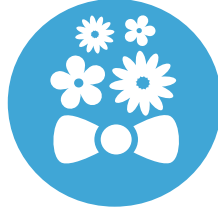




PennState



stepfamilies

Blending Bonds, Building Harmony

Hybrid Implementation Facilitation Manual



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Overview





Web-Based Thrive Universal Parenting Programs

The Thrive Initiative, which is a collaboration between the Department of Defense's Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy (DoD MC&FP) and the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State (Clearinghouse), is a portfolio of evidence-informed parenting programs that are designed to empower parents (and caregivers) as they nurture children from the prenatal period through 18 years of age.

There are four developmentally age-appropriate core, universal parenting programs within the Thrive Initiative—Take Root, Sprout, Grow, and Branch Out—that are available in a web-based format at no cost to military and civilian parents. Each of the Thrive Initiative parenting programs convey knowledge, skills, and strategies within three overarching learning domains: positive parenting practices, stress management, and child physical-health promotion.

Parents and caregivers can register and complete a Thrive program by visiting the Thrive website at <https://thrive.psu.edu>. Anyone who requires assistance can contact the Clearinghouse Thrive Team at thrive@psu.edu or call the Clearinghouse Technical Assistance Team at 1-877-382-9185.

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 & Toddlers (1 to 3 years)			



Thrive Initiative Universal Supplemental Parent-Education Modules

The Thrive Initiative's supplemental parent-education modules explore a variety of topics and offer families opportunities to build on information and strategies they have learned in any of the Thrive Initiative's four core, universal parenting programs. The supplemental modules are available in a web-based format at no cost to military and civilian parents, and each module takes approximately 2 hours to complete. Participating in an age-appropriate universal parenting program before engaging with any of the supplemental modules may help parents attain the most benefits as they work to reach the goals they set for their families.

As a professional, you can incorporate supplemental modules into your educational outreach for military or civilian families by using this manual. The manual should be used as a guide as you engage with families in the hybrid implementation of a supplemental module. This implementation can involve group-based, synchronous facilitation (i.e., face-to-face or virtual) while parents complete a supplemental module online. A description follows that explains how a supplemental module can be offered to participants in a hybrid implementation format.

Regardless of the type of delivery selected, facilitators must receive training, as outlined in this facilitation manual, prior to hybrid implementation.

Delivery Type 1: Supplemental Extension

If you are offering group-based, hybrid implementation of one of the Thrive Initiative's core, universal parenting programs, a supplemental module can be added as an extension to the existing virtual or face-to-face sessions. Just add two additional meeting times.

Delivery Type 2: Supplemental Stand Alone

You may have previously offered one or more of the Thrive Initiative's core, universal parenting programs to various groups. If so, you can recruit participants who have completed any of the four core, universal parenting programs to become part of a new group. These participants may have completed one or more universal parenting programs as a member of a hybrid implementation group(s), or they may have completed programming online independently. As a result of your recruitment efforts, a new group will be formed to complete the supplemental module online. This group will meet three times, face-to-face or virtually, to discuss the supplemental module's content.



Purpose of the *Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony* Hybrid Implementation Facilitation Manual

This facilitation manual offers professionals guidance regarding how to coordinate and deliver the *Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony* supplemental module in a hybrid implementation format. Specifically, this manual will provide the facilitator with implementation instruction for group-based—face-to-face or virtual—synchronous interactions while parents complete the supplemental module online asynchronously.

The *Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony* supplemental module includes six sessions. The supplemental module can be accessed by parents on the Thrive Initiative's website: <https://thrive.psu.edu/modules/supplemental/>.

Objectives of the *Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony* Hybrid Implementation Facilitation Manual

- Outline the components of the *Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony* supplemental module.
- Provide guidance to professionals as they implement face-to-face or virtual group meetings with parents as the parents complete the supplemental module.
- Offer templates that can be used as or part of recruitment tools, parent workbooks, scheduling examples, and preprinted resources.

Training





Hybrid Facilitation Training



The Thrive Initiative provides general facilitation training to prepare you, the facilitator, for hybrid implementation of a supplemental module.

- _____ If you have previously delivered a Thrive Initiative universal program or supplemental module in a hybrid implementation format, you likely completed the recommended *Hybrid Facilitation Training*. Please proceed to the next section in this facilitation manual titled ***Supplemental Module Training***.
- _____ If you are a new facilitator who has not facilitated a core, universal Thrive Initiative parenting program, you will need to complete the *Hybrid Facilitation Training* in order to offer a supplemental parent-education module in a hybrid format to parents and caregivers who have previously participated in a core, universal Thrive Initiative parenting program.

If you have not already done so, please complete the online *Hybrid Facilitation Training* to learn about the following aspects of quality facilitation:

- Fidelity;
- Program reach;
- Participant responsiveness;
- Logistics, dosage, and content adherence;
- Delivery quality; and
- Facilitation skills to assist during challenging situations encountered with parents.

To register for the *Hybrid Facilitation Training*, visit the Thrive Initiative's Facilitator Portal at <https://thrivefacilitator.lms.militaryfamilies.psu.edu>

Enter (or create) a user name and password to log in. Under "Thrive Facilitator Training," you will see a row titled "Hybrid Implementation Facilitation Training." Click on it, and select "Hybrid Facilitation Training" to access the course.

The *Hybrid Facilitation Training* takes approximately 2 hours to complete. You can complete this course at your own pace. It does not need to be completed all at once. You can take breaks as the online management system will recognize where you are in the completion process upon your return to the course.



Supplemental-Module Training

The next step in this training is to complete each web-based supplemental module that you wish to facilitate in a hybrid implementation format. This manual will guide you as you complete the web-based **Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony** supplemental module and will help prepare you to implement the supplemental module to a group of program participants using a hybrid approach.

When you are logged in to the Thrive Facilitator Portal, you are automatically enrolled in and have access to the Thrive Initiative's web-based universal parenting programs and supplemental parent-education modules. Click on the **Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony** supplemental module, and select "Go to course" to begin. As you complete the supplemental module, download the tools and resources provided. You can use these resources to learn more about a topic and to support your discussions during your face-to-face or virtual meetings with the group of participants you enroll in hybrid implementation of the supplemental module.

Use of the Hybrid Implementation Facilitation Manual

After you complete the online *Hybrid Facilitation Training* and the online **Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony** supplemental module, continue to use this facilitation manual as your guide to prepare for hybrid implementation of the supplemental module to a group of program participants.



Do not move forward until you have completed the Hybrid Facilitation Training and the Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony supplemental module.

Planning





Roles of Facilitator(s)

In the *Hybrid Facilitation Training*, you learned about two roles that a facilitator may fulfill—the coordinating facilitator and the delivery facilitator. These roles may be fulfilled by two separate individuals, or you may perform both roles.

If an individual is the designated **coordinating facilitator**, this individual will likely support the following aspects of coordination for hybrid implementation of the supplemental module:

- Participant recruitment;
- Participant registration;
- Participant attendance tracking; and,
- General preparation for delivery of the face-to-face or virtual group meetings that will discuss the supplemental module, such as scheduling meeting times, conducting marketing efforts, setting up a meeting space (e.g., reserving a location, scheduling a teleconferencing platform like Zoom), preparing or purchasing supplies, providing technical assistance on the day of meetings, and offering general support for the delivery facilitator.

If an individual is the designated **delivery facilitator**, this individual will likely do the following:

- Prepare for each meeting according to this facilitation manual, which is specific to the **Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony** supplemental module.
- Facilitate the discussion at each hybrid implementation meeting.

Initial Preparation

Format

Determine if you will be offering face-to-face meetings, virtual meetings, or a combination of the two. When group-based hybrid programming is offered for supplemental modules in any format, the participant groups are intended to include 10 – 12 families. Depending on your organization's specifics and limitations, unique factors may influence your planning (e.g., limits on a face-to-face group size due to space restrictions). This facilitation manual provides a framework for small, multi-family group meetings. Remain flexible so you can focus on serving your families in the best way possible.

Location

- If you are offering face-to-face meetings in a group format, you will need to find a meeting space that can accommodate a group comfortably (e.g., ample tables and chairs; a safe, accessible location).



- If you are offering virtual meetings, choose a virtual or video conferencing platform (e.g., Microsoft Teams) that does not require paid access for your families and offers adequate privacy protection. Ensure that the individual(s) who assume the role(s) of coordinating facilitator and delivery facilitator have ample training on utilizing the platform and/or they understand how to access technical support.

Recruitment and Advertising for Hybrid Implementation

Recruitment and Advertising Strategies

For hybrid implementation of the ***Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony*** supplemental module, recruit parents who have children between the ages of birth to 18 years. Recruitment will vary depending on the way you plan to offer hybrid programming. Consider the following delivery types:

Delivery Type 1: Supplemental Extension

If group-based, hybrid implementation of the supplemental module is being added as an extension of existing virtual or face-to-face sessions of one of the Thrive Initiative core, universal parenting programs, you will form your group at the time you recruit participants for that identified universal parenting program. Follow the recruitment guidance in the *Hybrid Implementation Facilitation Manual* for the selected core, universal parenting program, and proceed to [page 27](#) of this facilitation manual to learn how to add two additional meeting sessions for this supplemental parent-education module.

