

ANNEX G.

Focus Group Discussions with Adolescents and Youth for Cultural Adaptation: Guidance and Templates

UNICEF | Preprint Version, May 2026

Purpose

To elicit adolescents' perspectives on MMAPP items and administration to ensure linguistic, cultural, and conceptual fit prior to quantitative use. This guide supports structured discussion and systematic recording for five per-item attributes—Comprehensibility, Acceptability, Relevance, Technical Equivalence/Response Options, and Completeness—and also captures feedback on instructions, survey administration preferences, and general views on mental health and wellbeing.

Session Overview & Logistics

Duration: 90–120 minutes (extend to 2 sessions if reviewing many items).

Group size: 6–8 adolescents; run parallel groups to balance gender/age/lived-experience as feasible.

Minimum number of FGDs: Every item should be covered in at least 2 FGDs, therefore the minimum number of FGDs is two if every item can be covered in a single FGD. If not every item can be covered, then 4 FGDs are recommended so that each FGD can cover half of the times.

Facilitation team: 1 moderator + 1 note-taker (additional note-takers or facilitators can be helpful if available).

Materials: Item cards/slides, consent/assent forms, demographic sheet, sticky dots, pens, flipchart/whiteboard, response options visual aids (e.g., 4-point frequency scale cards).

Ethics & safety: Have referral information and a brief distress protocol available; reiterate confidentiality and voluntary participation.

Sampling & Group Composition

Suggested segmentation: (a) younger (15–17) and older (18–24) adolescents – *note: this can be adjusted based on your target age range, so if you are focused on 12-16yos, the one group is 12-14, one group 15-16*; (b) divide by gender if culturally appropriate: girls/young women and boys/young men – *note: if the study is only with girls, then boy groups would not be needed*; (c) include adolescents with lived experience of depression/anxiety. Consider additional groups if relevant (e.g., LGBTQ+ youth, out-of-school youth, adolescent mothers).

Roles

Moderator: Guides discussion, keeps neutrality, ensures all voices are heard, probes systematically for the six attributes.

Note-taker: Captures verbatim phrases, examples, disagreements, and records ratings in the per-item capture tables. FGD sessions should be audio recorded to facilitate transcription later.

Observer (optional): Tracks time, supports flow, monitors group dynamics and wellbeing.

Consent and Assent Form Examples for FGDs

Template 1: Parental Consent for Children aged 15-17 years

Introduction and purpose of the Focus Group Discussions:

Hello! We are inviting your child to take part in a discussion about the mental health of adolescents and young people in [name of context]. We want to understand how different adolescents your child's age talk about different feelings and emotions. The purpose of this activity is to identify what adaptations are needed to questions regarding how adolescents and young people refer to or describe their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, to make sure the questions and language is understandable, acceptable and relevant to the local context.

We have asked your child to be involved in this study because he/she is an adolescent or young person living in [name of context]. About [number of] adolescents and young people ages 15-24 in [name of context] will be asked to participate in this activity.

Who is conducting the work:

[Please adjust as needed] The work is led by XXX, in coordination with XXX. The work is also supported by [list of institutions].

What does involvement entail:

The activity will include a facilitated conversation about the language that is used among adolescents and young people to refer to feelings, emotions and behaviours relevant to their mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. The activity will be conducted by [adapt as needed] mental health expert from [insert more details] who will ensure a safe environment. The activity will last approximately [insert estimated number of] hours, and breaks and refreshments will be provided.

The discussion will be audio-recorded, and the recording will be transcribed, or typed out for documentation purposes. However, the information recorded or transcribed will not be shared outside of this activity's purpose, and your child's name will not be linked to the things they say in the transcript.

What if I do not want my child to do this?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. This means you may choose for your child not to take part in the activity. Or, if you choose to allow your child to participate, you or your child may choose to stop participating at any time. If you change your mind about participating, you or your child may simply inform the facilitator of the activity. Your choice to let your child participate, or not to participate, will not affect you or your child in any way.

There are no physical risks for your child to participate. While we do not anticipate it, there is a chance some of the items we talk about may give rise to some discomfort. To account for this,

before we begin the session, the participants will be informed that they do not have to talk about anything they don't want to. If there are questions they don't want to answer, they do not have to.

