



# Working with Stepfamilies: Understanding the Challenges

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Douglas Teti, Ph.D.

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# Applied Research Center



Daniel F. Perkins, Ph.D.  
Principal Scientist & Founder



Keith R. Aronson, Ph.D.  
Co-Director



# The Thrive Initiative



**Terri L. Rudy, MPA**  
**Thrive Portfolio Manager**

**[thrive.psu.edu](https://thrive.psu.edu)**

-  **Positive Parenting Practices**
-  **Parent and Child Stress Management**
-  **Promoting Healthy Lifestyles**

# Universal Programming

Thrive Initiative Program Areas			
Universal Parenting Programs			
Take Root	Sprout	Grow	Branch Out
Infants (0 to 6 months)	Preschool (3 to 5 years)	Grades K-5 (5 to 10 years)	Grades 6-12 (10 to 18 years)
Infants (6 to 12 months)			
Infants and Toddlers (1 to 3 years)			
Parenting Programs for High-Needs Populations			
Take Root Home Visitation		Grow Safe and Secure	
Infants and Toddlers (0 to 3 years)		Grades K-5 (5 to 10 years)	







# Dr. Douglas Teti

## Pennsylvania State University

- Distinguished Professor of Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS)
- Professor of Psychology and Pediatrics
- Department Head HDFS



# Presentation Objectives

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- Explain stepfamily dynamics
- Discuss challenges of stepfamily transitions
- Identify parenting roles and responsibilities
- Examine the dimensions of coparenting and its impact on stepfamilies
- Recognize the uniqueness of stepfamilies and their family development
- Explain how professionals can help support stepfamilies
- Plan for how to use Thrive programming and associated Thrive resources





# Stepfamily Dynamics

- Simple versus Complex Stepfamilies
- Stepfamilies (Wiemers et al., 2019):
  - Almost 30% of American families have a stepkin located somewhere in the family.
  - Stepkin are more common in families that are headed by younger adults.
  - Having stepkin significantly increases family size anywhere from 20% to 66%.





# Becoming a Stepfamily

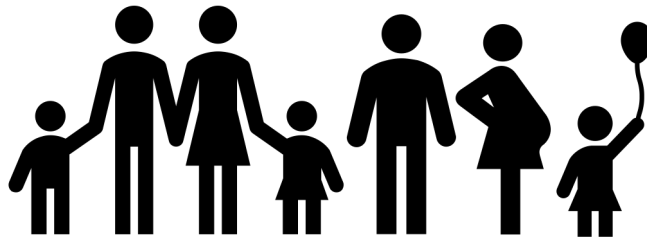
- Impacts on the child(ren)
  - Loss and Uncertainty
  - Shift in established relationships
    - Grandparents and other extended family members
    - Friends and peers
- Parent-Child Relationship
  - Relationship impacts between residential and non-residential biological parent



# Easing the Transition

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- Use an Authoritative Parenting Style
- Apply a Parenting Team Approach
- Implement a Gradual Pace
- Have Open Discussions
- Include the Child(ren) in Decision-making Processes
- Honor the Child(ren)'s Relationship with the Non-residential Biological Parent
- Manage parenting expectations



# Parenting Roles: Stepparent

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- Discovery and Acceptance
- Building Relationships
- Confronting Challenges
- Develop a Positive Reinforcement and Discipline Plan





# Expectations for Stepmother

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- Differing expectations placed on stepfather families versus stepmother families?



# Parenting Roles: Residential Biological Parent

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- Balancing needs and feelings of children, stepparent, and non-residential biological parent
- Understand child(ren)'s perspective
- Assume the role of mediator, if needed



# Parenting Roles: Non-residential Biological Parent

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- Establish and maintain good working coparenting relationships
- Commit to arrangements
- Refrain from criticism



# Coparenting in Stepfamilies

- Dimensions of Coparenting (Feinberg, 2003)
  - Positive coparenting dimensions:
    - **Agreement (between the partners)**
    - **Provision of support by the partner**
    - Endorsement of the partner as a parent
    - Closeness between the members of the couple
    - Satisfaction with division of labor (around child rearing)
  - Negative coparenting dimensions:
    - **Undermining one parent by the other parent**
    - Conflict between the parents





# Coparenting Authoritatively

Effective coparenting that revolves around both parents embracing the tenets of authoritative parenting usually has the best chance of success with children of any age (Teti & Candelaria, 2002).