Delivery Type 2: Supplemental Stand Alone

If you previously offered one, or more, of the Thrive Initiative's core, universal parenting programs to various groups, your recruitment efforts for facilitating this supplemental parent- education module will result in a new group being formed. Participants of this group will complete the web-based supplemental module independently and engage with you, the facilitator, as a group in three face-to-face or virtual meetings. The meetings will involve interactive discussions of the supplemental module's content. To recruit participants, use the contact information you have collected from previous program participants to market the parent-education module and create the new group. Consider creating a flyer and disseminating it and other invitational messaging via email, paper mail, or social media. You may also extend your marketing to families who have independently completed one or more of the Thrive Initiative's universal parenting programs.

In addition, you could consider mass marketing strategies like advertising in child care centers, local schools, youth centers, gyms, shopping centers, grocery stores, family centers, community centers, websites, social media pages, local newspapers, and organizational newsletters.



Before you start recruiting and advertising, confirm how the group will meet (i.e., virtually or face-to-face), and secure the dates and the times you will be meeting. When recruiting and advertising, share how the group will meet and the location (if meeting in person); explain some basic information about the dates, times, structure, and time commitment; and list a Point of Contact (POC) for questions. Other information that you may want to consider adding could include whether child care will be provided, whether snacks or refreshments will be available, or whether there is a registration requirement (e.g., must have previously participated/completed a Thrive core, universal parenting program).

Registration

A participating parent should have completed one (or more) of the Thrive Initiative age-graded core, universal parenting programs (i.e., Take Root, Sprout, Grow, or Branch Out) prior to engaging in any of the Thrive Initiative supplemental modules. Therefore, the participants you recruit will have already created a Thrive account prior to your first hybrid implementation meeting for the supplemental module, and they will understand the expectations of hybrid implementation. Upon registration, ensure parents have already participated in a Thrive core, universal program.



Note: Participants who participate in a Thrive Initiative core, universal program receive a Certificate of Completion upon finishing the program.

To help with any organizational paperwork that may need to be completed as you recruit and register participants, the Thrive Initiative has created a template for tracking participant recruitment. See *Appendix B*.

Attendance

During hybrid implementation meetings for the supplemental module, you are encouraged to take attendance in accordance with your organization's policies.

Program Preparation

Prepare and Disseminate Meeting Information

Whether your hybrid implementation is face-to-face or virtual, you will need to provide your participants with the following:

- The Parent Welcome Letter for the **Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony** supplemental module.



Note: There is a Parent Workbook and Syllabus for each delivery type (i.e., [Supplemental Extension](#) or [Supplemental Stand Alone](#)). Please be sure to access, download, and share the appropriate Parent Workbook and Syllabus with your participants.



This workbook provides detailed information on how to access the supplemental module on the Thrive Initiative website and specific information about the dates, times, location, topics, and homework for each meeting.

Prior to hosting the first session of your hybrid implementation meetings, prepare and disseminate a welcome letter to the registered participants. Include information such as the name and contact information of the facilitator(s), the dates and times of the meetings, and the meeting location (i.e., physical address or web link). See *Appendix C: Parent Welcome Letter template*.

In addition, list the specifics of your implementation, such as the dates and times of each meeting and homework due dates, in the *Parent Workbook and Syllabus*. After the file has been personalized with your delivery information, decide whether you will print and mail copies or share the file electronically with participants. Ensure all participants receive a copy of the *Parent Workbook and Syllabus* upon registration or before the first meeting.

Check Your Supplies

Hybrid implementation of the supplemental module in a **face-to-face format** will require the following:

- Computers for participants to sign in to the Thrive Initiative website and to use to complete the supplemental module,
- Internet access for participants and the facilitator(s),
- A physical meeting space with tables and chairs,
- A flip chart or whiteboard/blackboard with markers or chalk, and
- Pencils/pens for participants.

Hybrid implementation of the supplemental module in a **virtual format** will require the following:

- Computers for participants to sign in to the Thrive Initiative website and to use to complete the supplemental module;
- Internet access for participants and the facilitator(s) for the online meetings; and
- Access for participants and the facilitator(s) to a virtual or video-conferencing platform that includes shared workspaces such as screen sharing or a whiteboard feature.



Note: For virtual hybrid implementation, the facilitator or designated support person should have a telephone available and should have provided the telephone number to participants prior to the meetings in case they encounter technical difficulties in joining the virtual platform.

Implementation





Overview of Hybrid Implementation of the Supplemental Module

During the hybrid implementation of a supplemental module, parents independently complete portions of a supplemental module online, and, then, they meet with you (or the delivery facilitator) either virtually or face-to-face to discuss the content and further their knowledge gains and skill acquisition.

Online Supplemental Module – *Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony*

The *Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony* supplemental module includes six sessions, and a Wrap-Up session. The supplemental module can be accessed on the Thrive Initiative website at <https://thrive.psu.edu/modules/supplemental/>.

- **Below is a brief summary of the supplemental module content:**

- **Session 1: Introduction**

This session includes an overview of the module that includes a welcome and learning objectives.

- **Session 2: Becoming a Stepfamily**

This session discusses stepfamily dynamics and introduces the fictitious module families that are used to help participants understand the concepts, principles, and strategies discussed throughout the module. This session also describes some of the adjustments, thoughts, and feelings children and their relatives, friends, and peers may have when the stepfamily forms.

- **Session 3: Making the Transition**

This session explores strategies parents can use to help their children as the family transitions to a stepfamily.

- **Session 4: Parenting Roles**

This session examines the roles and responsibilities of all parents in a stepfamily and strategies to help family members adjust to their new family composition.

- **Session 5: Coparenting in Stepfamilies**

This session describes the dimensions of coparenting, authoritative parenting principles, and effective discipline in stepfamilies.

- **Session 6: Stepfamilies and Family Development**

This session provides examples of how stepfamilies can spend quality time together, how coparents can support one another, and ideas for how individuals can practice self-care to cope with stressors and emotions that can arise when they blend their family.

- **Wrap-Up**

This session includes additional resources and a Wrap-Up of the module.



Supplemental Module Meetings

Interactions with parents related to the supplemental module can be completed in two or three group-based meetings, depending on the delivery type (i.e., in person, virtually, or a combination of the two).

In this facilitation manual, the schedule of events, potential discussion questions, and activity prompts are provided for the two types of groups that can be formed for hybrid implementation meetings.

Overview of the Types of Hybrid Implementation for Supplemental Module Meetings

An outline follows that discusses the two hybrid supplemental module implementation delivery types covered in this facilitation manual.



*Please note, the agenda and delivery instructions for each type of implementation are color-coded in this facilitation manual. Delivery Type 1 is color-coded as **green**.*

Delivery Type 1: Supplemental Extension

After the hybrid implementation of one of the Thrive Initiative core, universal parenting programs has occurred, a supplemental module can be added as an extension of the existing virtual or face-to-face sessions of that universal parenting program by adding two additional meeting times.

- In this delivery type, the facilitator introduces the supplemental module meeting content during the final session of hybrid implementation of the offered core, universal parenting program. Allow approximately 20 additional minutes to explain the supplemental module and provide instructions on how to access the module. At this time, assign participants homework that includes *Sessions 1, 2 and 3* of the Stepfamilies supplemental module.
- Supplemental Module Meeting 1: Discuss *Sessions 1, 2 and 3* (45- to 60-minute meeting). Assign *Sessions 4, 5, 6* and the *Wrap-Up* as homework.
- Supplemental Module Meeting 2: Discuss *Sessions 4, 5, 6* and the *Wrap-Up* and Resource Sharing (60-minute meeting).



*Please note, the agenda and delivery instructions for each type of implementation are color-coded in this facilitation manual. Delivery Type 2 is color-coded as **purple**.*

Delivery Type 2: Supplemental Stand Alone

This delivery type encompasses the formation of a new group of families that consists of individuals who previously participated in a Thrive Initiative core, universal parenting program. These participants may have completed one or more universal parenting programs as a member of a hybrid implementation group(s), or they may have completed programming online independently. As a result of your recruitment efforts, a new group will be formed to complete the supplemental module online. This group will meet three times, face-to-face or virtually, to discuss the supplemental module's content.

- Participants are recruited based on their completion of any of the Thrive Initiative core, universal parenting programs (i.e., group-based or independent completion).
Note: Participants who participate in a Thrive Initiative core, universal program receive a Certificate of Completion upon finishing the program.
- Intake Meeting: Overview of the Supplemental Module (45- to 60-minute meeting). Assign participants *Session 1, 2, and 3* as homework.
- Supplemental Module Meeting 1: Discuss *Session 1, 2, and 3* (45- to 60-minute meeting). Assign *Sessions 4, 5, 6* and the *Wrap-Up* as homework.
- Supplemental Module Meeting 2: Discuss *Sessions 4, 5, 6* and the *Wrap-Up* and Resource Sharing (60-minute meeting).

Meeting Agenda



Facilitator's Meeting Guide

The next section of the facilitation manual will guide you through the meeting agendas, so you can engage participants in processing and practicing skills from each of the sessions of the online supplemental module. Before each meeting, read the appropriate meeting agenda thoroughly, and prepare to use the prompts to lead discussions.



There are two parts for this section. You only need to review the part that reflects the hybrid implementation delivery type you have selected.

Delivery Type 1: Supplemental Extension



[Content begins on page 27](#)

This is an extension of a hybrid implementation of one of the Thrive Initiative core, universal parenting programs that should be delivered to an existing group.

Delivery Type 2: Supplemental Stand Alone



[Content begins on page 63](#)

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.

Delivery Type 1: Supplemental Extension



This is an extension of a hybrid implementation of one of the Thrive Initiative core, universal parenting programs that should be delivered to an existing group.

