha Bruce Youthwork).
- **Structure:** Semi-structured focus group
- **Participants:** Youth, parent/guardian figures, or community members
- **Incentives:** \$30 electronic gift card
- **Supplies:** Participant information sheet, password encrypted recorder, study information sheets, maps, pens, markers, Post-its, recruitment card handout worksheet
- **Location:** In-Person

Introduction

Welcome. Hello, my name is [SAY NAME] and I am [INSERT RELEVANT POSITION]. [INTRODUCE OTHER STAFF PRESENT.] This project is being conducted by youth researchers supported by Child Trends, a nonprofit research center, and Sasha Bruce Youthwork, a DC-based nonprofit. This project is funded by the National Institute of Justice (#15PNIJ-22-GG-01420-RESS). The purpose of this research is to deepen our understanding of youths' experiences with community violence in Washington, DC. By community violence, we mean interpersonal violence that occurs in public spaces between individuals or small groups who may or may not know each other. Findings will be used to inform new and ongoing community safety strategies in Washington, D.C.

We think the best way to understand youths' experiences is to listen to individuals like yourself as well as other youth, parent/guardian figures, and/or community members. Our conversation today will last about 90 minutes.

Verbal consent/assent. [HAND OUT STUDY INFORMATION SHEETS.] As shared on the study information sheet, participation in today's conversation is voluntary. Perspectives and experiences that you share today will be kept confidential. This means we will not tell anyone outside of the researchers on this study what was said in the group, and we will not use your real names in reports for this study. You will not benefit personally from participating in this conversation. You may feel uncomfortable answering certain questions, but you may refuse to answer any questions you are not comfortable answering or leave at any time. If you would like to leave, please let me know. You will receive a \$30 electronic gift card via email or text within 30 minutes of the end of our conversation. Please take a few moments to read over the study information sheet.

[PAUSE FOR TWO MINUTES.]

Do you have any questions? [If unsure about comprehension, use the following probes:]

- Could you tell me about why you are here today?

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Learn more about Safety 7 at <https://www.childtrends.org/project/centering-youth-experiences-youth-participatory-action>.

- Could you tell me about the purpose of this study?

Thank you for reading the study information sheet. I am now going to individually ask each of you to confirm your participation in today's conversation. **[Ask each participant the following questions].**

1. We would like to record the conversation today for our records. Are you willing to be recorded?

[If the participant is not willing to be recorded, ask if they would be willing to proceed with the focus group without recording it. Instead, the facilitator will take notes during the discussion. If this option is acceptable, document how the focus group was processed on your notes. If one participant is not willing to be recorded, forgo asking this question.]

2. Do you agree to participate in this conversation as I have described it to you **[if participant agrees to be recorded add...]**, including agreeing to be recorded?

[The participants should one at a time say "yes" to both questions. If a participant says no to the second question, thank them for their time and dismiss them from the room.]

Thank you for providing your agreement to participate in today's conversation. **[Start recording].**

Establish group norms. Before we get started, we wanted to have a couple community agreements while we're in this space together:

- We're really interested in your own personal experiences and opinions, but there may be a time where you want to share a story or experience of a friend that you think is really important. That is okay, but do not share their name if you do.
- Do not specifically reference crimes that you have committed or may have committed.
- Do not specifically reference the names of any criminally active groups within this setting.
- There are no right or wrong answers. It's okay to say, "don't know." You also do not have to answer questions that you do not want to answer.
- There are no bad questions. If you are confused about a word or what we are asking, let us know and we will strive to clarify what we are saying.
- At some point, I may have to interrupt you and move onto another question. Know that I value your perspectives and experiences, but we may need to move on for the sake of time.
- Some people may have different opinions, and that's okay. We can disagree with each other respectfully and talk about our different viewpoints.
- Please don't share what is said during our conversation after we leave the meeting. What is said during the conversation should stay private.

Ice Breaker

Let's start by getting to know each other. Please share one activity that you like to do in our community.

Youth Focus Group Questions

We now are going to begin asking you questions about your experiences with community safety and violence within the neighborhoods we live. As a reminder, by community violence, we mean interpersonal violence that occurs in public spaces between individuals or small groups who may or may not know each other.

- 1) In your opinion, what element is most crucial to community safety?
- 2) When asked about community safety what feelings come up?

Now, we'd like to ask you some additional questions about **safety in our community**.

- 1) Where do you feel safe in our community? Why?
- 2) What makes you feel safe in our community? Why?
- 3) How do you get around in our community?
 - a. Do you feel safe walking around our community? Why?
 - b. What makes you or your loved ones feel safe walking around our community?
- 4) What makes you fear for your safety or your loved ones' safety in our community?
 - a. At what age did you first fear for your safety?
 - b. How do feelings of lack of safety affect your interactions or those of your loved ones in our community? For example, conversations with neighbors, talking to store clerks, saying hi to people on the streets.
- 5) What do you think are the causes of violence in our community?
- 6) How do police affect violence in our community?
 - a. How safe do you feel when there are police present in our community versus when they are not present?
 - b. Do you have thoughts on the time that it takes police to respond to violence in our community?
 - i. Do you think police response times play a role in the number of homicides in our community?
 - c. How often do you see police patrolling our community?
 - i. Do you want to see police patrolling our community?
- 7) How familiar are you with ongoing violence prevention and intervention, like the Cure the Streets, Credible Messengers, Trigger Project, Victims Services?
 - a. What is working well?
 - b. What is not working well?