If they feel upset during the interview, they may tell the facilitator of the study, and counselling support will be available to support participants, whenever needed. Please feel free to contact the activity coordinators listed on the information sheet we are sharing below.

If you agree for your child to take part in this study, there are no direct benefits to you or your child. We hope that, in the future, the information learned from this study will help us better understand how adolescents and young people express their feelings and emotions and ultimately help us understand the best way to measure mental health among this important population group, at the population level. You and your child will not be paid to take part in the study. Your child will receive a small item as a thank you for participating.

Confidentiality:

We will keep your and your child's personal information confidential, which means nobody will be informed about their participation in this activity. The information collected from all participants during the discussion will be put together anonymously, which means that participants' names or identifiers will not be presented. The results of the discussions will be written in reports and the consensus of the discussions will inform data collection tools developed by [insert name of relevant organisations involved in organising the FGD and implementing the module].

Do you have any questions?

Please feel free to ask the researchers any questions now. If you have any questions after you leave today, please contact the researchers listed in the information sheet you will be provided.

AUTHORIZATION:

By signing the statement below, you agree to allow your child to take part in the discussion.

I have read and understood the information provided above.
The purpose of this study, the procedures, risks and benefits have been explained to me.
I understand that I or my child can stop participation at any time.
I have had all my questions answered.
I have decided to allow my child to participate in this study.

Name of Parent/Guardian (Print)

Signature of Parent

Date

Name of Child (Print)

Template 2: Assent Form for Children aged 15-17 years

Introduction and purpose of the Focus Group Discussions:

Hello! We are inviting you to take part in a discussion about the mental health of adolescents and young people in [name of context]. We want to understand how different youth your age talk about different feelings and emotions. The purpose of this activity is to identify what adaptations are needed on questions regarding how adolescents and young people refer to or describe their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, to make sure the questions and language is understandable, acceptable and relevant to the local context.

We have asked you to be involved in this study because you are an adolescent or young person living in [name of context]. About [number of] adolescents and young people ages 15-24 in [name of context] will be asked to participate in this activity.

Who is conducting the work:

[Please adjust as needed] The work is led by XXX, in coordination with XXX. The work is also supported by [list of institutions].

What does involvement entail:

The activity will include a facilitated conversation about the language that is used among adolescents and young people to refer to feelings, emotions and behaviours relevant to their mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. The activity will be conducted by [adapt as needed] mental health expert from [insert more details] who will ensure a safe environment. The activity will last approximately [insert estimated number of] hours, and breaks and refreshments will be provided.

The discussion will be audio-recorded, and the recording will be transcribed, or typed out for documentation purposes. However, the information recorded or transcribed will not be shared outside of this activity's purpose, and your child's name will not be linked to the things they say in the transcript.

What if I do not want to do this?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. This means you may choose not to take part in the activity. Or, if you choose to participate, you can change your mind at any time, and choose to stop participating. If you change your mind about participating, you may simply inform the facilitator of the study. Your choice to participate or not to participate will not affect you in any way.

There are no physical risks to you if you choose to participate. While we do not anticipate it, there is a chance some of the items we talk about may give rise to some discomfort. To account for this, before we begin the session, you will be informed that you do not have to talk about anything you don't want to. If there are questions you don't want to answer, you do not have to.

If you feel upset during the interview, you may tell the facilitator of the study, and counselling support will be available to support participants if needed. Please feel free to contact the activity coordinators listed on the information sheet we are sharing below.

If you agree to take part in this study, there is no direct benefit to you. We hope that, in the future, the information learned from this study will help us better understand how adolescents and young people express their feelings and emotions and ultimately help us understand the best way to measure mental health among this important age group. *[Adapt as needed]* You will not be paid to take part in the study. You will receive a small item as a thank you for participating.

Confidentiality:

We will keep your personal information confidential, which means that nobody will be informed about your participation in the activity. The information collected from all participants during the discussion will be put together anonymously, which means your names or identifiers will not be presented. The results of the discussions will be written in reports and the consensus of the discussions will inform data collection tools developed by [insert name of relevant organisations].

Do you have any questions?

Please feel free to ask the researchers any questions now. If you have any questions after you leave today, please contact the researchers listed in the information sheet you will be provided.

