



# parental absence

## Parenting Through Family Separation

### Parent Workbook and Syllabus

### Delivery Type 2:

### Supplemental Stand Alone

This encompasses the formation of a new group of families that consists of individuals who have participated in a Thrive Initiative core, universal parenting program.





## Summary of Training

Use this summary to help you track your completion times for sessions and meeting dates, times, and location(s).

### Thrive Initiative Course Registration

Due Date	
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### Introduction Meeting *(Meeting: 20 min/Homework)*

Date	
Time	
Homework	Complete the Module's Welcome and Introduction and Part 1
Due Date	

### Supplemental Module Meeting 1: Discussion of the Introduction and Part 1

*(Meeting: 60 minutes/Homework)*

Date	
Time	
Homework	Complete Parts 2 and 3 and the Wrap-up
Due Date	

### Supplemental Module Meeting 2: Discussion of Parts 2 and 3 and the Module's Wrap-up *(Meeting: 60 minutes)*

Date	
Time	
Homework (optional)	Visit the Thrive Initiative's website for additional parenting resources: <a href="https://thrive.psu.edu">https://thrive.psu.edu</a>

## Supplemental Module Registration

Complete these steps prior to the Intake and Introduction meeting.

### Create a Thrive Initiative Account and Register for the Course

- Use this link to access the Thrive Initiative's website: <https://thrive.psu.edu/>.
- Navigate to and select "Modules."
- Select "Supplemental Modules" in the drop-down menu.
- Identify the module on Parental Absence, and select the "Learn More" button.
- A new web page will open. Select the blue button that reads "Get this course."
- A pop-up box will ask you to login or sign up. If you do not have an existing account, select the "Sign up" button.
- In the pop-up box, enter your first name, last name, and an email address. Next, create a username and password. Select your military affiliation, and check that you are not a robot; then, click the blue "Create account" button.



*Tip: To help you remember your username, you may want to use your email address as your username.*

- You will now be able to login and access the Thrive parent-education programs. Click "Login" at the top of the web page. In the pop-up box, enter your username and your password; then, click on the blue "Login" button.
- After you login, you will be able to view the course catalog (upper right-hand corner) and select the supplemental module you would like to participate in.
- Select the blue "Go to Course" button to start the online **Parental Absence** supplemental module.

**If you have any difficulty registering for an account or accessing a Thrive Initiative parent-education program or supplemental module, we would be happy to assist you!**



The Thrive Initiative Team can be emailed at [thrive@psu.edu](mailto:thrive@psu.edu).



Phone inquiries can be directed to **1.877.382.9185**.

# Intake and Introduction Meeting



**Intake and Introduction Meeting** *60 minutes*  
**Homework**

Date	
Time	
Link/Location	





## Step 1: Attend Meeting

- Review the supplemental module welcome materials provided by your facilitator.
- At the first meeting, your facilitator will provide an Welcome and Introduction of the program and ensure you have access to the Thrive Initiative website and supplemental module.

## Step 2: Complete Homework [For Supplemental Module Meeting 1]

Please complete the following activities in preparation for the next meeting:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Complete the ***Parental Absence: Parenting through Family Separation*** supplemental module's Welcome and Introduction.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Complete Part 1: Preparing to Coparent from Afar
- \_\_\_\_\_ Download and review the materials mentioned from the Parent Toolkit resources in the supplemental module.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Prepare to discuss the topics addressed in the Introduction and Sessions 2, 3, and 4 during the next meeting by answering the questions in *Step 3: Prepare Community-Building Activities/Discussion Questions*. If you have any questions you would like to ask during the discussion, note them in Step 4.



### Step 3: Prepare Community-Building Activities/Discussion Questions

Write your responses in the blue boxes on the next few pages as you prepare for the *next meeting*. During the *Supplemental Module Meeting 1* group discussion, record your notes in the magenta boxes.

As you complete the questions and activities, recognize that understanding and implementing the information we are learning will not happen immediately. You will need to use the strategies and skills you have learned throughout **Parental Absence: Parenting through Family Separation** consistently and make them part of your everyday life in order to see desired changes in your child's or your reactions or behaviors. Keep practicing what you have learned!

Each time you meet with the other program participants as a group, share and celebrate the small, short-term, positive changes you see in your interactions with your child. Consider what the long-term benefits may be for your family as you continue to use the skills and strategies you have learned and are learning in the **Parental Absence: Parenting through Family Separation** module.



## **Parental Absence Supplemental Module: Welcome and Introduction Interaction and Discussion Questions**

In the supplemental module's introduction, you learned about raising children while one coparent is away.

- A. What challenges have you faced when a coparent is away?
- B. How did you handle these challenges?
- C. How would you like to handle these challenges in the future?

*Reflection:*

 *Group discussion notes:*



## **Welcome and Introduction: Ambiguous Loss Interaction and Discussion Questions**

This section discussed the concept of ambiguous loss. The term refers to any relationship in which one person is both present and absent.

- A. Have you experienced ambiguous loss?
- B. How did this loss change roles within your family?
- C. How did you handle and deal with this change?