Next, we're going to ask some questions about experiences with **community trauma**.

- 1) When traumatic events (for example, a shooting or fight) happen in our community, how does it make you or your loved ones feel?
- 2) How do traumatic events impact the mental health of youth?
 - a. How has violence desensitized youth in our community?
 - b. Who do youth feel comfortable discussing traumatic events with?
 - c. Where do youth go to discuss traumatic events?

Safety 7

- d. What other resources do youth need to help them deal with traumatic events?
- 3) How does having a relationship with a respected and trusted adult play a role in youth not getting involved in violence?
 - a. How does having a respected and trusted adult play a role in youth getting involved in violence?

We're almost done! Finally, we're going to ask a few questions about the **connection between safety and community trauma**, and suggestions for improvement.

- 1) How do experiences of lack of safety and community trauma impact how community members connect with each other?
- 2) What programs do you participate in our community that you think would be beneficial for youth? For example, Boy & Girls Club, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Summer Youth Employment Program.
- 3) In an ideal world, what resources and services do you think should be available to youth to help improve safety and reduce community trauma in our community?

Family and Community Member Focus Group Questions

We now are going to begin asking you questions about your experiences with community safety and violence within the neighborhoods we live. As a reminder, by community violence, we mean interpersonal violence that occurs in public spaces between individuals or small groups who may or may not know each other.

- 1) In your opinion, what element is most crucial to community safety?
- 2) When asked about community safety what feelings come up?

Now, we'd like to ask you some additional questions about **safety in our community**.

- 1) Where do you and your family feel safe in our community? Why?
- 2) What makes you and your family feel safe in our community? Why?
- 3) How do you and your family get around in our community?
 - a. Do you and your family feel safe walking around our community? Why?
 - b. What makes you or your family feel safe walking around our community?
- 4) What makes you fear for your safety or your family's safety in our community?
 - a. How do feelings of lack of safety affect your interactions or those of your family in our community? For example, conversations with neighbors, talking to store clerks, saying hi to people on the streets.
- 5) How has today's community violence impacted the way in which you or your friends raise their families?
- 6) What do you think are the causes of violence in our community?
- 7) How has community violence changed in the past several years? Has it gotten better? Has it gotten worse?
 - a. What do you think caused the change?
- 8) How do police affect violence in our community?
 - a. How safe do you feel when there are police present in our community versus when

- they are not present?
- b. Do you have thoughts on the time that it takes police to respond to violence in our community?
 - i. Do you think police response times play a role in the number of homicides in our community?
 - c. How often do you see police patrolling our community?
 - i. Do you want to see police patrolling our community?
- 9) How familiar are you with ongoing violence prevention and intervention, like the Cure the Streets, Credible Messengers, Trigger Project, Victims Services?
- a. What is working well?
 - b. What is not working well?

Next, we're going to ask some questions about experiences with **community trauma**.

- 1) When traumatic events (for example, a shooting or fight) happen in our community, how does it make you or your family feel?
- 2) How do traumatic events impact the mental health of youth and families? For example, stress, anxiety, fear, depression, or worry.
 - a. How has violence desensitized youth and families in our community?
 - b. Who do youth and families feel comfortable discussing traumatic events with?
 - c. Where do youth and families go to discuss traumatic events?
 - d. What other resources do youth and families need to help them deal with traumatic events?
- 3) Do you think that children living without parents in the home impacts community violence? If yes, how?
- 4) Do you think there is stigma around getting mental health services for youth and parents/guardians? If yes, how so?
 - a. Do you think parents are taking the steps to try to understand their children's mental health? If yes, how so?

We're almost done! Finally, we're going to ask a few questions about the **connection between safety and community trauma**, and suggestions for improvement.

- 1) How do experiences of lack of safety and community trauma impact how community members connect with each other?
- 2) What programs did you or your children have while growing up that you think would be beneficial for today's youth? For example, Boy & Girls Club, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Summer Youth Employment Program.
 - a) Are there any current programs you recommend for youth living in our community?
- 3) In an ideal world, what resources and services do you think should be available to youth to help improve safety and reduce community trauma in our community?

Conclusion

Thank you for your participation today. If you need additional support in processing your

Safety 7

experiences or feelings that arose from today's conversation, we are providing a list of free resources available in your community. **[Hand out resource sheet]**. People associated with these resources will not know that you have participated in today's conversation and we will not disclose your participation with them.

If you have any questions, concerns, or additional information you would like to share, email Samantha Holquist at dcsafetystudy@childtrends.org. Her name and contact information also are included on your study information sheet. You will receive your \$30 electronic gift card via email or text within 30 minutes.

If you found your experience today valuable, we would love your help recruiting other individuals to participate in the research project. For each individual you help us recruit, you can receive an additional \$10 electronic gift card for each individual (up to a maximum of three people) who participates in an interview or focus group. For example, if you help us recruit three additional people to participate in an interview or focus group, you will receive a \$30 electronic gift card. To help us recruit new individuals to participate in the study, simply hand them a recruitment card and ask them to complete the online screener.

Is anyone interested in helping us recruit additional individuals to participate in the research study?

[If a participant is interested, ask them their made-up name for the study and find their name on the recruitment card handout worksheet. Hand the participant the recruitment card numbers associated with their name.]

Stop recording.