Introduction



Delivery Type 1: Supplemental Extension

The following instructions are only relevant to *the Supplemental Extension* of hybrid implementation of the supplemental module. Because your group is currently formed and already participating in active sessions, you will need less time to explain the meeting process or engage in participant introductions. Include the following steps in your final session of the hybrid implementation of the universal parenting program you are offering. Allow 20 additional minutes for these steps to be covered.

Introduction (20 minutes) **Homework**

Overview: Introduction Meeting

(20 minutes added to last universal program session)

Step 1: Provide Overview of the Supplemental Module

Step 2: Review Syllabus

Step 3: Share Expectations

Step 4: Registration and Check for Online Content Access

Step 5: Assign Homework



Step 1: Provide an Overview of the Supplemental Module

(10 minutes)

Discuss the following topics with your participants:

- _____ **Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony** is an online supplemental module for parents or caregivers who are part of a blended family system.
- _____ This module is designed to help parents and caregivers tackle the unique concerns and challenges that can arise as they raise their children in a stepfamily. It offers strategies and insights tailored to the types of parenting roles and coparenting dynamics that commonly occur within stepfamilies. In addition, four fictional blended families are featured throughout the module to demonstrate how parents and caregivers can apply these strategies in real-life situations to support their own stepfamilies.
- _____ During the online supplemental module sessions and throughout the hybrid implementation meetings, information and parenting strategies that parents can use and adapt, as necessary, to fit their individual circumstances and family needs will be disseminated. The supplemental module content is designed to help parents and caregivers build on their existing skills and strategies, so they can effectively care for their children and stepchildren and support the coparents in their children's lives.
- _____ Some of the content that is read and practiced in the supplemental module and discussed in the hybrid implementation meetings may be familiar to the parents, and they may already know about and use the disseminated information. Therefore, they may use the meeting time as an opportunity to realize, appreciate, and share what already works for them, their child, and their family.
- _____ **Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony** includes six sessions and a Wrap-Up.



After participating in the online supplemental module sessions and the hybrid implementation meetings, parents and caregivers should be able to do the following:

- Understand stepfamily dynamics, and identify some of the potential challenges the individuals in the family may face as they blend their family.
- Incorporate strategies, before and after the stepfamily forms, to help ease the transition for everyone involved.
- 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.
- 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.

Step 2: Review the Syllabus (5 minutes)

Provide copies or screen share a copy of the Parent Workbook and Syllabus for the **Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony** supplemental module. Review the Summary of Training, and highlight the section where the participants can find pertinent information.

Step 3: Set Expectations (2 minutes)

Set realistic expectations with your participants. Let them know they will be asked to independently complete the online supplemental module and come to meetings ready for discussion. Because the participants will be independently completing the module sessions, you must ensure your participants complete the supplemental module in its entirety. By completing the module, participants will gain valuable knowledge from the content and interaction activities.



In the two following meetings, you will use content, covered in the supplemental module, to facilitate interaction that provides participants opportunities for community building, reflection, and discussion with you and other participants who are trying to successfully navigate parenting in a blended family.

Step 4: [If needed] Registration and Check for Online Content Access (2 minutes)

Explain how participants can access the supplemental module online. Offer support to help with any technological questions. All participants will have previously set up a Thrive account, but you need to ensure they can log in and find the information they need to get started or progress in the supplemental module.

Step 5: Assign Homework (1 minute)

Ask participants to complete the following module sessions from the **Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony** supplemental module in advance of the second meeting:

- Session 1: Introduction
- Session 2: Becoming a Stepfamily
- Session 3: Making the Transition

If possible, show the pages in the Parent Workbook and Syllabus for the **Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony** supplemental module. Encourage your participants to complete all of the exercises and discussion questions for the assignments **prior to each of the meetings.**

Supplemental Module Meeting 1 should be scheduled **at least 1 week** after the *Wrap-Up and Resource Sharing* meeting from the Thrive Initiative core, universal parenting program hybrid implementation has been completed. Using this timing allows your participants 1 week to complete the supplemental module content for *Session 1 (Introduction)*, *Session 2 (Becoming a Stepfamily)*, and *Session 3 (Making the Transition)* and gives them time to practice some of the strategies they have learned.

Meeting 1



Discussion of Sessions 1, 2, and 3

Meeting (60 minutes)
Homework

Overview of Meeting 1

Step 1: Provide Reintroduction

Step 2: Restate the Ground Rules

Step 3: Start Discussion

Step 4: Assign Homework

Step 5: Adjourn



Step 1: Allow Families an Opportunity to Reintroduce Themselves (3 minutes)

Lead a quick, fun, or positive icebreaker for additional community building. Revisit the list from the Intake Meeting section of the Thrive Initiative core, universal parenting program Hybrid Implementation Manual (i.e., Take Root, Sprout, Grow, Branch Out) that was implemented, and incorporate a new icebreaker that was not used during those meetings.

Step 2: Restate the Ground Rules (2 minutes)

Review the ground rules previously brainstormed, and ask if any new rules need to be added.

Step 3: Start Discussion (50 minutes)

During Supplemental Module Meeting 1, discuss the following questions as a group.

Session 1: Introduction (10 minutes)

Provide an overview of the supplemental module using the following points that are taught in the supplemental module:

- The module began by defining the most common configurations of stepfamilies.
 - A **simple** stepfamily forms when one parent has children from a previous relationship, and they partner with an individual who does not have children.
 - A **complex** stepfamily arises when both parents bring children into the family, which creates relationships in which each parent's children become stepsiblings, and the parents are stepparents to each other's children. Complex families can also arise when the couple brings an additional child into the family through birth or adoption.
- 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.



After completing this learning module, you will be able 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.
- Incorporate strategies, before and after the stepfamily forms, to help ease the transition for everyone involved.
- 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.
- 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.



Ask the participants the following questions to generate discussion:

_____ Are you, or will you be, part of a simple or complex stepfamily?

_____ What challenges or successes are you currently experiencing while you are preparing to blend, or are raising your child(ren) in a stepfamily?



Ask the following question, and solicit answers from a few participants to generate discussion:

_____ What is one goal you hope to achieve by completing this supplemental module?



Session 2: Becoming a Stepfamily

Becoming a Stepfamily: Interaction and Discussion Questions

(5 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Becoming a stepfamily can be a joyous event, but it can also be a time that is filled with anxiety or fear for the adults and the children who are involved in the process.
- Stepfamilies can be comprised of the following individuals:
 - Residential biological parent
 - Residential non-biological parent (stepparent with stepchildren who live in their home for the majority of the time)
 - Non-residential biological parent
 - Non-residential non-biological parent (stepparent with stepchildren who visit their home but do not live in their home)
 - Biological children from your previous relationship only (mine)
 - Stepchildren only (yours)
 - Biological children from your previous relationship and stepchildren (yours and mine)
 - Biological children from your previous relationship and children from your current relationship (mine and ours)
 - Stepchildren and children from your current relationship (yours and ours)
 - Biological children from your previous relationship, stepchildren, and biological children from your current relationship (yours, mine, and ours)



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

- _____ Who are you in your family's stepfamily dynamic (e.g., residential biological parent, residential non-biological parent, non-residential biological parent, non-residential non-biological parent)?
- _____ Who are the children in your stepfamily dynamic?



Session 2: Becoming a Stepfamily **Meet the Module Stepfamilies: Interaction and Discussion Questions** (3 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- 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.



Generate discussion among participants using the following question:

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

Becoming a Stepfamily: From the Child's Perspective: Interaction and Discussion (8 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- The module discussed how children may experience the family's transition to a stepfamily, such as having feelings of loss and uncertainty, and how relationships with grandparents, friends, and peers can change.
- Children's adjustment to the transition to a stepfamily can be helped by the presence of supportive adults in their lives—grandparents, step-grandparents, and other extended family members. Support may include helping children understand parental decisions made on their behalf, encouraging parents to recognize their children's perspectives, and advocating on the children's behalf.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

_____ If you have already blended your family,

- o How has your child(ren) adjusted to the transition? What thoughts or feelings have they shared with you?



- o How did their 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?

_____ 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 their 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?

Session 3: Making the Transition

Making the Transition: Interaction and Discussion Questions

(5 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Stepparents often have strong, positive feelings for their stepchildren; however, those positive feelings may not be immediately reciprocated. Stepchildren are frequently not prepared to accept the stepparent as a parent, at least initially, and children might "push back." This situation could lead to parent-child and stepparent-child conflict. This, in turn, may cause adjustment difficulties for the children, the parent, and the stepparent.
- 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.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

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

Strategies for Easing the Transition to Stepfamily (Use an Authoritative Parenting Style): Interaction and Discussion Questions *(5 minutes)*



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Using an authoritative parenting style has shown to be an effective way to parent children. Parents and stepparents who use an authoritative parenting style exhibit the following behaviors when interacting with their children:
 - o Are loving, gentle, warm, nurturing, and supportive.
 - o Listen actively.
 - o Encourage self-sufficiency and independent decision-making.
 - o Communicate expectations firmly and consistently.
- Children are more likely to view authoritative parents as caring but also firm as parents set clear and appropriate standards of conduct.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

- _____ Before participating in the module, were you using any of the authoritative parenting principles with your children?
- _____ After participating in the module, which authoritative parenting principles would you like to use, or have you started using, with your children?
- _____ For those who have used 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?



