

Step 5

How to Prepare and Set-up a Focus Group

Here are some resources a *TfC* research team put together for their focus group.

The materials include:

1) a short statement informing participants about the focus group (it was written to build on the detailed letter of invitation that can be found on p. XXX).

2) a list of focus group roles students might fill

We hope you and your students discuss, edit and revise these documents so they fit the circumstances of your class.

1) Here is an informational statement that contains information that will allow participants to make an informed decision to participate.

“Welcome everyone. We are thankful that you have agreed to participate in our conversation about “how community and family affect young people in Newark, NJ.” Feel free to contribute as much or as little as you feel comfortable, but we do hope you feel comfortable. Please remember that this is a discussion, not a debate. Although we are recording this session, all your comments will be confidential.”

“Are there any questions that we may answer before we begin?”

1) Focus Group Roles.

1. Focus Group Manager(s) this could be one or two students--Responsible for the overall environment and ensuring that the conversation begins and ends on time.

Some tasks for focus group manager(s):

- Set up chairs in a circle or in a manner that will make face to face conversation easier—all participants should be able to see the faces of all other participants.
- Greet people and make sure they are comfortable throughout the time they are participating
- Introduce yourselves by name and the class members as a group.
- State the purpose of the group and the time available, even if you think participants already know.
- Monitor whether the prompts are being covered and how you are doing on time.
Agree in advance on a discreet signal such as a note to one of the moderators to let them know: “10 minutes left.” At an appropriate pause in the discussion, let the participants know how much time is left.
- Pay attention to the participants during the focus group—
 - Are they comfortable—i.e. do they need a glass of water, the window opened or closed?
 - Are they engaged?
 - Is anyone getting uncomfortable, upset or sad? (If so, approach them privately and see if they need anything.)
- **DON'T OVERTHINK THIS JOB.** Your job is simple: anticipate problems and challenges and act before they happen. If you are not sure what is needed? Ask yourself: if you were a participant what would make you comfortable and (thus) more likely to be honest in the focus group? Try to do these things—whether they are large or small—for your focus group participants.

1. ***Focus group moderator(s)*** could be one or two students—Lead the discussion and make sure participants are comfortable enough to speak freely and honestly.

Have your students ask themselves, if they were participating in a focus group, what should moderators do (and not do) to make the experience easier, more relaxed and honest? The answer to this question should be what your students should do when they moderate their focus group.

After considering the comfort of participants, the moderator(s) should be focused on the research question—here, understanding how families *influence* young people—and realize the prompts are concrete ways to get people to help us answer this question. Moderators, then, should be familiar—i.e. not have to read them-- with the prompts. They should also—along with the managers--ensure that the entire group is relaxed and participating and that a wide range of views are expressed. The role requires full engagement in the discussion, not just asking the questions/prompts. We encourage our most mature and observant students to volunteer for the moderator role(s).

General tips for focus group moderators:

- Don't be afraid of a little silence after you ask a question, let participants think
- Be flexible and sensitive—if people are not engaged, make some changes, talk less maybe.

- Don't feel the conversation must go through you—let participants build on each other's comments.
- Don't judge—we are looking for honesty, not the right answer.
- Get everyone involved, without putting anyone on the spot: “What do other people think?” “what are you thinking?” “Does anyone agree (or disagree) with that comment?”
- Connect comments
- Ask follow-up questions. For example, “that is incredibly interesting or “can you tell us more?”
- RELAX—people are participating because they want to talk, your job is to channel the conversation.

2. *Focus Group Note takers:* should be at least two students so the class will have an accurate transcript--Responsible for recording the conversation, body language, atmosphere, etc.

General tips for focus group note takers:

- Create a template for note taking.
- Before the conversation begins, fill in or write down the date, time, location, topic, and number of people.
- Use a seating chart, give each participant a number, and use these numbers to identify participants when they speak.
- Write questions and answers in a shorthand that the record-keeper can read later. For example, write without vowels and abbreviate words such as “mgt” for

“meeting.” It is easiest if the person who records the conversation also types it into an electronic document so that everyone on the team can share it.

- Develop shorthand and abbreviations with other note-takers.
- Write down key words and phrases that will trigger your memory when you expand notes, but try to get key quotes word-for-word.
- To distinguish between your thoughts and what was said by participants, your comments might be italicized or placed in quotes.
- Make sidebar notations on how else are people communicating--body language, attitude, etc.
- RELAX, Do the best you can. Don't worry if you miss something; another note taker will probably have recorded it.

FOCUS GROUP ROLES

Research team

name _____

Focus group manager-

Moderators _____ and _____

Note takers _____ and _____