AUTHORIZATION:

By signing the statement below, you agree to take part in the discussion.

I have read and understood the information provided above.
The purpose of this study, the procedures, risks and benefits have been explained to me.
I understand that I can stop participation at any time.
I have had all my questions answered.
I have decided to participate in this study.

Name of Parent/Guardian (Print)

Signature of Parent

Date

Name of Child (Print)

Template 3: Consent Form for Children aged 18-24 years

Introduction and purpose of the Focus Group Discussions:

Hello! We are inviting you to take part in a discussion about the mental health of adolescents and young people in [name of context]. We want to understand how different youth your age talk about different feelings and emotions. The purpose of this activity is to identify what adaptations are needed on questions regarding how adolescents and young people refer to or describe their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, to make sure the questions and language is understandable, acceptable and relevant to the local context.

We have asked you to be involved in this study because you are an adolescent or young person living in [name of context]. About [number of] adolescents and young people ages 15-24 in [name of context] will be asked to participate in this activity.

Who is conducting the work:

[Please adjust as needed] The work is led by XXX, in coordination with XXX. The work is also supported by [list of institutions].

What does involvement entail:

The activity will include a facilitated conversation about the language that is used among adolescents and young people to refer to feelings, emotions and behaviours relevant to their mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. The activity will be conducted by [adapt as needed] mental health expert from [insert more details] who will ensure a safe environment. The activity will last approximately [insert estimated number of] hours, and breaks and refreshments will be provided.

The discussion will be audio-recorded, and the recording will be transcribed, or typed out for documentation purposes. However, the information recorded or transcribed will not be shared outside of this activity's purpose.

What if I do not want to do this?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. This means you may choose not to take part in the activity. Or, if you choose to participate, you can change your mind at any time, and choose to stop participating. If you would like to change the terms of your participation, you may simply inform the facilitator of the study. Your choice to participate or not to participate will not affect you in any way.

There are no physical risks to you if you choose to participate. While we do not anticipate it, there is a chance some of the items we talk about may give rise to some discomfort. To account for this, before we begin the session, you will be informed that you do not have to talk about anything you don't want to. If there are questions you don't want to answer, you do not have to.

If you feel upset during the interview, you may tell the facilitator of the study, and counselling support will be available to support participants if needed. Please feel free to contact the activity coordinators listed on the information sheet we are sharing below.

If you agree to take part in this study, there is no direct benefit to you. We hope that, in the future, the information learned from this study will help us better understand how adolescents and young people express their feelings and emotions and ultimately help us understand the best way to measure mental health among this important age group. *[Adapt as needed]* You will not be paid to take part in the study. You will receive a small item as a thank you for participating.

Confidentiality:

We will keep your personal information confidential, which means that nobody will be informed about your participation in the activity. The information collected from all participants during the discussion will be put together anonymously, which means your names or identifiers will not be presented. The results of the discussions will be written in reports and the consensus of the discussions will inform data collection tools developed by [insert name of relevant organisations].

Do you have any questions?

Please feel free to ask the researchers any questions now. If you have any questions after you leave today, please contact the researchers listed in the information sheet you will be provided.

AUTHORIZATION:

By signing the statement below, you agree to take part in the discussion.

I have read and understood the information provided above.
The purpose of this study, the procedures, risks and benefits have been explained to me.
I understand that I can stop participation at any time.
I have had all my questions answered.
I have decided to participate in this study.