Apply a Parenting Team Approach: Interaction and Discussion Questions (4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Parents and caregivers should be collaborative and cooperative in raising and caring for children.
- Parents and caregivers should present a united front when determining how the family will function as a newly defined stepfamily.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

In the module, you read about how scenario parents, Brenda and Mei, applied the parenting team approach with their daughter, Bree.

_____ How have you used parenting as a team in your stepfamily?

_____ Has there been an instance in your blended family when parenting with a team approach would have yielded a better outcome? Would anyone like to share about this experience?

Implement a Gradual Pace: Interaction and Discussion Questions (4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- In the beginning of the relationship, stepchildren may not be as responsive to their stepparent and may even reject them. 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 their place in it, and more time to discuss with the parent and stepparent the role the stepparent will play in their lives after the new family is formed.



Generate discussion among participants using the following question:

In the module, you read about how the Allister family slowly incorporated Benny into Lola's bedtime routine.

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

Have Open Discussions: Interaction and Discussion Questions

(4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- 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.
- Engaging in open discussion can help family members determine and understand expectations as the blended family forms. These early and ongoing conversations can help children feel that their feelings and concerns are recognized and matter.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

In the module, you read how Raymond used the time he spent shooting hoops with his twins, JaMarcus and Jaden, to discuss the home he was considering moving his family into as part of the transition to a stepfamily.

_____ What stepfamily-related topics have you discussed with your children? Were some topics more difficult than others?

_____ How did you approach the conversations with your children? What kinds of feelings did your children express?



Include the Child in Decision-making Processes: Interaction and Discussion Questions (4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Regardless of the age of the child, find ways to include each child in family decisions—big or small. Allowing children to weigh in helps children understand they are valued and are important members of the family.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

In the module, you read about how scenario parents, Delia and Benny, encouraged Lola to make decisions about some of the items she packed to take to her father's home. This strategy led to fewer meltdowns and tears on transition days.

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

Honor the Child's Relationship with the Non-residential Biological Parent: Interaction and Discussion Questions (4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Honoring and maintaining the relationship between the non-residential parent and their children fosters the children's adjustment and overall well-being.
- Parents should abide by visitation schedules with the non-residential parent and maintain cordial and coparent-like relationships, regardless of personal feelings.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

In the module, you read about how Jaden's mother talked to her son about the importance of spending time with his father while also finding ways to spend time with his friends during his weekend visits.



- _____ How do you honor your child(ren)'s relationship with their other parent?
- _____ 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)?

Manage Parenting Expectations: Interaction and Discussion Questions (4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Managing parenting expectations can help foster positive relationships, reduce conflict, and create a supportive and harmonious environment within a blended family.
- Specifically, a biological parent may need to alter expectations regarding their stepparenting partner and not press the stepparent into a parenting role without carefully assessing whether the children—and the stepparent—are ready for the stepparent to take on that role.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

In the module, you read about how the Martinez family manages expectations in regard to Miguel's role as a disciplinarian.

- _____ What expectations do you have for your stepfamily as you prepare to blend?
- _____ For those who have already blended their families, what expectations did you have about your blended family? Were there any expectations that you now realize may have been unreasonable or unrealistic?



Facilitator Tip

- Review the Parent Toolkit Resource, "*Strategies for Easing the Transition to a Stepfamily*," to share some of the strategies mentioned in the document with your participants.



Step 4: Assign Homework (3 minutes)

Ask your participants to complete the following supplemental module sessions before your next meeting:

- Session 4: Parenting Roles
- Session 5: Coparenting in Stepfamilies
- Session 6: Stepfamilies and Family Development
- Wrap-Up

Step 5: Adjourn (2 minutes)

Supplemental Module Meeting 2 should be scheduled **at least 1 week after Supplemental Module Meeting 1 has occurred**. This timing allows your participants 1 week to complete the supplemental module content for *Session 4 (Parenting Roles)*, *Session 5 (Coparenting in Stepfamilies)*, *Session 6 (Stepfamilies and Family Development)*, and the *Wrap-Up* section.

The *Wrap-Up* section provides time for participants to practice some of the strategies they have learned and reflect on their progress in achieving their parenting goals. In addition, during this meeting, the supplemental module content is wrapped up, and additional resources are provided.

Meeting 2



**Discussion of Sessions 4, 5, and 6,
the Wrap-Up and Resource Sharing**

Meeting *(60 minutes)*

Homework *(none)*

Overview of Meeting 2

Step 1: Provide an Icebreaker

Step 2: Restate the Ground Rules

Step 3: Start Discussion

**Step 4: Direct to Additional Resources/Register for
Additional Thrive Initiative Programming**

Step 5: Thank and Adjourn



Step 1: Engage Families in an Icebreaker Activity (4 minutes)

Lead a quick, fun, or positive icebreaker for additional community building. Revisit the list from the Intake Meeting section, and incorporate an icebreaker that was not used during the earlier meetings.

Step 2: Restate the Ground Rules (1 minute)

Review the ground rules previously brainstormed, and ask if any new rules need to be added.

Step 3: Start Discussion (45 minutes)

During Supplemental Module Meeting 2, discuss the following questions as a group.

Session 4: Parenting Roles

Parenting Roles: Interaction and Discussion Questions (7 minutes)

★ Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Parents and stepparents often expect too much too fast when a stepfamily forms. Stepparents may enter into a parental/disciplinary role more quickly than the children or biological parents may be comfortable with.
- Biological parents and stepparents must be aware that the stepparent's credibility in the parenting role is not automatically given by the children, and it needs to be earned.
- Children aged 6 or younger are more likely to accept a stepparent as a legitimate parent because they tend to view adults as authoritative and wise. Older children, however, may initially struggle to see the stepparent as a parental figure and may need time to build a relationship.
- Stepparents and biological parents should allow children the time and space to adjust and develop acceptance.
- Strategies that allow for discovery and acceptance include building relationships, confronting challenges, and developing a positive reinforcement and discipline plan.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

In the module, you read about how the scenario families implemented discovery and acceptance strategies in their blended families. Mei worked on building a relationship with her stepdaughter, Bree, through their shared interest in playing musical instruments. The Martinez family developed a positive reinforcement and discipline plan to outline how they might respond to certain kinds of situations.

- _____ The Wingfields incorporated family meetings into their routine to confront challenges in the family. Have you tried this strategy? If yes, how did the family meeting work for your family?
- _____ In the module, you were encouraged to consider situations and challenges your family is likely to experience. Would anyone like to share examples of situations or expected challenges you and your partners could discuss and proactively plan for?

Providing Positive Reinforcement and Discipline: Interaction and Discussion Questions (4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- To ensure cohesion for all family members, the residential biological parent and stepparent should consider the following factors as they decide when and/or how a stepparent should take on a parental/disciplinary role in the family:
 - o **Acceptance:** Has the stepparent been accepted by the stepchildren as an individual who has earned this privilege?
 - o **Competence:** Is the stepparent (and the residential biological parent) perceived as competent and reasonable in their dealings with the children, particularly around disciplinary decisions and actions?
 - o **Expectations:** What expectations do the biologically related parents have regarding the stepparent's disciplinarian role?
 - o **Agreement:** What has been proactively agreed to between the parent(s) and stepparent and between the parents and the children?
- Building a positive relationship with a stepchild is an ongoing process that requires the adult to make an effort to regularly communicate with the child and take a genuine interest in their life. The module 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.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

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

The Role of the Residential Biological Parent: Interaction and Discussion Questions (4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- The residential biological parent must balance the needs and emotions of their children and the stepparent and navigate complex and emotionally charged challenges.
- The module scenario described how Krystal had to balance Raven's needs with Raymond's desire to develop Raven's basketball skills, which was an area of parenting in which he was experienced and excited.



Generate discussion among participants using the following question:

- _____ For residential biological parents, in what areas of family life have you played, or do you anticipate having to play, a mediating role between the stepparent and your children?



The Role of the Non-Residential Biological Parent: Interaction and Discussion *(4 minutes)*



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- The extent to which the non-residential biological parent remains involved with their 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.
- Establishing and maintaining a good working coparenting relationship between the non-residential biological parent and two re-partnered parents are vital.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

In the module, you read how, despite their differences and troubling divorce, Juan Sr. and Angela are committed to coparenting their children.

_____ If you are a non-residential biological parent, how do you ensure you remain involved in your child(ren)'s life?

The session concluded with a homework activity that encouraged you to identify and determine which parents in the family take on specific parenting tasks.

_____ Did this activity help you identify and discuss parental roles and responsibilities within your family? Which responsibilities did you decide to take on? Which responsibilities did you decide to share with or give to another parent in the family?

Session 5: Coparenting in Stepfamilies Coparenting with Your Partner/Dimensions of Coparenting: Interaction and Discussion *(4 minutes)*



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Parents and stepparents need to work together to develop a mutually agreed-upon approach regarding parenting the children as a coparenting team.
- Good, or competent, coparenting is essential to family health and children's well-being regardless of family type.



- In stepfamilies, each parent's level of authority or responsibility in their parenting role is not necessarily split equally among the individuals in the coparenting relationship, and their role can vary depending on the needs of a family and the ability and commitment of each coparent.
- The module described three dimensions of coparenting and introduced an activity to help you understand how each aspect of coparenting applies to stepfamilies. The dimensions or aspects and their applicability to stepfamilies are as follows:
 - **Agreement:** An agreed-upon approach to parenting the children.
 - **Provision of support by the partner:** Feeling supported by one's partner is critical in any relationship.
 - **Undermining one parent by the other parent:** Parents need to be tolerant and avoid the tendency to engage in inter-parental criticism and conflict.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

In the module activity, you identified the dimension of coparenting being displayed by each of the scenario families.

