

## Focus groups with parents on transitions

In order to research how parents themselves experience the transition from home or childcare to preschool education, then you organize some focus groups with parents. If you want to achieve diversity within the group of parents, then you need a well-considered planning. Each partner organizes a number of focus groups, with the aim to reach a mix of parents. (SES; gender; ethnic-cultural diversity; with young/older children). The ideal number of participants for a focus group would be between 6 and 12 people. Each organization invites all parents of children of 2-4 years old to participate.

If you want to achieve diversity within the group of parents, you will have to plan a focus group at multiple and various moments. One parent can make himself available in a morning, another one in the evening, or in the weekend. The location where you organise the focus group is also important. Parents take part in a focus group of their own choice; this could be in their familiar environment, at the place where parents already come. These options lower the barrier for parents to participate.

Flyer: do you want to reach all parents? Do all parents speak or understand the language sufficiently? Do you need to provide an interpreter? A multilingual invitation indicates that everyone is welcome to participate in these conversations.

Each focus group should support the sharing and co-construction of meanings amongst participants. The discussion will start from individual points of view, but it should evolve through confrontation with the perspective of others.

Key points:

1. At the beginning of the focus group, the facilitator welcomes everybody and reminds the aims of the focus group. Remind that everything will stay anonymous and that just the research team will see the information of the families. Remind also that the focus group will be recorded.
2. As a facilitator, make sure there is a focus on how diversity/inclusion is perceived through all the areas you will explore with the focus groups. You do not need to make this explicit with participants, but pay attention to the examples they bring and try to deepen concepts connected to this theme when they arise.
3. As a facilitator make sure everybody has a say, pay attention also to the ones that talk less and value what is said, without judging or giving an answer yourself. Be careful, for example, when a participant asks you 'what do you mean?' Sometimes by answering this question, you actually give a direction to the conversation (unless of course the question refers to a term that it is not understood or so). In these cases, it is better to mirror the question by repeating 'what do you mean?'
4. When exploring each theme, always ask concrete examples. Through concrete examples, we get to know what parents 'really' think, and we don't get 'standardized answers'. E.g. after asking 'Do you think it's important to stimulate autonomy during the 'saying goodbye'. Make it concrete by asking 'do you think children say goodbye by themselves?'

## A template with possible questions for parents

### 1. Presentation – 10 min.

*My name is xxx. I work at xxx. We want to get to know the experiences of children and parents during the period of transition between pre-school / child care and school or between home and school. That is why you have been invited. You are all mothers and fathers from the neighbourhood, or from one of those ECEC centres. ECEC centres in your neighbourhood want to contribute to a warm transition for children and parents and to a good policy for parents. We would like to hear your opinion, about how things are going right now. What is going well? And what needs adjustments?*

*So what are we going to do? This is a group discussion. I am going to ask questions to which you can react. We will be listening to each other; you can complement each other, or offer a different opinion. Sometimes it will be necessary to speak slowly because of the translation. We will be working until xx h at last.*

*Have you got any more questions about the objectives of this discussion? Would you like to take part? Be sure that you are not at all obliged to participate. We just think it is very important to let hear your voice.*

*My colleague xx will be taking notes. Everything here today is anonymous. We will not write down your name. But can we put the conversation on tape? We want to reproduce your opinions correctly, and afterwards we want to process your ideas as good as possible.*

### 2. Introduction – 10 min.

*Introduction 'who is who'. We will not write down any names, but I think it is nice to get to know you a little better. Sticker to write down your name.*

*Also tell: how many children, the name of your child, since when have they been going to school.*

### 3. Warm-up – 10 min.

*How do you feel in ECEC/school in general? What is the vibe among the ECEC staff/ teachers and parents? Are you feeling welcome? How come you are feeling welcome? Why are you not feeling welcome? What is the vibe among the parents?*

### 4. At child level – 30 min.

Getting familiar with a new situation:

*Think back at the first time you came to ECEC / school with your kid. How were you received? How were the first days with your child? About familiarisation, how did that work? How was your contact with the ECEC staff/ teachers? Did you get any explanation? What were you able to tell yourself? What did you tell about your child?*

*And how did it make you feel?*

Daily contact:

*How did the contacts afterwards work out? When bringing or picking up your child, do you talk to the childcare workers / teachers? What are you talking about? What would you like to talk about (but could not until now)? What would you like to know (but do not know for the moment)?*

*How does/did it make you feel? Are you getting enough space and time for this? Can you start this daily conversation easily or is it rather difficult? Why?*

*Are there any ways in which daily contact is supported? E.g. notebook, leaflets, communication put onto the wall in natal group, classroom, ECEC or school ... Is it of any help to you? In what way? Or: why do you think it is good? What is insufficient? Can you work with it yourself easily? How does that make you feel?*

Key moments:

*How did other key moments work out for your kid at school? How was the transition van home or ECEC to school? To another grade and another teacher or from ECEC to primary school? How did the transition work out for your child? In what way were you possibly involved? How did that make you feel?*

#### **5. At the level of organisation of the school – 20 min.**

Information about the policy of education:

*As a parent, are you aware of the policy of education of the ECEC / school? How have you been informed? Is that sufficient? Is it necessary for you? Does that information help you? In what way?*

Participating / deciding together:

*Does the school ask you sometimes to participate in thinking about the school's functioning or vision? Do you bring along your own input? About which subjects?*

*If not: do you think it is appropriate? Would you like to get involved more? Why / why not? What are your expectations about that?*

#### **6. Conclusion – 10 min.**

*Is there still something you would like to say? Any additions? Some more remarks? Extra suggestions?*

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