Name of Adolescent / Youth (Print.) Signature of Adolescent / Youth Date

FGD Facilitation Guidance and Template Script

| Session | Suggested time | Instruction overview and key considerations | Template Script |
|--------------|----------------|---|--|
| Introduction | 5 minutes | <p>Welcome participants. Explain the purpose is adapting questions on adolescent mental health thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to be relevant to the local context without changing the meaning of the item entirely. We involve youth directly because we need their expertise to be sure the final version can easily be understood among young people throughout their setting.</p> <p>Especially when priming about the suicidality questions, explain that we know that it's sensitive, but it's very important to know about as it's a problem that affects many people. Further, specifically highlight to participants that sometimes we think that asking about it will make things worse, but actually asking about it can help young people to feel understood, and can help to normalise these feelings, and to get support that they need.</p> | <p>Introduction: Greetings, everyone! Thank you for joining us today. My name is [Your Name] and I'll be your facilitator for this important discussion. Joining me today are also [introduce notetaker and other staff so participants know who is in the room].</p> <p>Objective: We have invited you here today because we are planning a survey to find out more about the mental health and wellbeing of young people in [country/context]. We want to make sure the words we use in the survey are the best words we can use with young people to talk about emotions and experiences of feelings. This will help us when we try to measure how young people are feeling in an upcoming survey on adolescent mental health which will be implemented around the country.</p> <p>You are the experts: we learn from you. You were invited because you have important knowledge. We hope you will help us to use the right words, to ensure young people will understand when we ask about emotions and feelings.</p> <p>All your ideas are welcome. We are not trying to get everyone to agree. We want to hear all kinds of different opinions and ideas you all might have.</p> |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | | <p>We want to hear examples, but we also need to protect people's privacy. Please try not to use real people's names. Instead, you could say something like, "a young person might say..."</p> <p>The discussion will last [estimated time]. We will take a break in the middle. Feel free to move around. You can find bathrooms here [explain location].</p> <p>Confidentiality: Before we dive in, I want to make clear that all information shared during this discussion is confidential. Your responses will be kept anonymous. We want everyone to feel comfortable being open and honest.</p> <p>We will be talking about sensitive topics, and you don't have to answer any question you don't want to. Also, if you'd like to step outside during any part of the session, you are welcome. If you would like to speak to one of us separately, you can give us a signal. We can also speak to you after the group. And you can leave the discussion at any point, you will not be in any kind of trouble.</p> <p>Remind them about Safeguarding Focal points and contact information.</p> |
|--|--|--|--|

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| <p>Icebreaker and names</p> | <p>15 minutes – depending on the number of participants present</p> | <p>Consider an icebreaker/ introduction. All facilitators, notetakers, etc. should join.</p> | <p>Now, to get us started and create a comfortable atmosphere, let's begin with a brief icebreaker activity. Turn to the person to the right of you, and learn their name and their favorite food (or if working with a food-insecure population, use another activity). Once everyone is done discussing, we will come together as a group, and I will ask each of you to introduce your partner to the rest of the group. Any questions before we start?</p> <p>[After 5 minutes of discussion time, come together as a group and spend the next 5-10 minutes having each person introduce their partner].</p> <p>*note: this is an example of an icebreaker, but please adapt as you see fit.</p> |
| <p>Ground Rules</p> | <p>10 minutes</p> | <p>Explain some ground rules, and participants may suggest other rules you add to this list. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • voluntary (participants can stop at any time with no consequences) • confidentiality (not speak about what someone has said with others outside the group) • comfortable (if anyone wants to take a break, or talk 1-on-1, | <p>Great! Now that we all know each other, let's come together to establish some ground rules to ensure a productive and respectful discussion. I'll start by suggesting a few, and then I invite you all to share ideas you have, and we can collectively agree on a set of ground rules and put them up on this paper here [point to paper] for us to see throughout the session.</p> <p>For instance, going back to my introduction, talk about the importance of confidentiality. What's shared in this room, stays in this room, and we will all respect</p> |