_____ Evaluate the dimensions of coparenting in your parenting relationship using the questions below.

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

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



Effective (Step)parenting Discipline: Interaction and Discussion

(4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Effective discipline can help children learn to accept responsibility for their behaviors, recognize the needs of others, and develop self-confidence and self-control.
- Using the principles of effective discipline can help children learn to trust their parents as they make decisions regarding their well-being, feel comfortable coming to parents in positive and negative situations, and understand that they can depend on their parents to make decisions that are in their best interests.



Facilitator Tip

- For your reference, the key principles of effective discipline are outlined below. You may want to share a few principles with participants to generate discussion for the question asked in this section.
 - o Expect behavior that is developmentally appropriate.
 - o Have ground rules for appropriate behavior that are clear, fair, easy to understand, enforceable, and positively stated by you and your coparent.
 - o Use time out/withdrawal of a valued activity to deal with serious misbehavior.
 - o Avoid yelling, name-calling, threatening, or spanking when setting ground rules and enforcing them.
 - o Look at discipline as an opportunity for you to be a positive (step)parent and for your child to learn about themselves.
 - o Be respectful of your child's feelings. Speak to them as you would like to be spoken to.
 - o Be clear about what you expect from your child, and make the consequences attached to misbehavior appropriate to the situation and to your child's age and level of maturity.
 - o Try ignoring your child's protests or complaints regarding the ground rules. This avoids needless conflict over minor issues and teaches your child that you are setting ground rules that are reasonable and fair.
 - o Remember that your child is a unique individual. What worked for you when you were a child or what works for other parents may not apply to your child.
 - o Praise your child when they follow the ground rules for the behavior you have set. Be very specific when you praise your child, and refer to a specific behavior or action.



Generate discussion among participants using the following question:

The module provided an activity in which you could brainstorm how you might incorporate effective discipline practices into your interactions with your (step)children.

_____ Would anyone like to talk about effective discipline principles you have used in your parenting?

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

(4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- A child's well-being is strongly linked with the nature of the relationship between the stepfamily and the non-residential parent. Ideally, the stepfamily parental unit and the non-residential biological parent can work together on behalf of the child and maintain cordial and respectful interactions.
- Children who are exposed to persistent conflict between their two biological parents are at an elevated risk for experiencing anxiety, depression, insecurity, and behavior problems.
- Thrive offers a supplemental parent-education module, *Coparenting: Coordinated. Cooperative. United.*, that can help you learn strategies and gather insights into what you might be experiencing as a coparent. The module is available on the Thrive website.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

_____ 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. Would anyone like to talk about that experience?

_____ 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. Would anyone like to share about that?



Session 6: Stepfamilies and Family Development

Stepfamilies and Family Development: Interaction and Discussion

(4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Regardless of family form, the health and well-being of the family as a whole and of the children are more dependent on the nature and quality of the processes that take place within the family instead of the family's structure. In many cases, parents and children in stepfamilies manage well over the long term.
- Stepfamilies are healthiest, and children's outcomes optimized, when parents function well as a coparenting team and when parents have a good working knowledge of what competent parenting is and is not.
- Coparenting that is rooted in authoritative parenting has a high likelihood of succeeding in stepfamilies.
- 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.



Generate discussion among participants using the following question:

This session described fun activities the scenario families participated in together, such as having pizza and game nights, volunteering together, going on family bike rides, and cooking dinner together.

_____ What activities does your family enjoy participating in together?

Supporting your Coparent: Interaction and Discussion

(4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Healthy stepfamilies depend upon each parent's capacity to support each other as they navigate together the challenges stepfamilies face. Actions parents and stepparents can incorporate into their interactions with each other and in the family environment to enhance the coparent relationship and encourage support and cooperation include the following:



- o Spend time together as a couple and as a family.
- o Identify and embrace areas of family life where you can find common ground.
- o Actively listen to each other.
- o Foster a sense of belonging and inclusion for all members of the family.
- o Use family problem-solving and family meetings to address problems.
- o Communicate clear rules and boundaries to the family and with each other.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

This session described how the couples in the scenario families support each other. Brenda and Mei used nightly walks to talk. Benny and Delia scheduled weekly coffee dates. Raymond and Krystal went on monthly date nights. Angelina and Miguel tackled chores together on weekends. There was also an activity that asked you to determine if different actions could positively or negatively impact your coparent relationship with your partner.

_____ How do you show support and appreciation for your coparenting partner?

_____ What new actions or activities might you try to show support and appreciation for regarding your coparenting partner?

Stepfamilies Develop and Change with Time: Interaction and Discussion (4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- 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.
- Family members must also learn to manage their response to stressors, such as irritability, anger, or feeling overwhelmed, by finding appropriate coping strategies and outlets.



Generate discussion among participants using the following question:

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

**Wrap-Up** (1 minute)

Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information

- You are commended for completing the supplemental module and participating in these group meetings. Your participation reflects your commitment to learning and being the best parent/stepparent and coparent you can be! Navigating this responsibility can be overwhelming. There may be many hurdles along the way, but you and your blended family can overcome these obstacles. Engaging in bonding activities and using clear communication can help encourage and maintain positive relationships for all family members during the different stages of a stepfamily's development

Wrap-Up Module Discussion: Summary Questions (5 minutes)

Tell participants you are wrapping up, and generate discussion among participants using of the following questions:

- _____ Which topic discussed in the supplemental module was the most beneficial to you as a (step)parent? Why?
- _____ What strategies or skills did you learn in the supplemental module that will help you achieve the goals you have for your (step)child or your family?
- _____ What has changed in your interactions with your (step)child since before completing the supplemental module?
- _____ Have you noticed a difference in the way your (step)child is responding to your parenting?



Step 4: Direct to Additional Resources and/or Register for Additional Thrive Initiative Programming (4 minutes)

Provide support and encouragement to your participants to explore other Thrive Initiative programming. Share and/or register participants for any additional hybrid implementation options that you plan to offer. Thrive Initiative programming may include any of the following:

Universal Programs

- **Take Root** is available for parents and caregivers of children who are between 0 and 3 years old.
- **Sprout** is available for parents and caregivers of children who are between 3 and 5 years old.
- **Grow** is available for parents and caregivers of children who are between 5 and 10 years old.
- **Branch Out** is available for parents and caregivers of children who are between the ages of 10 and 18 years old.

Supplemental Modules

Additional supplemental modules are available on a variety of topics and can be accessed online at <https://thrive.psu.edu/modules/supplemental/>.

Encourage participants to continue to visit the Thrive website, <https://thrive.psu.edu>, as their child develops and grows. They can access additional resources and materials like mini-booster modules, blog postings, parenting handouts and guides, an inclusivity toolkit, and newsletters.

Step 5: Thank and Adjourn (1 minute)

Thank the participants for their involvement in the hybrid implementation group program.

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.

Intake and Introduction



Delivery Type 2: Supplemental Stand Alone

The following instructions are only relevant to the Supplemental Stand Alone hybrid implementation of the supplemental module. Because you are forming a new group, the participants will meet for three sessions, which begin with an Intake and Introduction Meeting. This meeting time will allow for rapport-building activities at the beginning of implementation, such as engaging in participant introductions and setting ground rules. Two overarching goals of implementing Thrive programming in a hybrid format are setting a positive tone and warmly engaging participants in the process.

Intake and Introduction (60 minutes) **Homework**

Overview: Introduction Meeting (60 minute session)

Step 1: Welcome

Step 2: Provide Overview of the Supplemental Module

Step 3: Complete Introductions and /or Ice Breaker(s)

Step 4: Set or Remind Participants of the Ground Rules

Step 5: Review Syllabus

Step 6: Share Expectations

Step 7: Offer registration and Check for Online Content Access

Step 8: Assign Homework



Step 1: Welcome your Families (10 minutes)

Face-to-Face Meetings

- Welcome family members or families as they walk in the door. Smile, be friendly, and take a genuine interest in each participant and their comfort level.
- Consider preparing reusable name tags so you can call each person by name. You can collect the name tags at the end of the meeting for use at the second meeting or ask the participants to bring them back to the second meeting.
- Help each person get settled and comfortable in the space. Be certain to prepare in advance. For example, have ample tables/desks and chairs, and set them up in an arrangement that will promote eye contact and ease of conversation.
- Track attendance if needed.

Virtual Meetings

If you (acting as a delivery facilitator) choose to complete group meetings virtually, you should partner with a coordinating facilitator or a co-host. Your partner can help you with technological issues and serve as an additional point-of-contact for your families in case they have any technological issues when joining or participating in the virtual meeting. This assistance will allow you to fully focus on interacting with your families during the meetings, and it will ensure adequate support is available for those families who may need extra help with technology.

Open the virtual meeting space early so participants can test their computer technology (i.e., video and audio) before the start of the meeting. Consider using music and a simple message via screen share as a digital waiting room so families can troubleshoot their audio as they enter the virtual space. A screen share example can be found in *Appendix D*.

Welcome your families as they join the virtual platform. Encourage each participant to have their camera on and to enter their preferred name in the platform so you can call each individual by name. You might also have a Chat box prompt available to encourage friendly interaction (e.g., ask participants to share the name and age of their child).

If you are tracking attendance, let your coordinating facilitator help you with this task.