*Reflection:*

 *Group discussion notes:*



## **Welcome and Introduction** **Resilience and Coparenting Interaction and Discussion Questions**

The module listed some examples of covert parenting, like taking a video of yourself reading your child’s favorite bedtime story to be played while you are gone, spending dedicated time on the phone daily, and ordering a meal for the family to “take care of dinner.”

- A. Can you think of a time when you used covert coparenting? How did it go?
- B. What example of coparenting did you like within the module? How would you like to use it?

*Reflection:*

 *Group discussion notes:*



## Part 1: Preparing to Coparent from Afar Preparing Your Child for Parental Separation Interaction and Discussion Questions

This section covers how to prepare your child for a parental separation.

- A. How does your child or adolescent handle transitions? Think about past changes, transitions, or separations that your child has experienced. Consider big and small transitions, such as moving to a new home or getting ready for bedtime.
- B. Does your child typically adapt quickly, or is he or she slower to warm up to new situations, routines, and environments? How does your child respond to changes in his or her routines? What do you notice in your child's moods, emotions, and behaviors? Does your child ask questions and express distress, or is your child quiet?

*Reflection:*



*Group discussion notes:*



## **Part 1: Preparing to Coparent from Afar** **Determine What you Want your Child to Know or Understand About Separation Interaction and Discussion Questions**

Session 1 discussed how to explain a parental separation to your child and how you may want your child to remember the experience.

### **Think about ways you connect as a family now.**

- A. Could any of these methods be adapted by using video chat, asynchronized video messages, text messages, emails, mail, or care packages?
- B. What are some ways that you connect with extended family or friends from afar?  
Could any of those strategies be used now?

### **If You Are Part of a Military Family**

Military parents may have good intentions as they try to explain parental absences, but they may not be aware that a young child could feel responsible for the parent leaving.

You can help to explain parental absence to your child by focusing on the following points:

- o Separation is no one's fault
  - o Assure your child that he or she is loved
  - o Ensure your child understands he or she will be safe
  - o Discuss new daily routines
  - o Find ways to stay connected
- A. Have you had a discussion like this with your child? How did it go?
  - B. How would you have this discussion or how would you like to have this discussion?



*Reflection:*



*Group discussion notes:*



## **Part 1: Preparing to Coparent from Afar** **Staying Connected Interaction and Discussion Questions**

This section highlighted communicating regarding a parental separation and how to discuss this situation with your child.

- A. Think of a time when you spoke about a serious topic with your child. How did your child react?
- B. The module has parent toolkit resources that provide ideas for staying connected during separations. What do you already do that's on the list (or not on the list)? What's a new idea on the list that you like and want to try?

*Reflection:*

 *Group discussion notes:*



## Part 1: Preparing to Coparent from Afar Creating a Coparenting Plan Interaction and Discussion Questions

Creating a coparenting plan can help prepare your family for the separation.

- A. What works well for you as coparents right now? What are your strengths as coparents? What are the current challenges in your coparenting relationship?
- B. What responsibilities will need to be shifted? Who will take on any additional responsibilities?
- C. What practices or routines would the parent who is away like to continue? How can you help make this wish happen?
- D. How will you communicate?


*Reflection:*



*Group discussion notes:*



## Step 4: Prepare Additional Questions for Supplemental Module Meeting 1

 Note any additional questions you may have for the group or the facilitator.

*Reflection:*

 *Group discussion notes:*



# Supplemental Module Meeting 1



**Discussion of Welcome and  
Introduction and Part 1**

*60 minutes*

**Homework**

Date	
Time	
Link/Location	





## Step 1: Attend Meeting

Return to Introduction Meeting, Step 3: Prepare Community-Building Activities/Discussion Questions to discuss the activities and questions on the previous pages as a group. If new ideas are mentioned during the group meeting, note them in the magenta boxes under your prior homework responses.



*To engage in discussion, go back to the homework you completed after the Intake and Introduction Meeting.*

## Step 2: Complete Homework [For Supplemental Module Meeting 2]

Please complete the following activities in preparation for the next meeting:

\_\_\_\_\_ Complete Part 2: Coparenting Through the Separation

\_\_\_\_\_ Complete Part 3: Preparing for Homecoming

\_\_\_\_\_ Complete the Wrap-Up

\_\_\_\_\_ Download and review materials mentioned from the Parent Toolkit resources in the supplemental module.

\_\_\_\_\_ Prepare to discuss the topics addressed in Sessions 5, 6, 7, 8, and the Wrap-Up during the next meeting by answering the questions in *Step 3: Prepare Community- Building Activities/Discussion Questions*. If you have any questions you would like to ask during the discussion, note them in Step 4.

## Step 3: Prepare Community-Building Activities/Discussion Questions

Write your responses in the blue boxes on the next few pages as you prepare for the *next meeting*. During the *Supplemental Module Meeting 1* group discussion, record your notes in the magenta boxes.



## ? Part 2: Coparenting Through the Separation Interaction and Discussion Questions

Each parent will experience his or her own emotional responses to the separation, and these responses may be painful. However, each parent must learn to adjust to the new circumstances.

How have you handled previous separations from your partner or coparent?

