

IDENTIFYING PARENTAL BARRIERS TO BOOSTER SEAT USE

Since booster seats are a new technology for many parents, parents may initially be unaware of the importance of booster seats or resistant to using them. You should expect some parents to question why booster seats are needed and to be concerned that their children may not want to use them. Some parents may also question whether they are as safe as car sets for younger children, and others may just place children in seat belts without a booster. In order to design an effective education program, it is important to understand what the barriers are to using booster seats and what would motivate parents to use them.

BARRIERS FACED BY PARENTS

One effective way to find out how parents feel about booster seats is to hold focus groups or market research discussion groups with small groups of parents in your community. These discussions provide parents with a forum to share their opinions and knowledge about child passenger safety and booster seats. The information learned from parents will build on what you learned from your conversations with community organizations (described above).

For our campaign, we conducted a number of focus groups with parents in Spring 2000 before we started planning our educational efforts.²² Three focus groups were conducted in King County with parents of children under 10-years-old. In addition, two focus groups were conducted in other areas of the state with parents of children who were not using booster seats. Professional survey research firms conducted these groups.

From the focus groups in Washington State, we learned that parents face the following barriers to using booster seats:

Lack of knowledge

- Parents did not have a clear idea of what a booster seat is, or what one even looks like.
- Parents were confused about when children should ride in the different safety devices. They incorrectly identified the correct age at which it is safe for a child to use an adult lap and shoulder belt. Some thought that adult seat belt use is based on a combination of child behavior and size. Many parents thought their children were “too big” or “too old” to ride in a safety seat, even though their children were the right size for a booster seat.
- Some parents believed a seat belt was adequate and booster seats were non-essential. They viewed the booster seat as a device that just helps children see out the window better. They did not see the booster seat as an essential safety device.

- Parents were concerned that booster seats might increase a child's risk of injury because she could slip out, because her face would be closer to a window that may shatter in a crash, and because the seat is not firmly attached to the car like a forward-facing car seat is.

Cost

Parents felt that booster seats are expensive. In 2000, parents in our focus groups reported finding only high-back booster seats that cost \$80-100 (even though less expensive low back and high-back seats were in stores at this time.). Parents wanted to pay only \$20-25 for a booster seat.

Child Resistance

Parents felt their children would resist booster seat use because they were "too old" to be sitting in a safety seat. This resistance is made worse by peer pressure. When older siblings and friends did not use booster seats, their children did not want to use them.

Difficulty Fitting Seats in Vehicle

Parents expressed concern that it is difficult to fit the seats in the vehicle, particularly if there are three passengers and car seats in the back seat. They also were concerned about having to transfer seats between vehicles.

Lack of Shoulder Belts in Vehicle

Some parents could not use booster seats because their cars were made before 1990 and only had lap belts in the back seat. Since booster seats require a lap and a shoulder belt, these parents did not know how to buckle their children safely in the car.

We worked to overcome the first three barriers through a comprehensive booster seat campaign.

Many of these parental barriers may be shared by parents in your community. Other barriers may be unique to your community, such as having few retail stores carrying booster seats, or specific cultural or language barriers.^{23, 24}

SETTING UP FOCUS GROUPS

If you plan to conduct focus groups in your own community, you have two options, depending upon your budget and staff resources:

- a) Hire a professional market research firm; or**
- b) Organize and conduct the focus groups on your own**

Below is a table outlining the pros and cons of each option followed by some tips to keep in mind for each one.

USING A PROFESSIONAL FIRM

PROS	CONS
Handles all logistics, including participant recruitment and screening (can be time-consuming)	Less personal contact by your staff with the community you serve
Uses professional facilitators who are experienced in eliciting information from participants	Less likely for the facilitator to represent the target community.
Provides meeting space and technical equipment	Expensive. Focus groups can cost over \$3000 per session.

Tips for using a professional firm:

- When choosing a firm, interview them about how they conduct their focus groups, how they have worked with clients in the past, and who their previous clients have been. Ask to speak with their former clients.
- Be clear about your goals for the focus groups and what information you hope to learn from the participants. The firm will design the session and choose the participants based on what you tell them.
- Provide the firm with the characteristics of the audience that you are trying to educate. Some questions you may ask yourself before meeting with the market research firm team: Are you educating parents or professionals who work with children? Are they occasional users of booster seats or have they never heard of them? What is the age range of the children that your message will affect? Is your audience in a specific cultural group or socioeconomic group?

- Suggest locations for the focus groups if you have a preference. It is easier to recruit participants if the meeting location is close to their home or work.
- Meet the focus group facilitator that the firm provides to find out if she or he will be a good “fit” for your group. You will want someone who will put your audience at ease and who will be able to draw information and opinions from the participants. If you have your own facilitator whom you would like to use, most firms are willing to work with this person.
- Discuss what incentives can be offered to participants to thank them for their time and efforts. Incentives help recruit participants and make sure that they show up for the session. Consider providing a low-cost or free booster seat to participants.
- If you have a limited budget, some market research firms are flexible and will share the responsibilities. For example, you could draft the script, recruit participants, and find a location. The firm could help revise the script, provide a facilitator, and write the final report that shares results.

