



# Healthy Communication for Families

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Brittney Mathies, Ph.D.  
Penn State University  
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**Daniel F. Perkins, Ph.D.**  
Principal Scientist & Founder



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



**Deb Johnson, M.B.A.**  
Associate Director

✦ **Applied  
Research**

**Program  
Selection** ✦

✦ **Curriculum  
Development**

**CLEARINGHOUSE**  
FOR MILITARY FAMILY READINESS

<https://militaryfamilies.psu.edu>

**Learning  
Solutions** ✦

✦ **Program  
Implementation**

**Program  
Evaluation** ✦



# 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<br>(0 to 6 months)                    | Preschool<br>(3 to 5 years) | Grades K-5<br>(5 to 10 years) | Grades 6-12<br>(10 to 18 years) |
| Infants<br>(6 to 12 months)                   |                             |                               |                                 |
| Infants and Toddlers<br>(1 to 3 years)        |                             |                               |                                 |
| Parenting Programs for High-Needs Populations |                             |                               |                                 |
| Take Root Home Visitation                     |                             | Grow Safe and Secure          |                                 |
| Infants and Toddlers<br>(0 to 3 years)        |                             | Grades K-5<br>(5 to 10 years) |                                 |





Today's presenter



**Dr. Brittney Mathies**

**Pennsylvania State University**



# Objectives

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- Define communication
- Discuss effective communication
- Examine healthy communication strategies
  - I-statements
  - Complaints v. criticisms
  - Active listening
  - Positive non-verbal language
  - Fighting fairly
- Identify communication strategies for families
  - Daily check-ins
  - Family activities
  - Family meetings



# Definitions

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# Communication

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- Communication is part of everyday life
  - “A process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior”
    - ❑ In-person
    - ❑ Phone
    - ❑ Email
    - ❑ Text
    - ❑ Social media
- Quality social interactions are beneficial to us in many ways!





# Interpersonal Communication

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- “A strategic process of message transaction between two people to create and sustain shared meaning”



- Success of our relationships relies on the ability to effectively communicate
- People attribute meaning to both **words** and **actions**, regardless of intentionality



# Effective Communication

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# What Is It?

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- Relies on the ability to “articulate thoughts and ideas effectively” and “listen effectively to decipher meaning”
  - Can be difficult
  - Requires practice; understanding is not sufficient



# Importance

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- Benefits in personal and professional settings
  - Fosters collaboration
  - Helps solve problems
  - Prevents and reduces misunderstandings
  - Builds trust
- Benefits within families
  - Offers opportunities to build and refine skills needed for success outside of home
  - Strengthens family bonds and sense of belonging
  - Increases harmony and resiliency
  - Results in strong social, emotional regulation, and coping skills

(Amrullah & Alfikri, 2022; Badriyah et al., 2024; Ekanjume-Ilongo, 2012; Ginsburg, 2007; Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012; Patterson, 1995; Peterson & Green, 2009; Theiss, 2018; Zeffane et al., 2011)



# Levels of Communication

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- 2 levels to consider
  - Content-level messages
    - Information shared; the “what” and “how”
  - Relationship-level messages
    - Intent and interpretation based on relationship



# Examples

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# Healthy Communication Strategies

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# I-Statements

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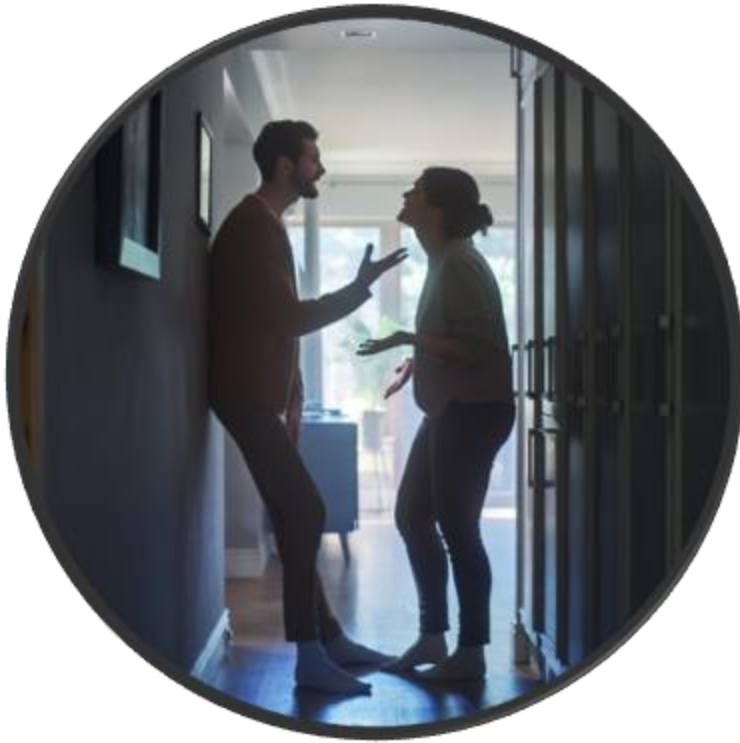
- States the problem and focuses on the message sender (speaker)'s experience
- Reduces the likelihood of the message receiver (listener) feeling attacked or criticized
- Tips for I-statements
  - Be as specific as possible
  - Try to be objective
  - Avoid using words like “never” and “always” - absolutes may elicit a defensive response
  - Focus on the emotion the sender is feeling
- Models
  - “When \_\_\_\_\_, I feel \_\_\_\_\_.
  - “I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_.