Step 2: Provide an Overview of the Supplemental Module (10 minutes)

Take time to discuss the following topics with your participants:

- _____ **Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony** is an online supplemental module for parents or caregivers who are part of a blended family system.
- _____ This module is designed to help parents and caregivers tackle the unique concerns and challenges that can arise as they raise their children in a stepfamily. It offers strategies and insights tailored to the types of parenting roles and coparenting dynamics that commonly occur within stepfamilies. In addition, four fictional blended families are featured throughout the module to demonstrate how parents and caregivers can apply these strategies in real-life situations to support their own stepfamilies.
- _____ During the online supplemental module sessions and throughout the hybrid implementation meetings, information and parenting strategies that parents can use and adapt, as necessary, to fit their individual circumstances and family needs will be disseminated. The supplemental module content is designed to help parents and caregivers build on their existing skills and strategies, so they can effectively care for their children and stepchildren and support the coparents in their children's lives.
- _____ Some of the content that is read and practiced in the supplemental module and discussed in the hybrid implementation meetings may be familiar to the parents, and they may already know about and use the disseminated information. Therefore, they may use the meeting time as an opportunity to realize, appreciate, and share what already works for them, their child, and their family.
- _____ **Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony** includes six sessions and a Wrap-Up.



After participating in the online supplemental module sessions and the hybrid implementation meetings, parents and caregivers should be able to do the following:

- Understand stepfamily dynamics, and identify some of the potential challenges the individuals in the family may face as they blend their family.
- Incorporate strategies, before and after the stepfamily forms, to help ease the transition for everyone involved.
- 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.
- 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.

Step 3: Complete Introductions and Icebreakers (10 minutes)

Start with a brief and modest introduction of yourself. Share any expertise you have regarding child development and include any other relevant characteristics about yourself that can help you relate to your participants (e.g., community member, organization, military affiliation). Then, engage the group in a strengths-based icebreaker to build relationships. Have the participants introduce themselves and answer an icebreaker question.



Examples of introduction and icebreaker questions follow:

_____ Tell me your name, your coparent's name(s), your child's name, your child's age, and (pick one of the following):

_____ what you enjoy most about parenting,

_____ a word you could use to describe one of your child's strengths,



- _____ one aspect of your parent-child relationship that is working well,
- _____ a skill you use effectively in your parenting, or
- _____ an activity you enjoy doing with your child.



Facilitator Tip

- You can also start future meetings with an icebreaker if you find the families you are working with are reserved or quiet or would benefit from rapport building. Use your judgment, and avoid controversial topics. Note, for future meetings, consider using new or unused icebreakers from the list above.

Step 4: Set Ground Rules (5 minutes)

Stating some ground rules and, then, brainstorming a few together as a group may help families feel safe and supported as they share their parenting journey. You can start the brainstorming by offering a few sample ground rules, such as the following:

- **You will always start on time.**
- **You will always end on time.**
- **You will turn your cell phone on vibrate and would like everyone else to do the same.**
- **If a group member must take a call, let them know they may quietly excuse themselves from the room (mute themselves if in a virtual meeting).**

Other rules you may come up with, as a group, include the following:

- Adopt an open and supportive stance. Avoid judgment about other participants' parenting. We are all learning new parenting strategies and gaining new knowledge!
- One person speaks at a time.
- Assume positive intent.
- Use a respectful tone.
- Celebrate small wins when practicing new parenting skills!



This is also a good time to discuss with your participants your organization's confidentiality clauses. Briefly explain how mandated reporting requirements apply to statements made by participants related to child abuse or neglect.



Information to Cover:

Ground Rules Set at Meeting:



Step 5: Review Syllabus (5 minutes)

Provide copies or screen share a copy of the *Parent Workbook and Syllabus* for the **Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony** supplemental module. Review the Summary of Training, and highlight the section where the participants can find pertinent information.

Step 6: Set Expectations (5 minutes)

Set realistic expectations with your participants. Let them know they will be asked to independently complete the online supplemental module and come to meetings ready for discussion. Because the participants will be independently completing the module sessions, you must ensure your participants complete the supplemental module in its entirety. By completing the module, participants will gain valuable knowledge from the content and interaction activities.



In the two following meetings, you will use content, covered in the supplemental module, to facilitate interaction that provides participants with opportunities for community building, reflection, and discussion with you and other participants who are trying to successfully navigate parenting in a blended family.

Step 7: [If needed] Registration and Check for Online Content Access (10 minutes)

Complete any registration requirements for your organization. Then, explain how participants can access the supplemental module online. Offer support to help with any technological questions. All participants will have previously set up a Thrive Initiative account, but you need to ensure they can log in and find the information they need to get started or progress in the supplemental module.



Step 8: Assign Homework (1 minute)

Ask participants to complete the following module sessions from the **Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony** supplemental module content in advance of the second meeting:

- Session 1: Introduction
- Session 2: Becoming a Stepfamily
- Session 3: Making the Transition

If possible, show the pages of the Parent Workbook and Syllabus for the **Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony** supplemental module. Encourage your participants to complete all of the exercises and discussion questions for the assignments prior to each of the meetings.

Supplemental Module Meeting 1 should be scheduled **at least 1 week after the Intake/Introduction Meeting has occurred**. This timing allows your participants 1 week to complete the supplemental module content for *Session 1 (Introduction)*, *Session 2 (Becoming a Stepfamily)*, and *Session 3 (Making the Transition)* and gives them time to practice some of the strategies they have learned.

Meeting 1



Discussion of Sessions 1, 2, and 3

Meeting (60 minutes)
Homework

Overview of Meeting 1

Step 1: Provide Reintroduction

Step 2: Restate the Ground Rules

Step 3: Start Discussion

Step 4: Assign Homework

Step 5: Adjourn



Step 1: Allow Families an Opportunity to Reintroduce Themselves (3 minutes)

Lead a quick, fun, or positive icebreaker for additional community building. Revisit the list from the Intake/Introduction Meeting section, and incorporate an icebreaker that was not used during that meeting.

Step 2: Restate the Ground Rules (2 minutes)

Review the ground rules previously brainstormed, and ask if any new rules need to be added.

Step 3: Start Discussion (50 minutes)

During Supplemental Module Meeting 1, discuss the following questions as a group.

Session 1: Introduction (10 minutes)

Provide an overview of the supplemental module using the following points that are taught in the supplemental module:

- The module began by defining the most common configurations of stepfamilies.
 - A **simple** stepfamily forms when one parent has children from a previous relationship, and they partner with an individual who does not have children.
 - A **complex** stepfamily arises when both parents bring children into the family, which creates relationships in which each parent's children become stepsiblings, and the parents are stepparents to each other's children. Complex families can also arise when the couple brings an additional child into the family through birth or adoption.
- 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.



After completing this learning module, you will be able 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.
- Incorporate strategies, before and after the stepfamily forms, to help ease the transition for everyone involved.
- 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.
- 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.



Ask the participants the following questions to generate discussion:

_____ Are you, or will you be, part of a simple or complex stepfamily?

_____ What challenges or successes are you currently experiencing while you are preparing to blend, or are raising your child(ren) in a stepfamily?



Ask the following question, and solicit answers from a few participants to generate discussion:

_____ What is one goal you hope to achieve by completing this supplemental module?



Session 2: Becoming a Stepfamily

Becoming a Stepfamily: Interaction and Discussion Questions

(5 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Becoming a stepfamily can be a joyous event, but it can also be a time that is filled with anxiety or fear for the adults and the children who are involved in the process.
- Stepfamilies can be comprised of the following individuals:
 - Residential biological parent
 - Residential non-biological parent (stepparent with stepchildren who live in their home for the majority of the time)
 - Non-residential biological parent
 - Non-residential non-biological parent (stepparent with stepchildren who visit their home but do not live in their home)
 - Biological children from your previous relationship only (mine)
 - Stepchildren only (yours)
 - Biological children from your previous relationship and stepchildren (yours and mine)
 - Biological children from your previous relationship and children from your current relationship (mine and ours)
 - Stepchildren and children from your current relationship (yours and ours)
 - Biological children from your previous relationship, stepchildren, and biological children from your current relationship (yours, mine, and ours)



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

- _____ Who are you in your family's stepfamily dynamic (e.g., residential biological parent, residential non-biological parent, non-residential biological parent, non-residential non-biological parent)?
- _____ Who are the children in your stepfamily dynamic?



Session 2: Becoming a Stepfamily Meet the Module Stepfamilies: Interaction and Discussion Questions (3 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- 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.



Generate discussion among participants using the following question:

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

Becoming a Stepfamily: From the Child's Perspective: Interaction and Discussion (8 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- The module discussed how children may experience the family's transition to a stepfamily, such as having feelings of loss and uncertainty, and how relationships with grandparents, friends, and peers can change.
- Children's adjustment to the transition to a stepfamily can be helped by the presence of supportive adults in their lives—grandparents, step-grandparents, and other extended family members. Support may include helping children understand parental decisions made on their behalf, encouraging parents to recognize their children's perspectives, and advocating on the children's behalf.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

_____ If you have already blended your family,

- o How has your child(ren) adjusted to the transition? What thoughts or feelings have they shared with you?



- o How did their 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?

_____ 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 their 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?

Session 3: Making the Transition

Making the Transition: Interaction and Discussion Questions

(5 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Stepparents often have strong, positive feelings for their stepchildren; however, those positive feelings may not be immediately reciprocated. Stepchildren are frequently not prepared to accept the stepparent as a parent, at least initially, and children might "push back." This situation could lead to parent-child and stepparent-child conflict. This, in turn, may cause adjustment difficulties for the children, the parent, and the stepparent.
- 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.



? Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

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

**Strategies for Easing the Transition to Stepfamily
(Use an Authoritative Parenting Style): Interaction and
Discussion Questions** (5 minutes)

★ Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Using an authoritative parenting style has shown to be an effective way to parent children. Parents and stepparents who use an authoritative parenting style exhibit the following behaviors when interacting with their children:
 - o Are loving, gentle, warm, nurturing, and supportive.
 - o Listen actively.
 - o Encourage self-sufficiency and independent decision-making.
 - o Communicate expectations firmly and consistently.
- Children are more likely to view authoritative parents as caring but also firm as parents set clear and appropriate standards of conduct.

? Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

- _____ Before participating in the module, were you using any of the authoritative parenting principles with your children?
- _____ After participating in the module, which authoritative parenting principles would you like to use, or have you started using, with your children?
- _____ For those who have used 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?



Apply a Parenting Team Approach: Interaction and Discussion Questions *(4 minutes)*



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Parents and caregivers should be collaborative and cooperative in raising and caring for children.
- Parents and caregivers should present a united front when determining how the family will function as a newly defined stepfamily.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

In the module, you read about how scenario parents, Brenda and Mei, applied the parenting team approach with their daughter, Bree.

_____ How have you used parenting as a team in your stepfamily?

_____ Has there been an instance in your blended family when parenting with a team approach would have yielded a better outcome? Would anyone like to share about this experience?

Implement a Gradual Pace: Interaction and Discussion Questions *(4 minutes)*



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- In the beginning of the relationship, stepchildren may not be as responsive to their stepparent and may even reject them. 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 their place in it, and more time to discuss with the parent and stepparent the role the stepparent will play in their lives after the new family is formed.

**Generate discussion among participants using the following question:**

In the module, you read about how the Allister family slowly incorporated Benny into Lola's bedtime routine.

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

Have Open Discussions: Interaction and Discussion Questions

(4 minutes)

**Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:**

- 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.
- Engaging in open discussion can help family members determine and understand expectations as the blended family forms. These early and ongoing conversations can help children feel that their feelings and concerns are recognized and matter.

**Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:**

In the module, you read how Raymond used the time he spent shooting hoops with his twins, JaMarcus and Jaden, to discuss the home he was considering moving his family into as part of the transition to a stepfamily.

_____ What stepfamily-related topics have you discussed with your children? Were some topics more difficult than others?

_____ How did you approach the conversations with your children? What kinds of feelings did your children express?



Include the Child in Decision-making Processes: Interaction and Discussion Questions (4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Regardless of the age of the child, find ways to include each child in family decisions—big or small. Allowing children to weigh in helps children understand they are valued and are important members of the family.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

In the module, you read about how scenario parents, Delia and Benny, encouraged Lola to make decisions about some of the items she packed to take to her father's home. This strategy led to fewer meltdowns and tears on transition days.

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

Honor the Child's Relationship with the Non-residential Biological Parent: Interaction and Discussion Questions (4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Honoring and maintaining the relationship between the non-residential parent and their children fosters the children's adjustment and overall well-being.
- Parents should abide by visitation schedules with the non-residential parent and maintain cordial and coparent-like relationships, regardless of personal feelings.



? Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

In the module, you read about how Jaden's mother talked to her son about the importance of spending time with his father while also finding ways to spend time with his friends during his weekend visits.

- _____ How do you honor your child(ren)'s relationship with their other parent?
- _____ 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)?

Manage Parenting Expectations: Interaction and Discussion Questions *(4 minutes)*

★ Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Managing parenting expectations can help foster positive relationships, reduce conflict, and create a supportive and harmonious environment within a blended family.
- Specifically, a biological parent may need to alter expectations regarding their stepparenting partner and not press the stepparent into a parenting role without carefully assessing whether the children—and the stepparent—are ready for the stepparent to take on that role.

? Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

In the module, you read about how the Martinez family manages expectations in regard to Miguel's role as a disciplinarian.

- _____ What expectations do you have for your stepfamily as you prepare to blend?
- _____ For those who have already blended their families, what expectations did you have about your blended family? Were there any expectations that you now realize may have been unreasonable or unrealistic?



Facilitator Tip

- Review the Parent Toolkit Resource, "*Strategies for Easing the Transition to a Stepfamily*," to share some of the strategies mentioned in the document with your participants.

Step 4: Assign Homework (3 minutes)

Ask your participants to complete the following supplemental module sessions before your next meeting:

- Session 4: Parenting Roles
- Session 5: Coparenting in Stepfamilies
- Session 6: Stepfamilies and Family Development
- Wrap-Up

Step 5: Adjourn (2 minutes)

Thank the participants for their involvement in Meeting 1 and reiterate the date and time of Meeting 2.

Supplemental Module Meeting 2 should be scheduled **at least 1 week after Supplemental Module Meeting 1 has occurred**. This timing allows your participants 1 week to complete the supplemental module content for *Session 4 (Parenting Roles)*, *Session 5 (Coparenting in Stepfamilies)*, *Session 6 (Stepfamilies and Family Development)*, and the *Wrap-Up* section.

The *Wrap-Up* section provides time for the participants to practice some of the strategies they have learned and reflect on their progress in achieving their parenting goals. In addition, during this meeting, the supplemental module content is wrapped up, and additional resources are provided.

Meeting 2



**Discussion of Sessions 4, 5, and 6,
and the Wrap-Up and Resource Sharing**

Meeting *(60 minutes)*

Homework *(none)*

Overview of Meeting 2

Step 1: Provide an Icebreaker

Step 2: Restate the Ground Rules

Step 3: Start Discussion

**Step 4: Direct to Additional Resources/Register
for Additional Thrive Initiative
Programming**

Step 5: Thank and Adjourn



Step 1: Engage Families in an Icebreaker Activity (4 minutes)

Lead a quick, fun, or positive icebreaker for additional community building. Revisit the list from the Intake Meeting section, and incorporate an icebreaker that was not used during the earlier meetings.

Step 2: Restate the Ground Rules (1 minute)

Review the ground rules previously brainstormed, and ask if any new rules need to be added.

Step 3: Start Discussion (45 minutes)

During Supplemental Module Meeting 2, discuss the following questions as a group.

Session 4: Parenting Roles

Parenting Roles: Interaction and Discussion Questions (7 minutes)

 **Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:**

- Parents and stepparents often expect too much too fast when a stepfamily forms. Stepparents may enter into a parental/disciplinary role more quickly than the children or biological parents may be comfortable with.
- Biological parents and stepparents must be aware that the stepparent's credibility in the parenting role is not automatically given by the children, and it needs to be earned.
- Children aged 6 or younger are more likely to accept a stepparent as a legitimate parent because they tend to view adults as authoritative and wise. Older children, however, may initially struggle to see the stepparent as a parental figure and may need time to build a relationship.
- Stepparents and biological parents should allow children the time and space to adjust and develop acceptance.
- Strategies that allow for discovery and acceptance include building relationships, confronting challenges, and developing a positive reinforcement and discipline plan.

**Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:**

In the module, you read about how the scenario families implemented discovery and acceptance strategies in their blended families. Mei worked on building a relationship with her stepdaughter, Bree, through their shared interest in playing musical instruments. The Martinez family developed a positive reinforcement and discipline plan to outline how they might respond to certain kinds of situations.

- _____ The Wingfields incorporated family meetings into their routine to confront challenges in the family. Have you tried this strategy? If yes, how did the family meeting work for your family?
- _____ In the module, you were encouraged to consider situations and challenges your family is likely to experience. Would anyone like to share examples of situations or expected challenges you and your partners could discuss and proactively plan for?

Providing Positive Reinforcement and Discipline: Interaction and Discussion Questions (4 minutes)**Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:**

- To ensure cohesion for all family members, the residential biological parent and stepparent should consider the following factors as they decide when and/or how a stepparent should take on a parental/disciplinary role in the family:
 - o **Acceptance:** Has the stepparent been accepted by the stepchildren as an individual who has earned this privilege?
 - o **Competence:** Is the stepparent (and the residential biological parent) perceived as competent and reasonable in their dealings with the children, particularly around disciplinary decisions and actions?
 - o **Expectations:** What expectations do the biologically related parents have regarding the stepparent's disciplinarian role?
 - o **Agreement:** What has been proactively agreed to between the parent(s) and stepparent and between the parents and the children?



- Building a positive relationship with a stepchild is an ongoing process that requires the adult to make an effort to regularly communicate with the child and take a genuine interest in their life. The module 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.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

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

The Role of the Residential Biological Parent: Interaction and Discussion Questions (4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- The residential biological parent must balance the needs and emotions of their children and the stepparent and navigate complex and emotionally charged challenges.
- The module scenario described how Krystal had to balance Raven's needs with Raymond's desire to develop Raven's basketball skills, which was an area of parenting in which he was experienced and excited.



Generate discussion among participants using the following question:

- _____ For residential biological parents, in what areas of family life have you played, or do you anticipate having to play, a mediating role between the stepparent and your children?



The Role of the Non-Residential Biological Parent: Interaction and Discussion (4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- The extent to which the non-residential biological parent remains involved with their 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.
- Establishing and maintaining a good working coparenting relationship between the non-residential biological parent and two re-partnered parents are vital.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

In the module, you read how, despite their differences and troubling divorce, Juan Sr. and Angela are committed to coparenting their children.

_____ If you are a non-residential biological parent, how do you ensure you remain involved in your child(ren)'s life?

The session concluded with a homework activity that encouraged you to identify and determine which parents in the family take on specific parenting tasks.