| | | | |
|--|------------------|---|---|
| | | <p>that can be done at any time).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> not using cell phones. Turn off or silence your cell phones. Stay with the group, no side conversations, speak clearly, respect one another, not talking over one another, (otherwise we won't be able to write down what is said...) <p>You may also consider handing out index cards/post-its at the beginning inviting participants to write down any thoughts or ideas they didn't want to share out loud, and they can be given to facilitator or left in a box at the end.</p> | <p>each other in ensuring this confidentiality.</p> <p>Another ground rule would be respect. Let's show respect for each other's opinions and ideas, even if they differ from our own. Relatedly, please listen attentively when someone is speaking, and avoid interrupting. And please turn off or silence your cell phones to avoid interruptions during the discussion.</p> <p>Now, are there any additional ground rules you'd like to suggest, or do we all agree on these?</p> <p>[Facilitator waits for participants to agree or suggest modifications to the ground rules, and with the help of a notetaker, writes down the final set of ground rules on a paper where everyone can see them. Consider handing out index cards/post-its at the beginning inviting participants to write down any thoughts or ideas they didn't want to share out loud, and they can be given to the facilitator or left in a box at the end.]</p> |
| <p>Explain Items Review Process</p> | <p>5 minutes</p> | <p>Explain the aims for each item is to find out if it is/how we can improve the item wording to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understandable – is the wording clear for most young people their age, can we make it clearer (Is the item easily understandable for | <p>Now that we've established our ground rules, let's briefly explain the items review process. Our aim is to ensure that each question in the module meets three key criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understandable: We want to make sure the wording of each question is clear for most young people. If you find any |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | <p>adolescents in your community? Is there are alternative wording that would be commonly understood for adolescents in your community?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comfortable – are the words okay to talk about with someone else, can we improve this (Would it be offensive, stigmatizing, or inappropriate to ask this question to adolescents in your community? If unacceptable, how could the question be reworded to make it acceptable to ask?) • Relevant – is the question asking about things that are part of daily life for youth (Is the item relevant to adolescents in your community? Is it something that adolescents talk about or experience in your community? If not, could the examples be changed to more relevant to adolescents in your community?) • Consistent with experiences of mental health conditions - Are the thoughts, feelings, or experiences in the question something that you have heard among adolescents and young people living with mental health conditions in your community? If not, how could the wording be changed to be more | <p>wording that is unclear, we will work together to make it clearer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comfortable: We need to assess whether the words used in the questions are comfortable to talk about with someone else. If there are any questions that you think could be asked in a better way, please let us know. • Relevant: It's important that questions ask about things that are a part of daily life for youth in our community. We want to ensure that the questions are relevant to your experiences. • Consistent with mental health experiences: We want to make sure that the questions accurately reflect the descriptions from adolescents who have had experiences related to mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety. Are these the words that adolescents with these experiences would use, or should some of the wording be changed to fit how they would describe things? <p>Our goal is to make the module as user-friendly and effective as possible, so your feedback in these areas is incredibly valuable.</p> |
|--|--|--|--|

| | | | |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|
| | | <p>reflective of the experience of adolescents with lived experience of mental health conditions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • | |
| <p>Items Review</p> | <p>Each item that needs discussing can take from a few minutes to 20 minutes or longer. Account for a short break after every 40 minutes or so.</p> | <p>Now go through each questionnaire item by item with the group. Refer to excel sheet to note suggestions to improve wording. To elicit more descriptions, you may use prompts like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is it like for an adolescent who feels [emotion mentioned in the question] every day? • What does [emotion/word] mean to you? • Are there other words that young people often use to describe this [emotion]? • Which word do you think would be best for this question, '[current wording]' or the words you suggested?] <p>Take a short break or do an energizer after around 40 minutes in between. This could look like approximately 5-7 items per hour, although it may change across focus group and item.</p> | <p>Items Review: Now, we will go through each survey question one by one to check that each question is understandable, comfortable to talk about, and relevant. You might think some questions are ok the way they are, and you might have ideas for how to improve others. Our notetaker will use an Excel sheet as we discuss to note suggestions for improving the wording.</p> <p>After we discuss every few items, we'll take a short break to keep our energy levels up.</p> <p>Does anyone have any questions before we get started?</p> <p>Let's now begin with the first item.</p> <p>[Allow silence. Allow time for participants to reflect. Allow time for participants to think, then speak.]</p> |

| | | | |
|----------------|-----------|--|--|
| | | | |
| Closing | 2 minutes | <p>Thank the group for their time. Remind them about the confidentiality issues and that they can talk to the team members with any comments or questions whenever they would like to.</p> | <p>Thank you for your invaluable time and contributions during this process. Your insights are tremendously important in helping us enhance the module and ensure it's well-suited for our community. Before we wrap up, I'd like to remind everyone about the importance of confidentiality. Everything shared in this discussion is confidential, and your responses will remain anonymous.</p> <p>Before we end this discussion, how is everyone feeling? I know we covered some difficult topics, so let's check-in</p> <p>[consider an activity to close the discussion, something that is cheerful and community-driven]</p> <p>If you have any comments or questions at any point, feel free to reach out to [Name and contact of focal point] whenever you'd like. Your feedback is always welcome and encouraged.</p> |