# Examples

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# Complaints vs. Criticisms

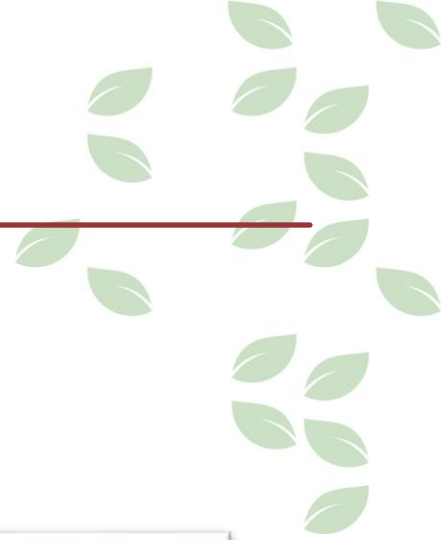
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- Complaints focus on specific behaviors
- Criticisms focus on a person's character and are often relayed to and/or perceived by the receiver as an attack
  - Response may be defensive or hostile
- Complaints are ideal!



# Examples

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# Active Listening

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- Listening is as important as speaking
- Helps create safe, trusting communication environment
- Conveys respect
- Reduces the chance of misinterpretations
- Speaker feels heard and understood
- How to be an active listener
  - Listen for the purpose of understanding
  - Withhold judgment
  - Display verbal and non-verbal involvement
- Speaker-Listener technique can help, especially when difficult or uncomfortable topics arise



# Positive Non-Verbal Language

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- Important aspect of active listening
- Non-verbal language may hold more weight than words exchanged
- Aspects beyond words
  - Tone
  - Rapidness of speech
  - Body language
  - Energy or “vibe”



# Fighting Fairly

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- Communication during disagreements matters because of relationship implications
- Goal is to productively resolve conflict
- Remaining calm is key
- Establishing ground rules helps both parties remain “in line” and uphold boundaries
- Use I-statements, complaints vs. criticisms, and active listening strategies
- Refrain from exaggerating or inventing information; stick to facts and specifics
- Breaks are ok if they are for the purposes of processing information or de-escalating emotions





# Communication Strategies for Families

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# Daily Check-Ins

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- Help to maintain open communication
- Strive for time each day to connect individually
- Work with your child to set an informal agenda for your check-ins; what things will you share?
- Can be very brief
- If a topic arises and there is not time to fully process, discuss, and resolve the matter, set a time for further discussion





# Family Activities

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- Encourages open communication between family members
- Helps family members feel connected
- Provides opportunities to create shared memories
- May include routine experiences (rituals)
- May include non-routine experiences



# Family Meetings

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- Dedicated times for planning, sharing, and discussion related to family life
- Need to be well structured and used appropriately
- Can foster open communication in a safe space
  - Asking questions
  - Making decisions
  - Sharing with each other
- May take some time before meetings feel productive, efficient, and comfortable
- Many adjustments may be required
- Goal is to establish connection



# Wrap-Up

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# Review

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- Defined communication
- Discussed effective communication
- Examined healthy communication strategies
  - I-statements
  - Complaints v. criticisms
  - Active listening
  - Positive non-verbal language
  - Fighting fairly
- Identified communication strategies for families
  - Daily check-ins
  - Family activities
  - Family meetings

