



PennState



stepfamilies

Blending Bonds, Building Harmony

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.



This material is the result of partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with Penn State University.

CLEARINGHOUSE
FOR MILITARY FAMILY READINESS

Summary of Training

Use this summary to keep track of your homework due dates and meeting dates, times, and location(s).

Thrive Initiative Account and Course Registration

Due Date	
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Intake and Introduction Meeting (Meeting: 60 min/Homework)

Date	
Time	
Homework	Complete Sessions 1, 2, and 3
Due Date	

Supplemental Module Meeting 1: Discussion of Sessions 1, 2, and 3

(Meeting: 60 minutes/Homework)

Date	
Time	
Homework	Complete Sessions 4, 5, and 6 and the Wrap-Up
Due Date	

Supplemental Module Meeting 2: Discussion of Sessions 4, 5, and 6 and the Module's Wrap-Up (Meeting: 60 minutes/Homework: optional)

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

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 Stepfamilies, 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 **Stepfamilies** 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.



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 overview 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 Session 1: Introduction
- _____ Complete Session 2: Becoming a Stepfamily
- _____ Complete Session 3: Making the Transition
- _____ Download and review the materials mentioned from the Parent Toolkit resources in the supplemental module.
- _____ Prepare to discuss the topics addressed in Sessions 1, 2, and 3 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 ***Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony*** consistently and make them part of your everyday life in order to see desired changes in your (step)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 (step)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 ***Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony*** module.



Intake and Introduction Meeting



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Supplemental Module Introduction (Stepfamilies): Interaction and Discussion Questions

In the supplemental module's introduction, you learned that stepfamilies represent a family system that can involve coparenting between the newly partnered parents and between the newly partnered parents and a non-residential parent who is biologically related to at least some of the children. Stepfamilies can be defined as simple or complex.

- A. Are you, or will you be, part of a simple or complex stepfamily?
- B. What challenges or successes are you currently experiencing while you are preparing to blend, or are raising your child(ren) in a stepfamily?
- C. What is one goal you hope to achieve by completing this supplemental module?

Reflection:



Group discussion notes:



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Session 2: Becoming a Stepfamily

Becoming a Stepfamily: Interaction and Discussion Questions

This session described the dynamics of stepfamilies and how many stepfamilies are formed.

- A. Who are you in your family's stepfamily dynamic?
- B. Who are the children in your stepfamily dynamic?

Reflection:



Group discussion notes:



Session 2: Becoming a Stepfamily

Meet the Module Stepfamilies: Interaction and Discussion Questions

To help you understand the concepts, principles, and strategies discussed in the module, you were introduced to four fictitious blended families—the Allister, Hayes, Martinez, and Wingfield families.

- A. Thinking about the scenario families in the module, which family do you most identify with and why?

Reflection:



Group discussion notes:



Session 2: Becoming a Stepfamily

Becoming a Stepfamily: From the Child's Perspective: Interaction and Discussion Questions

The module discussed how children may experience the family's transition to a stepfamily and how relationships with grandparents, friends, and peers can change. Supportive adults, such as grandparents, step-grandparents, and other extended family members, can help children adjust during the transition.

A. If you have already blended your family,

- o How has your child adjusted to the transition? What thoughts or feelings has he or she shared with you?
- o How did your child's relationships with others (e.g., friends, extended family) change?
- o Were there any adults in your child's life who provided support, or continue to provide support to your child? If yes, what kinds of support were provided?

B. If you have not yet blended your family,

- o What thoughts or feelings do you anticipate your child will have about the transition?
- o How might his or her relationships with others, like extended family or friends, change?
- o Who may be able to provide support to your child as your family transitions to a stepfamily?

Reflection:



Intake and Introduction Meeting



Group discussion notes:



Session 3: Making the Transition

Making the Transition: Interaction and Discussion Questions

This session of the module discussed parent-child relationships in a stepfamily and asked you to reflect on your relationship with the child(ren) in your family.

- A. How would you describe your relationship with the children in your blended family?
- B. What strengths do you recognize in the relationship? What areas would you like to improve in the relationship?

Reflection:



Group discussion notes:



Intake and Introduction Meeting



Session 3: Making the Transition

Strategies for Easing the Transition to Stepfamily (Use an Authoritative Parenting Style): Interaction and Discussion Questions

The module discussed how using an authoritative parenting style has shown to be an effective way to parent children and that children are more likely to view authoritative parents as caring but also firm.