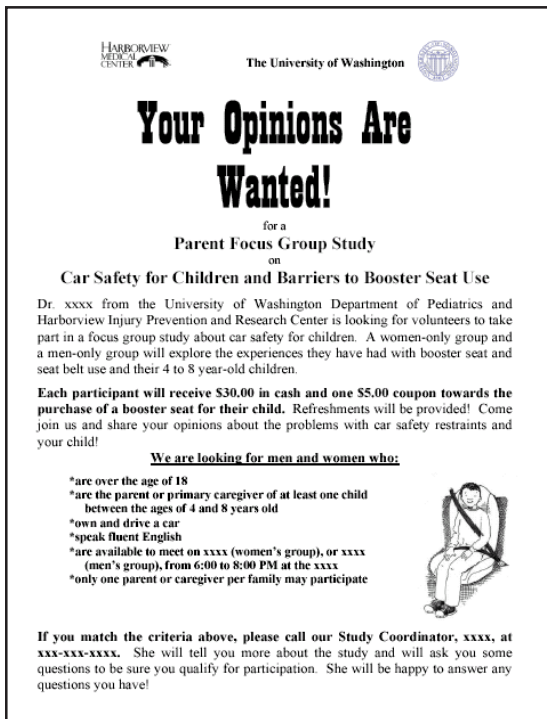
PLANNING YOUR OWN FOCUS GROUPS

PROS	CONS
Less expensive. Focus groups can be held for \$500-\$800.	Need to arrange for technical equipment and transcription of recording after session has ended.
Opportunity for more personal contact by your staff with the community you serve. This contact may help you on your campaign in the future. For example, parents who participate may be interested in sharing booster seat information in their own community and may refer families to you for more information.	Need to handle all logistics, including participant recruitment and screening. Recruitment and screening can be very time-consuming.
Can provide own facilitator who is similar to your audience members and from the community.	Facilitator may not be as skilled at drawing information from participants. If the facilitator is recognized by the community, members may feel reluctant to share personal information.

Checklist for conducting focus groups on your own:

- Determine what the goals are for the focus group.** Are you trying to find out why parents do not use booster seats on everyday trips? Are you trying to find out the barriers that child-care providers have in educating their clients (parents) about booster seats?
- Identify your initial target audience.** It is important to determine whose behavior you want to change. However, realize that this may change somewhat during the course of the focus groups – you may learn that there is an additional group whose behavior change is necessary to accomplish the campaign goals.
- Recruit a facilitator.** The best facilitator is someone who the participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts with. Facilitators must be very careful not to impose their views and values on the group. They should be aware of giving all participants a chance to share their opinions in a friendly and supportive atmosphere.
- Recruit translators or assistants if needed.**
- Find a location and time that is convenient for this community.** Evening meetings or weekend meetings are often convenient for parents who work.
- Determine what incentives you have to encourage participation.** Are you able to pay the participants? Can you provide food or child-care? Can you reimburse for mileage or pay for parking? Recruitment is usually easier if you can pay people for their time. We paid people \$25-30 per 2-hour session, provided food, and gave each participant a discount coupon for a booster seat.
- Write a script for your focus group session based on your campaign goals.** Use open-ended questions, instead of questions that require only a “Yes” or “No” answer. Open-ended questions encourage participants to describe their feelings and opinions. In the Washington campaign, we had three goals for our focus groups: 1) explore barriers to booster seat use; 2) discuss what would change their behavior; and 3) test appeal of campaign messages and communication channels.

- ❑ **Recruit participants.** Post advertising flyers where potential participants will see them regularly, such as stores, community centers, clinics, churches, and parks. You can also recruit directly at these venues and/or ask contacts at these venues to encourage participation. You will want about 8-10 participants per group. Recruit several extra participants as typically some people do not show up.



DO INCLUDE ON A RECRUITMENT FLYER:

- Characteristics of participant (i.e. car owner)
- Incentives
- Who to contact for more information
- Confidentiality of information
- Who is conducting the research

TO ALLOW YOU TO SCREEN RECRUITS AND TO REDUCE BIAS IN YOUR RESULTS, DO NOT INCLUDE:

- Location and time of meeting
- What the results will be used for

- ❑ **Screen recruits over the phone.** Use your audience characteristics to screen callers who respond to your advertisements. For example, if you are trying to find out more information about parents who never use booster seats, ask callers “Do you own a booster seat?”

- ❑ **Gather materials that you will show or use at the session.** If you show sample educational materials or sample messages, make sure your materials are big enough to be seen by all at the meeting, or that you provide individual copies.
- ❑ **Determine how you will record the answers.** Tape record or videotape the sessions so you can have a record of participant answers and reactions. Videotaping can be costly, but it allows you to see facial expressions. In addition, you should have one or two people designated as “scribes” for the session in case the sound quality of the recording turns out poor.
- ❑ **Place reminder calls to participants a day or two before the meeting.**
- ❑ **During the recruitment, screening, and actual session, make parents feel comfortable and valued.** Their “expertise” as parents is what you need!
- ❑ **Expect the unexpected at the focus group!** Participants may bring along unexpected friends, equipment may not work correctly or people may interpret questions in a way that you did not expect. You may want to conduct a small pilot group first to test the script, facility, and equipment.