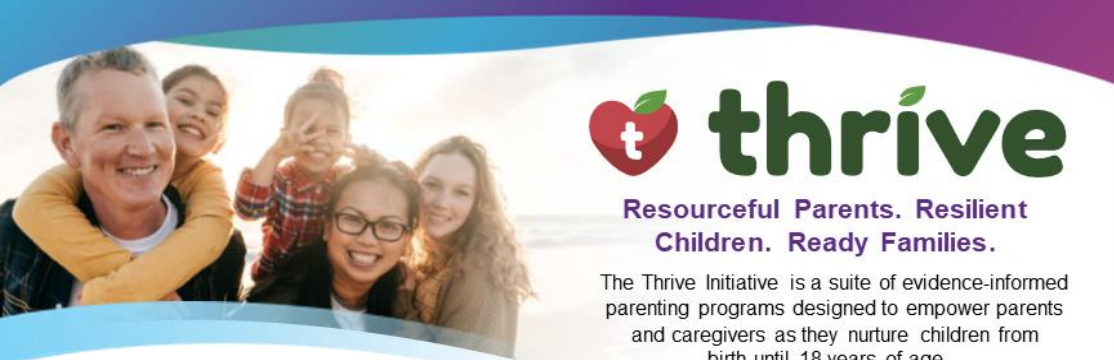


# Questions?

**Please enter any  
questions or  
comments into the  
chat box.**








**Resourceful Parents. Resilient Children. Ready Families.**

The Thrive Initiative is a suite of evidence-informed parenting programs designed to empower parents and caregivers as they nurture children from birth until 18 years of age.


### Universal Parenting Programs

Four universal parenting programs are available in **online formats** and can be accessed at **no cost** to families.




#### Take Root

**Ages 0-3 years**  
Take Root supports parents and caregivers from birth through the first 3 years of their child's life.




#### Sprout

**Ages 3-5 years**  
Sprout assists parents and caregivers as they foster their preschool child's development and resiliency.



#### Grow

**Ages 5-10 years**  
Grow teaches positive parenting techniques, stress management strategies, and health promotion skills.



#### Branch Out

**Ages 10-18 years**  
Branch Out supports parents and caregivers as their child transitions from childhood to adulthood.

### Supplemental Modules

Build on information and strategies in the universal parenting programs with supplemental modules that identify specific topics that may be beneficial to meet your family goals.

-  **Adolescent Mental Health**  
Parenting to Wellness
-  **Anger Management**  
Family Conflict: Mindfully Creating Positivity
-  **Coparenting**  
Coordinated. Cooperative. United.
-  **Exceptional Families**  
Embracing Differences. Flourishing Together.
-  **Father Forward**  
Present. Engaged. Supportive.
-  **Grandfamilies**  
PROSPERing with 10- to 14-Year Olds
-  **Harmful Behaviors**  
Recognize. Respond. Repair.
-  **Parental Absence**  
Parenting Through Family Separation
-  **Raising Siblings**  
Fostering Positive Relationships
-  **Stepfamilies**  
Blending Bonds, Building Harmony



**Visit the Thrive website to start learning!**

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

 [thrive@psu.edu](mailto:thrive@psu.edu)