## Authoritative principles:

- Be loving, gentle, warm, nurturing, and supportive.
- Actively listen.
- Encourage self-sufficiency and independent decision-making.
- Communicate expectations firmly and consistently.

# Effective (Step)parent Discipline

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- Interparental agreement
- Show a united front
- Know the readiness of the child(ren) to accept stepparent as disciplinarian
- Don't make assumptions
- Take a step back, if necessary





# Stepfamilies and Family Development

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- Family process trumps family structure
- Stepfamilies develop and change with time



# Questions?

Please enter any  
questions or  
comments into the  
chat box.







# stepfamilies

Blending Bonds, Building Harmony

This supplemental parent-education module is designed to provide support for parents and caregivers who are part of a blended family system.

For more information about this supplemental module, visit:

<https://thrive.psu.edu/modules/supplemental>



## In this module, you will learn how to do the following:



Understand stepfamily dynamics, and identify some of the potential challenges the individuals in your family may face as you blend your family.



Explore factors that may contribute to children's adjustments to the dynamics within their stepfamily, and learn how parents can provide support to their children.



Identify parenting roles and responsibilities, and determine when it may be appropriate for stepparents to assume certain responsibilities, such as discipline.



Understand the importance of adopting an authoritative parenting style, and learn how to use specific components of authoritative parenting.



Incorporate strategies, before and after the stepfamily forms, to help ease the transition for everyone involved.




Examine the dimensions of coparenting and the impact competent coparenting can have on the stepfamily.



Foster healthy relationships within the stepfamily through open communication practices.

# Upcoming event:


## *Hybrid Implementation of Thrive Parent-Education Programming*

**Hybrid Implementation Facilitation Manuals**

The Thrive Initiative Hybrid Implementation Facilitation Manuals are designed to offer support to professionals who work with families.

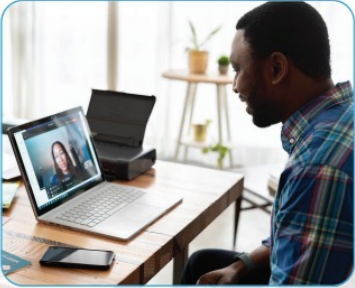
The purpose of the program-specific facilitation manuals is to offer guidance to professionals on how to implement the Thrive universal parenting programs – Take Root, Sprout, Grow, and Branch Out – in a hybrid format. Specifically, these manuals offer the facilitator instructions on implementation for group face-to-face or virtual synchronous interaction while parents and caregivers complete the online asynchronous program.

The facilitator will need to complete the online General Facilitation Training for the identified web-based parenting program and use the manual in order to implement a hybrid program-specific Thrive parenting program.







**The Hybrid Implementation Facilitation Manuals will do the following:**

- Outline the components of the program-specific, universal parenting program.
- Provide guidance on how to implement face-to-face or virtual group meetings while parents and caregivers complete the online sessions.
- Present templates for recruitment tools, parent workbooks, scheduling examples, and preprinted resources.
- Program manuals include a Parent Workbook and Syllabus that parents and families can use to stay on track and, in spaces provided, enter thoughts and responses on programming information and take notes during group discussion times.



**To download a program-specific Hybrid Implementation Facilitation Manual visit:**  
<https://thrive.psu.edu/for-professionals/resources/>

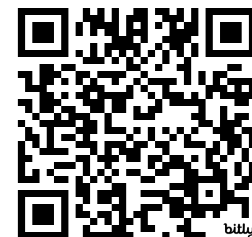
 thrive.psu.edu  thrive@psu.edu  1-877-382-9185 



Terri L. Rudy, MPA  
Thrive Portfolio  
Manager

❖ Wednesday, July 31

❖ 12 p.m. EDT



<http://bit.ly/ThriveEduSessionII>

# Clearinghouse Office Hours

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**Monday, June 24**  
**@ 3 p.m. Eastern Time**

**<https://bit.ly/3Tj00wV>**

- ✓ Monthly collaborative learning sessions.
- ✓ Real-time guidance and resources from researchers and implementation specialists.
- ✓ Open to anyone who supports military families
- ✓ 30- to 45-minute microlearning sessions over Teams







## Presentation Survey

*\* Slide deck and recorded presentation will be available on the Thrive website.*



# Contact Us

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Thank you for  
participating!

## Contact Us



thrive.psu.edu



thrive@psu.edu



1.814.865.7412



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# Provision of support by the partner

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