- A. Who are your best support people when your coparent is away?
- B. What are some activities you enjoy doing? What kind of self-care is important to you right now? What are some tasks you are willing to let go of during the separation to reduce your stress?

*Reflection:*

 *Group discussion notes:*



## **Part 2: Coparenting Through the Separation** **Infant and Toddler Reactions Interaction and Discussion Questions**

Infants and toddlers are aware of changes in family dynamics and may experience stress when change occurs in the family. During times of transitions, babies may want to be held or cuddled more, and toddlers may need reminders from others about the away parent and why the parent is absent.

- A. If you have an infant or toddler, who are the important adults in your child's life?
- B. What might be important for these individuals to know about your family's current separation?

*Reflection:*

 *Group discussion notes:*



## ? Part 2: Coparenting Through the Separation Children's Reactions Interaction and Discussion Questions

Your school-age child may react in different ways to a parent's absence. This module discussed how the away and home parent can work together to help support connection.

- A. What are some ways you, as the parent at home, can be present with your child during the time leading up to the separation?
- B. What are some ways you, as the separated parent, can be present with your child during the time leading up to the separation?

*Reflection:*

 *Group discussion notes:*



## **Part 2: Coparenting Through the Separation** **Put in the Work to Stay Connected Interaction and Discussion Questions**

There are many ways to stay connected with a separated parent and keep the separated parent in the daily lives of children throughout the separation.

- A. What are some ways you can “keep your coparent present” during separation?
- B. What are some ways you might help your child measure, or cope with, missed events or milestones during the separation?

*Reflection:*

 *Group discussion notes:*



**? Part 3: Preparing for Homecoming  
Common Thoughts and Feelings for Parents at Home  
Interaction and Discussion Questions**

The module asked you to think about how you are feeling about the return of the away parent, list what you're most looking forward to upon the parent's return, and reflect on what concerns you might have.

- A. What are you looking forward to when your coparent returns?
- B. What concerns do you have about your coparent's return?

*Reflection:*

 *Group discussion notes:*



## **Part 3: Preparing for Homecoming** **Common Thoughts and Feelings for Children** **Interaction and Discussion Questions**

Your child will likely experience different feelings about the away parent returning home and the reintegration process.

- A. Have you had a conversation with your child about a parent coming back from a separation? How did it go?
- B. How have you begun to plan with your child for the away parent's return (e.g., what will mornings look like, how will the nighttime routine change)?

*Reflection:*



*Group discussion notes:*



**?** **Part 3: Preparing for Homecoming**  
**Planning for Reintegration With Your Coparent**  
**Interaction and Discussion Questions**

The process of reintegration generally is smoothest when coparents have had strong communication and have stayed connected throughout the separation.

- A. What do you think each family member envisions for the away parent's homecoming, and what is possible for the initial homecoming?
- B. What are your hopes and expectations for what coparenting will look like after the coparent returns? What are your worries and fears?
- C. Do you have a plan for reintegration? What does that plan include regarding coparenting roles?

*Reflection:*



*Group discussion notes:*



**?** **Part 3: Preparing for Homecoming**  
**Coparenting Tips for Homecoming and Reintegration**  
**Interaction and Discussion Questions**

This section discussed how the returning parent should keep in mind that reintegration does not mean everything will go back to how it was before the parent left.

For those of you who have assumed the away parent role, what did you most look forward to when you returned home? What most concerned you?

A. What supports did you need or use as you integrated back into family life?

*Reflection:*

 *Group discussion notes:*



### ? Wrap-Up: Module Discussion Summary Questions

- A. Which topic discussed in the supplemental module was the most beneficial to you as a parent/caregiver? Why?
- B. What strategies or skills did you learn about in the supplemental module that you will use to help you achieve the goals you have for your child or your family?
- C. What has changed in your interactions with your child since you began to complete the supplemental module?
- D. Have you noticed a difference in the way your child is responding to your parenting since participating in this module?


*Reflection:*



*Group discussion notes:*



## Step 4: Prepare Additional Questions for Supplemental Module Meeting 2

 Note any additional questions you may have for the group or the facilitator.

*Reflection:*

 *Group discussion notes:*



## Supplemental Module Meeting 2



**Discussion of Parts 2 and 3, and  
Wrap-Up and Resource Sharing**

*60 minutes*

**Homework**

*(optional)*

Date	
Time	
Link/Location	





### Step 1: Attend Meeting

Return to *Supplemental Meeting 1, Step 3: Prepare Community-Building Activities/ Discussion Questions* to discuss the activities and questions on the previous pages as a group. If new ideas are mentioned during the group meeting, note them in the magenta boxes under your prior homework responses.



*To engage in discussion, go back to the homework you completed after Meeting 1.*

### Step 2: Complete Homework [optional]

Consider registering for additional Thrive Initiative universal parenting programs or supplemental modules.

- Information about the Thrive Initiative universal parenting programs can be accessed at <https://thrive.psu.edu/>.
- Supplemental modules can be accessed at <https://thrive.psu.edu/modules/supplemental/>.

Visit the Thrive Initiative website at <https://thrive.psu.edu> to access additional resources and materials.