 **1-877-382-9185**

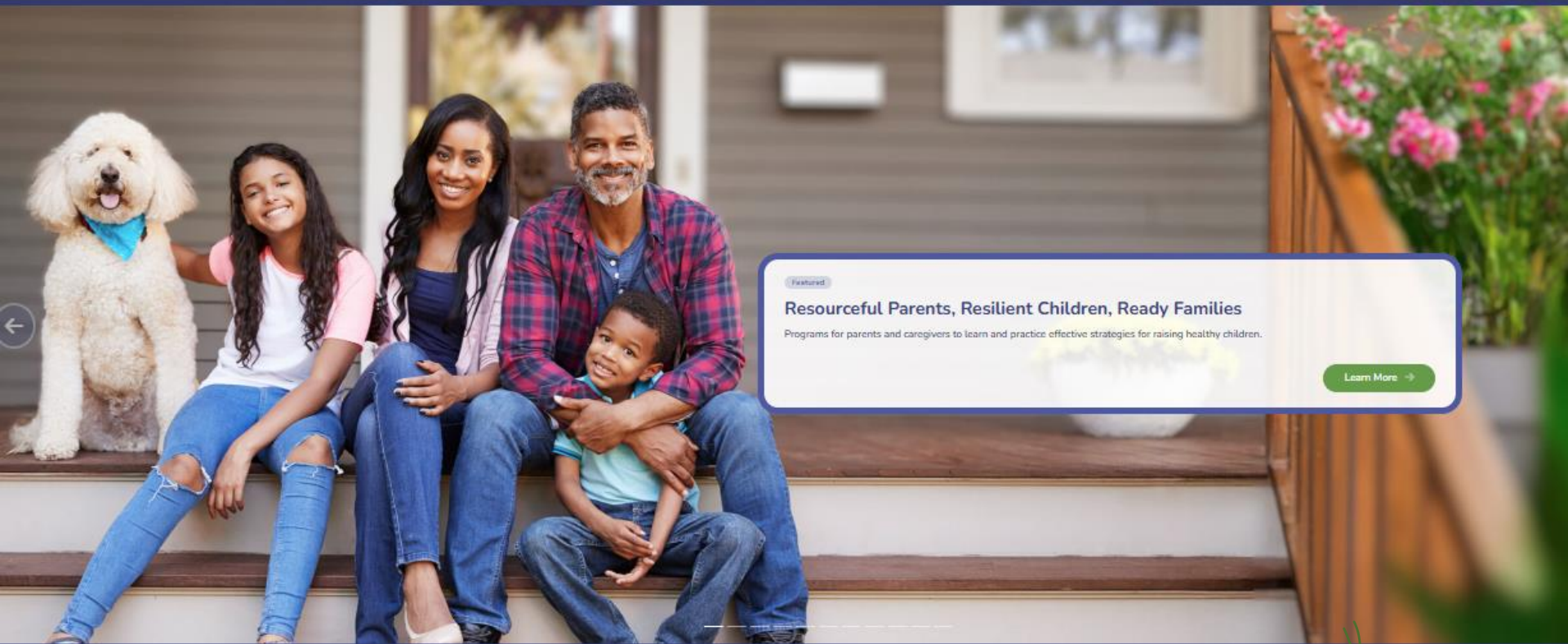


***Want to learn more about healthy communication?***



**Visit the Thrive website for programs, tools, and guidance on improving family communication.**





**NEW  
UPDATE**



## Empowering Families to Thrive

The Thrive Initiative is a portfolio of developmentally sensitive, evidence-informed parent-education programs that are designed to support parents and caregivers as they raise their children from birth until 18 years of age. The Initiative includes a series of online and face-to-face parenting programs and a variety of online resources that can be used to meet families where they are.

The four universal Thrive Initiative programs are available online and include interactive learning modules and downloadable parent resources. Immediate access to programming is granted to parents and caregivers. The federal government owns the programs and resources; therefore, they are available at no cost to military and civilian families.

Trained professionals deliver the universal face-to-face and targeted programs in an in-person format. Resources for professionals can be found under the professionals section in the site navigation.



### Parents and Caregivers

Explore programs and resources to help your family Thrive!

[Get Started ->](#)



### Professionals

Identify resources and supports to help families Thrive!

[Get Started ->](#)



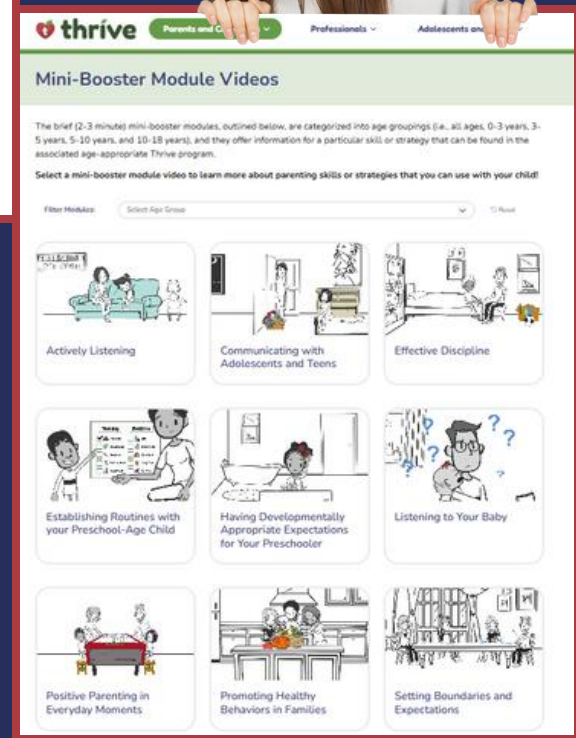
### Adolescents and Teens

Explore resources to help you and your peers Thrive!

