

# Data Collection Method Brief

*Collecting Data from Children Ages 9-13*

## APPENDIX A: IN PERSON FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

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<http://www.lpfch.org/informed/facts/etr.html>

## In-Person Focus Group Interviews

### How have focus groups been used for collecting information from children?

Researchers and practitioners use focus group interviews to develop and/or test programs, services, models, or evaluation tools; to explore children's views on a variety of issues; and for some types of program evaluation. Research suggests that it can be used effectively with children 6 years of age and older. Focus group interviews are not appropriate for hypothesis testing or drawing inferences about larger populations;<sup>2,3,6</sup> however, this method is often used in combination with other modes of data collection (e.g., surveys) to provide more in-depth information and/or explore findings.

### What are important considerations when using focus group interviews with children?

- ✓ Children under 11 years of age may need visual as well as verbal stimuli to make issues concrete.
- ✓ Investigators can use standard interview questions with children ages 11 and older, but the questions must be modified to reflect children's cognitive and language abilities, address issues of confidentiality of reporting certain behaviors, and ensure they are relevant to children's main social and cultural context (e.g., home or school).
- ✓ This method is ideal for children with lower literacy skills.
- ✓ Focus groups provide an opportunity to obtain more in-depth data than written surveys because they allow focus group facilitators and participants to ask clarifying questions.
- ✓ It is preferable to have slightly smaller groups when conducting focus groups with children than with adults (ideally 4-6 children).
- ✓ Mixed gender focus groups work well with 9-13 year olds, but it may be beneficial to consider gender-specific groups for some topics (e.g., sexual risk taking).
- ✓ It is preferable to keep the length of focus group interviews shorter with children (e.g., 30-60 minutes) than with adults.
- ✓ It is important to include time to develop rapport and get to know the children before the focus group begins.
- ✓ It is critical to include facilitator training when using this approach because the quality of the data from focus group interviews is dependent on the skills, experience, and interest of the facilitator.
- ✓ Some research and evaluation groups are now using telephone-based focus groups with adults; use of telephone-based focus groups with children has not yet been reported in the literature.

<p><b>What are the advantages of using this approach?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptability</li> <li>• Ease of use</li> <li>• Flexible</li> <li>• In-depth information</li> </ul>	<p><b>What the Research Says...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Participation in focus groups was perceived as “fun” by some children.<sup>4</sup></li> <li>✓ Children may feel more supported, safer, and less intimidated taking part in group interviews with peers as compared to individual interviews.<sup>2,3,5</sup></li> <li>✓ Focus groups provide an easy way to learn about the ideas and opinions of homogeneous groups.<sup>5,6</sup></li> <li>✓ This method can be combined easily with other data collection methods.<sup>2</sup></li> <li>✓ Focus groups eliminate the power imbalance between child and adult researcher that may be present in individual interviews.<sup>1,6</sup></li> <li>✓ Group interviews may generate a greater range of responses than individual interviews because participants can develop, challenge and suggest new ideas and react to differing viewpoints.<sup>1,5,6</sup></li> <li>✓ Focus groups tend to be less costly than individual interviews.<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>
<p><b>What are the drawbacks of this approach?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation</li> <li>• Privacy</li> <li>• Data quality</li> <li>• Data management</li> </ul>	<p><b>What the Research Says...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Scheduling a time and location that is convenient for all participants can be challenging.<sup>2,6</sup></li> <li>✓ The success of the focus group is dependent, in part, on the communication skills of the participants.<sup>5</sup></li> <li>✓ Some children (e.g., those who are shy or who do not like speaking in front of groups) may be uncomfortable taking part in focus groups.<sup>4</sup></li> <li>✓ Group interviews can be influenced by individuals within a group.<sup>2</sup></li> <li>✓ It is more difficult to maintain confidentiality using focus group interviews compared to individual interviews.<sup>5</sup></li> <li>✓ Focus group interviews are not good for hypothesis testing or drawing inferences about larger populations.<sup>2,3,6</sup></li> <li>✓ This approach may mask individual differences.<sup>1</sup></li> <li>✓ Focus group data require detailed coding for analysis.<sup>6</sup></li> </ul>
<p><b>References</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Heary, C., &amp; Hennessy, E. (2006). Focus groups versus individual interviews with children: A comparison of data. <i>Irish Journal of Psychology</i>, 27(1-2), 58-68.</li> <li>2. Heary, C. M., &amp; Hennessy, E. (2002). The use of focus group interviews in pediatric health care research. <i>Journal of Pediatric Psychology</i>, 27(1), 47-57.</li> <li>3. Hennessy, E., &amp; Heary, C. (2004). Exploring Children's View through focus groups. In S. Green &amp; D. Hogan (Eds.), <i>Researching children's experiences: Approaches and methods</i> (pp. 236). London Sage.</li> <li>4. Hill, M. (2006). Children's voices on ways of having a voice: Children's and young people's perspectives on methods used in research and consultation. <i>Childhood: A Global Journal of Child Research</i>, 13(1), 69-89.</li> <li>5. Lewis, A. (1992). Group child interviews as a research tool. <i>British Educational Research Journal</i>, 18(4), 413-421.</li> <li>6. Peterson-Sweeney, K. (2005). The Use of Focus Groups in Pediatric and Adolescent Research. <i>Journal of Pediatric Health Care</i>, 19(2), 104-110.</li> </ol>