- A. Before participating in the module, were you using any of the authoritative parenting principles with your children?
- B. After reading about authoritative parenting, are there authoritative parenting principles that you would like to use, or will start using, with your children?
- C. If you already practice authoritative parenting, which of the principles are you able to implement with ease? Are any of the principles challenging for you to use in your parenting? If so, which ones?

Reflection:



Group discussion notes:



Session 3: Making the Transition

Apply a Parenting Team Approach: Interaction and Discussion Questions

- A. The module described how parents can present a united front in raising and caring for children to help ease the transition to a stepfamily. How have you used parenting as a team in your stepfamily?
- B. Has there been an instance in your blended family when parenting with a team approach would have yielded a better outcome?

Reflection:



Group discussion notes:



Session 3: Making the Transition

Implement a Gradual Pace: Interaction and Discussion Questions

The module discussed how having a slower or more deliberative ramp-up time when transitioning to a stepfamily can give children more time to get to know the stepparent, more time and opportunities to weigh in on what the new family will be like and the child's place in it, and more time to discuss with the parent and stepparent the role the stepparent will play in the lives of all family members after the new family is formed.

A. In what ways have you or can you incorporate a slow pace as you blend your family?

Reflection:



Session 3: Making the Transition

Have Open Discussions: Interaction and Discussion Questions

In general, the more time the parents can talk with children about becoming a new family and the more time the parents spend with the children before the formal transition takes place, the better the transition and the family dynamics will be for all family members.

- A. What stepfamily-related topics have you discussed with your child(ren)? Were some topics more difficult than others?
- B. How did you approach the conversations with your child(ren)? What kinds of feelings did your child(ren) express?

Reflection:



Group discussion notes:



Session 3: Making the Transition

Include the Child in Decision-making Processes: Interaction and Discussion Questions

The module described the importance of including children in family decisions to help them understand they are valued and are important members of the family.

- A. What decisions have you, or can you, encourage your children to weigh in on in your family?

Reflection:



Group discussion notes:



Session 3: Making the Transition

Honor the Child's Relationship with the Non-residential Biological Parent: Interaction and Discussion Questions

Honoring and maintaining the relationship between non-residential parent and his or her children fosters the children's adjustment and overall well-being.

- A. How do you honor your child's relationship with his or her other parent?
- B. If you are the non-residential parent, have you noticed ways that your ex-partner has honored your relationship with your child(ren)? How might your ex-partner better support your relationship with your child(ren)?

Reflection:



Group discussion notes:



Session 3: Making the Transition

Manage Parenting Expectations: Interaction and Discussion Questions

The module discussed how managing parenting expectations can help foster positive relationships, reduce conflict, and create a supportive and harmonious environment within a blended family.

- A. What expectations do you have for your stepfamily as you prepare to blend?
- B. If you have already blended your family, what expectations did you have before the transition to a stepfamily? Were there any expectations that you now realize may have been unreasonable or unrealistic?

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 Sessions 1, 2, and 3 *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 Session 4: Parenting Roles
- _____ Complete Session 5: Coparenting in Stepfamilies
- _____ Complete Session 6: Stepfamilies and Family Development
- _____ 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 4, 5, and 6 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.



Session 4: Parenting Roles

Parenting Roles: Interaction and Discussion Questions

This session described how parents and stepparents often expect too much too fast when a stepfamily forms and provided strategies that can help children get to know and accept their stepparent and the role the stepparent will play in their blended family.

- A. The Wingfield scenario family incorporated family meetings into the family's routine to confront challenges in the family. Have you tried incorporating this strategy? If yes, how did the family meeting work for your family?
- B. What situations or expected challenges could you and your partner discuss and proactively plan for as you blend your family?

Reflection:



Group discussion notes:



Session 4: Parenting Roles

Providing Positive Reinforcement and Discipline: Interaction and Discussion Questions

This session explored the factors that can help ensure family cohesion. The session also provided an activity you could complete to help you understand how well you know your stepchild and identify areas in which you could learn more.

- A. What factors have you considered as you determine your children's readiness for their stepparent to assume a disciplinary role in their lives?
- B. The module activity asked questions about activities your stepchild does and does not enjoy, his or her friends, academic strengths and challenges, and his or her special health or dietary needs.
 - o For stepparents, did you learn anything new about your stepchild(ren) that you didn't know prior to completing the activity?
 - o How might you use this new information to strengthen your relationship with your stepchild?

Reflection:



Group discussion notes:



Session 4: Parenting Roles

The Role of the Residential Biological Parent: Interaction and Discussion Questions

The residential biological parent must balance the needs and emotions of his or her children and the stepparent and navigate complex and emotionally charged challenges.