[Get Started ->](#)









DATE   /   /

# Upcoming Events



<https://bit.ly/4idFt75>



<https://bit.ly/41BtYzd>

DATE   /   /

## Problematic Sexual Behaviors

- **Part 1: May 5, 2025**
  - **Dr. Benjamin Sigel**

- **Part 2: June 17, 2025**
  - **Dr. Renee Roman**

**\* Both webinars will be held at 4 pm (ET)**





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FOR MILITARY FAMILY READINESS

# Open Office Hours

Open Office Hours will be held the last Wednesday of every month from February through October from 2-3 p.m.

## Spring 2025 Open Office Hour Dates

Wednesday,  
**Feb. 26**  
from 2-3 p.m.

Wednesday,  
**March 26**  
from 2-3 p.m.

Wednesday,  
**April 30**  
from 2-3 p.m.



**Sign up here:**

<https://militaryfamilies.psu.edu/open-office-hours/>

- ✓ Open to anyone supporting military families, attend one or all of these monthly 30-to-45 minute microlearning sessions over Teams.
- ✓ Learn how to tackle real-world problems and challenges through monthly collaborative learning sessions.
- ✓ Get real-time guidance and resources from researchers and implementation specialists at the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness for free.

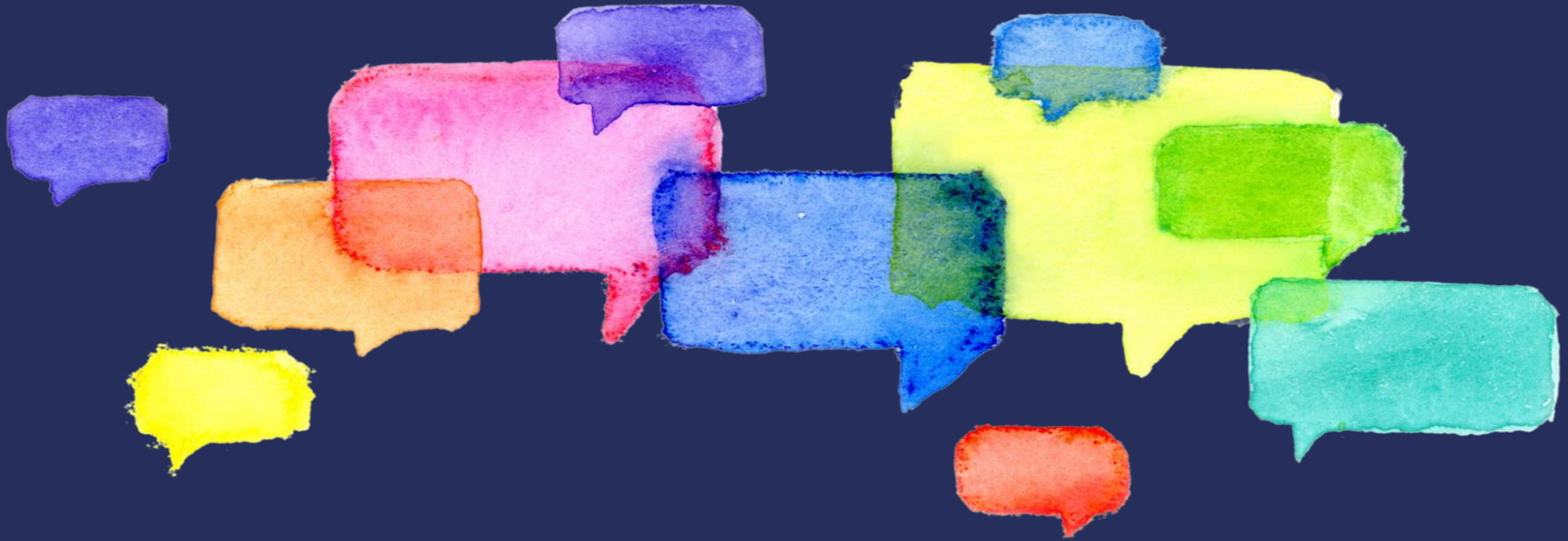
**For more information contact us:**



[clearinghouse@psu.edu](mailto:clearinghouse@psu.edu)



1-877-382-9185



# Presentation survey

<https://bit.ly/43SMw0A>

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



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# Thank You

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## Contact Us



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



[thrive@psu.edu](mailto:thrive@psu.edu)



1.814.865.7412



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