Volunteering
For Social & Behavioral Research

It’s a Big Decision!
Here are some facts to help you decide.

What is informed consent?
Informed consent is the process of learning the key facts about a research study before deciding whether to participate. The consent process continues to provide information to you throughout your time in the study.

To help you decide whether or not to participate, the researchers and staff will meet with you to explain the details of the study. You should feel free to ask any questions and to tell them if you don’t understand something. If your native language is not English, translation assistance can be provided and the informed consent document will be provided in your native language.

The research team provides an informed consent document that explains details about the study, such as its purpose, length, required procedures, and key contracts. Known risks and potential benefits are also explained.

If you decide to participate, you must sign the informed consent document (unless this requirement has been waived by the IRB). You will be given a copy of the document to keep. By signing the form you do not give up any rights and you can quit participating in the study at any time. If you decide to quit participating, you should tell the research team.

How can I prepare for the first meeting with the researchers?
- Make a list of questions to ask.
- Bring a friend or relative along for support and to hear the responses to your questions.
- Bring a pen and paper to take notes.
- Ask questions or stop the discussion if you don’t understand what is being said.

Will my information be kept confidential?
Researchers must keep information about you confidential. That means they cannot share the information with anyone except those mentioned in the informed consent document. The researchers report the results of the study at scientific meetings, in professional journals, to study sponsors, and to various government agencies. However, the names of the participants are never used in any reports.

For more information....
To find a research study near you, go to www.clinicaltrials.gov

For questions about your rights as a research participant, contact the USF Division of Research Integrity & Compliance at (813) 974-5638 or at the address below.

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Without social and behavioral research, society would not have attained the level of advances that we enjoy today. Social and behavioral research provides data important to many fields of study, including the social sciences, public health, education, business, and transportation.

Research studies provide participants with opportunities to contribute to society and to their community. Volunteers in research are participating in the development of new information about people, communities, and services to improve the lives of others.

This brochure addresses some of the frequently asked questions about social and behavioral research. In addition to reading this pamphlet, it is often helpful to talk to family members, a physician, counselor, and/or friends as you try to decide whether or not to volunteer for a research study.

A research study is an organized activity that is designed to answer a question or problem. Any research study that collects information about people or uses existing information or specimens collected from people is considered human subjects research.

There are many types of social and behavioral research studies. Some answer specific questions about behavior and others address problems in society. Some determine whether new programs or services are better than those currently used. Others evaluate programs currently offered or the need for additional community services.

Each study has specific requirements about who can participate. These requirements are called inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria define specific conditions or characteristics that make it appropriate to enroll a person into a study. Exclusion criteria define conditions or characteristics that would make it inappropriate for a person to be enrolled.

These criteria are often based on such factors as age, gender, medical history, life experiences, and current needs. Some research studies seek subjects with specific needs or interests, while others seek a broad range of individuals (often referred to as normal volunteers).

A person must qualify for the study before being asked to join as a human subject. It is important to understand that these criteria are not used to reject people personally. Instead, the criteria identify appropriate participants and help minimize the risks those participants face. The criteria also help researchers answer the research questions.

Ethical codes and laws protect the safety and rights of people who take part in research.

Federal law requires that research studies be approved and monitored by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). IRB oversight ensures that a research study is ethical and that the well-being and rights of participants are protected. It also makes sure that the risks are as low as possible and that there are potential benefits, either to the participants or to individuals in the future.

The IRB is an independent committee of professional people such as doctors and college teachers, as well as members of the community. All universities, hospitals, and other institutions that conduct or support human subjects research must have research reviewed by an IRB.

Find out as much as you can about the research. A member of the research team should answer all of your questions about the study. Some of the answers may be found in the informed consent document. Before you decide, be sure you know the answers to these questions:

- What is the research question (purpose) of the study?
- What should I expect while I’m a participant?
- What kind of tests and procedures are involved?
- How do the known risks, possible side effects, and potential benefits in the study compare with alternatives that are available for me?
- How might this research affect my daily life?
- Will there be any costs to me?
- How long will I be involved in the study?
- Who is going to be in the study?