- A. If you are the residential biological parent, what areas of family life have you played, or do you anticipate having to play, a mediating role between the stepparent and your child(ren)?
- B. If you represent another type of parent in the stepfamily, how do you anticipate the residential parent serving as a mediator in your blended family?

Reflection:



Group discussion notes:



Session 4: Parenting Roles

The Role of the Non-Residential Biological Parent: Interaction and Discussion Questions

In the module, you learned that the extent to which the non-residential biological parent remains involved with his or her children is not limited to the re-partnered parental unit. It also extends to coparenting between the residential biological parent and the non-residential biological parent and between the stepparent and the non-residential parent.

- A. If you are a non-residential biological parent, how do you ensure you remain involved in your child(ren)'s life?
- B. The session concluded with a homework activity that encouraged you to identify and determine which parents in the family take on specific parenting tasks.
 - o Did this activity help you identify and discuss parental roles and responsibilities within your family?
 - o Which responsibilities did you decide to take on? Which responsibilities did you decide to share with or give to another parent in the family?

Reflection:



Supplemental Module Meeting 1



Group discussion notes:



Session 5: Coparenting in Stepfamilies

Coparenting with Your Partner/Dimensions of Coparenting: Interaction and Discussion Questions

The module described three dimensions of coparenting and introduced an activity to help you understand how each dimension applies to stepfamilies

A. Evaluate the dimensions of coparenting in your parenting relationship using the following questions:

- o Do you have an agreed-upon approach to parenting your children?
- o Do you feel supported by your coparenting partner?
- o Are you tolerant of your ex-partner or coparent, and do you refrain from engaging in criticism or conflict in front of your children?

B. Which dimensions of coparenting do you feel are going well? Which dimensions do you think could be improved?

Reflection:



Group discussion notes:



Session 5: Coparenting in Stepfamilies

Effective (Step)parenting Discipline: Interaction and Discussion Questions

Effective discipline can help children learn to accept responsibility for their behaviors, recognize the needs of others, and develop self-confidence and self-control. The module provided an activity in which you could brainstorm how you might incorporate effective discipline practices into your interactions with your (step)children.

A. What effective discipline principles have you used in your parenting?

Reflection:



Group discussion notes:



Session 5: Coparenting in Stepfamilies

Coparenting Considerations for the Stepfamily Parental Unit and the Non-Residential Biological Parent: Interaction and Discussion Questions

- A. The module provided an opportunity for you to reflect on a time when you felt that you and your co-parent functioned as a good parental team. What behaviors did you display toward one another in that situation?
- B. The module also encouraged you to identify a parenting area about which you and your co-parent may disagree and brainstorm some strategies that might help you work through the parenting disagreement. What strategies did you come up with?

Reflection:



Group discussion notes:



Session 6: Stepfamilies and Family Development

Stepfamilies and Family Development: Interaction and Discussion Questions

In the module, you learned that stepfamilies are healthiest, and children's outcomes are optimized, when parents function well as a coparenting team and when parents use an authoritative parenting style. Further, spending time together as a family unit—participating in fun activities or completing household responsibilities—can promote bonding and foster positive relationships at all stages of stepfamily development.

A. What activities does your family enjoy participating in together?

Reflection:



Group discussion notes:



Session 6: Stepfamilies and Family Development

Supporting your Coparent: Interaction and Discussion Questions

Healthy stepfamilies depend upon each parent's capacity to support each other as the coparenting team navigates the challenges stepfamilies face. This session described how the coparents in the scenario families support each other and provided an activity that asked you to determine if different actions could positively or negatively impact your coparenting relationship.

- A. How do you show support and appreciation for your coparenting partner?
- B. What new actions or activities might you try to show support and appreciation for regarding your coparenting partner?

Reflection:



Group discussion notes:



Session 6: Stepfamilies and Family Development

Stepfamilies Develop and Change with Time: Interaction and Discussion Questions

The module explored how stressors that may have existed when a stepfamily first formed may resolve if members of the couple remain supportive of each other and of the children and if family members remain committed to and engaged in addressing and solving problems.

- A. What kinds of activities do you participate in to help you manage your stress or feel rejuvenated?

Reflection:



Group discussion notes:



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Wrap-Up: Module Discussion Summary Questions

- A. Which topic discussed in the supplemental module was the most beneficial to you as a (step)parent? 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 (step)child or your family?
- C. What has changed in your interactions with your (step)child since you began to complete the supplemental module?
- D. Have you noticed a difference in the way your (step)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 Sessions 4, 5, and 6,
and the 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.