_____ Did this activity help you identify and discuss parental roles and responsibilities within your family? Which responsibilities did you decide to take on? Which responsibilities did you decide to share with or give to another parent in the family?

Session 5: Coparenting in Stepfamilies Coparenting with Your Partner/Dimensions of Coparenting: Interaction and Discussion (4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Parents and stepparents need to work together to develop a mutually agreed-upon approach regarding parenting the children as a coparenting team.
- Good, or competent, coparenting is essential to family health and children's well-being regardless of family type.



- In stepfamilies, each parent's level of authority or responsibility in their parenting role is not necessarily split equally among the individuals in the coparenting relationship, and their role can vary depending on the needs of a family and the ability and commitment of each coparent.
- The module described three dimensions of coparenting and introduced an activity to help you understand how each aspect of coparenting applies to stepfamilies. The dimensions or aspects and their applicability to stepfamilies are as follows:
 - **Agreement:** An agreed-upon approach to parenting the children.
 - **Provision of support by the partner:** Feeling supported by one's partner is critical in any relationship.
 - **Undermining one parent by the other parent:** Parents need to be tolerant and avoid the tendency to engage in inter-parental criticism and conflict.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

In the module activity, you identified the dimension of coparenting being displayed by each of the scenario families.

_____ Evaluate the dimensions of coparenting in your parenting relationship using the questions below.

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

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

Effective (Step)parenting Discipline: Interaction and Discussion

(4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Effective discipline can help children learn to accept responsibility for their behaviors, recognize the needs of others, and develop self-confidence and self-control.



- Using the principles of effective discipline can help children learn to trust their parents as they make decisions regarding their well-being, feel comfortable coming to parents in positive and negative situations, and understand that they can depend on their parents to make decisions that are in their best interests.



Facilitator Tip

- For your reference, the key principles of effective discipline are outlined below. You may want to share a few principles with participants to generate discussion for the question asked in this section.
 - o Expect behavior that is developmentally appropriate.
 - o Have ground rules for appropriate behavior that are clear, fair, easy to understand, enforceable, and positively stated by you and your coparent.
 - o Use time out/withdrawal of a valued activity to deal with serious misbehavior.
 - o Avoid yelling, name-calling, threatening, or spanking when setting ground rules and enforcing them.
 - o Look at discipline as an opportunity for you to be a positive (step)parent and for your child to learn about themselves.
 - o Be respectful of your child's feelings. Speak to them as you would like to be spoken to.
 - o Be clear about what you expect from your child, and make the consequences attached to misbehavior appropriate to the situation and to your child's age and level of maturity.
 - o Try ignoring your child's protests or complaints regarding the ground rules. This avoids needless conflict over minor issues and teaches your child that you are setting ground rules that are reasonable and fair.
 - o Remember that your child is a unique individual. What worked for you when you were a child or what works for other parents may not apply to your child.
 - o Praise your child when they follow the ground rules for the behavior you have set. Be very specific when you praise your child, and refer to a specific behavior or action.



Generate discussion among participants using the following question:

The module provided an activity in which you could brainstorm how you might incorporate effective discipline practices into your interactions with your (step)children.

_____ Would anyone like to talk about effective discipline principles you have used in your parenting?



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

(4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- A child's well-being is strongly linked with the nature of the relationship between the stepfamily and the non-residential parent. Ideally, the stepfamily parental unit and the non-residential biological parent can work together on behalf of the child and maintain cordial and respectful interactions.
- Children who are exposed to persistent conflict between their two biological parents are at an elevated risk for experiencing anxiety, depression, insecurity, and behavior problems.
- Thrive offers a supplemental parent-education module, *Coparenting: Coordinated. Cooperative. United.*, that can help you learn strategies and gather insights into what you might be experiencing as a coparent. The module is available on the Thrive website.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

- _____ 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. Would anyone like to talk about that experience?
- _____ 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. Would anyone like to share about that?

Session 6: Stepfamilies and Family Development

Stepfamilies and Family Development: Interaction and Discussion

(4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Regardless of family form, the health and well-being of the family as a whole and of the children are more dependent on the nature and quality of the processes that take place within the family instead of the family's structure. In many cases, parents and children in stepfamilies manage well over the long term.



- Stepfamilies are healthiest, and children's outcomes optimized, when parents function well as a coparenting team and when parents have a good working knowledge of what competent parenting is and is not.
- Coparenting that is rooted in authoritative parenting has a high likelihood of succeeding in stepfamilies.
- 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.



Generate discussion among participants using the following question:

This session described fun activities the scenario families participated in together, such as having pizza and game nights, volunteering together, going on family bike rides, and cooking dinner together.

_____ What activities does your family enjoy participating in together?

Supporting your Coparent: Interaction and Discussion

(4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- Healthy stepfamilies depend upon each parent's capacity to support each other as they navigate together the challenges stepfamilies face. Actions parents and stepparents can incorporate into their interactions with each other and in the family environment to enhance the coparent relationship and encourage support and cooperation include the following:
 - o Spend time together as a couple and as a family.
 - o Identify and embrace areas of family life where you can find common ground.
 - o Actively listen to each other.
 - o Foster a sense of belonging and inclusion for all members of the family.
 - o Use family problem-solving and family meetings to address problems.
 - o Communicate clear rules and boundaries to the family and with each other.



Generate discussion among participants using the following questions:

This session described how the couples in the scenario families support each other. Brenda and Mei used nightly walks to talk. Benny and Delia scheduled weekly coffee dates. Raymond and Krystal went on monthly date nights. Angelina and Miguel tackled chores together on weekends. There was also an activity that asked you to determine if different actions could positively or negatively impact your coparent relationship with your partner.

_____ How do you show support and appreciation for your coparenting partner?

_____ What new actions or activities might you try to show support and appreciation for regarding your coparenting partner?

Stepfamilies Develop and Change with Time: Interaction and Discussion (4 minutes)



Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information:

- 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.
- Family members must also learn to manage their response to stressors, such as irritability, anger, or feeling overwhelmed, by finding appropriate coping strategies and outlets.



Generate discussion among participants using the following question:

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

**Wrap-Up** (1 minute)

Review this section of the module with the participants by offering the following information

- You are commended for completing the supplemental module and participating in these group meetings. Your participation reflects your commitment to learning and being the best parent/stepparent and coparent you can be! Navigating this responsibility can be overwhelming. There may be many hurdles along the way, but you and your blended family can overcome these obstacles. Engaging in bonding activities and using clear communication can help encourage and maintain positive relationships for all family members during the different stages of a stepfamily's development

Wrap-Up Module Discussion: Summary Questions (5 minutes)

Tell participants you are wrapping up, and generate discussion among participants using of the following questions:

- _____ Which topic discussed in the supplemental module was the most beneficial to you as a (step)parent? Why?
- _____ What strategies or skills did you learn in the supplemental module that will help you achieve the goals you have for your (step)child or your family?
- _____ What has changed in your interactions with your (step)child since before completing the supplemental module?
- _____ Have you noticed a difference in the way your (step)child is responding to your parenting?



Step 4: Direct to Additional Resources and/or Register for Additional Thrive Initiative Programming (4 minutes)

Provide support and encouragement to your participants to explore other Thrive Initiative programming. Offer information about and/or register participants for any additional hybrid implementation options that you plan to provide. Thrive Initiative programming may include any of the following:

Universal Programs

- **Take Root** is available for parents and caregivers of children who are between 0 and 3 years old.
- **Sprout** is available for parents and caregivers of children who are between 3 and 5 years old.
- **Grow** is available for parents and caregivers of children who are between 5 and 10 years old.
- **Branch Out** is available for parents and caregivers of children who are between the ages of 10 and 18 years old.

Supplemental Modules

Additional supplemental modules are available on a variety of topics and can be accessed online at <https://thrive.psu.edu/modules/supplemental/>.

Encourage participants to continue to visit the Thrive website, <https://thrive.psu.edu>, as their child develops and grows. They can access additional resources and materials like mini-booster modules, blog postings, parenting handouts and guides, an inclusivity toolkit, and newsletters.

Step 5: Thank and Adjourn (1 minute)

Thank the participants for their involvement in the hybrid implementation group program.

Appendices



Appendix A



Stepfamilies Recruitment Poster



stepfamilies

Blending Bonds, Building Harmony

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

Gain knowledge, skills, and strategies in the following areas:

- positive parenting practices,
 - stress management, and
 - child physical-health promotion.
-

Learn more about *Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony* and other Thrive programs at:

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

Meet with us!

Appendix B



Stepfamilies Participant Recruitment and Tracking Sheet

Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony

Hybrid Implementation Participant Recruitment and Tracking Sheet

[illegible]

Instructions for Completing the *Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony* Participant Recruitment and Tracking Sheet

The goal of this tracking sheet is to track individuals who would like more information about the hybrid implementation of *Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony* and to provide information about the dates and times for meetings.

Download the Participant Recruitment and Tracking Sheet

Ensure you are following your organization's privacy protocols with all of the information that is collected and stored. You can complete this form on a computer or print it to handwrite your responses. You may also choose to move the data to a spreadsheet.

Complete Columns 1-4

- Enter the potential participant's name, email address, child's date of birth, and today's date.
- If the potential participant has multiple children, enter the date of birth for the focal child (i.e., the child who the participant is focusing on with *Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony*).

Complete Columns 5 [Optional]

- To calculate the age, you can use an online age calculator.
- If the age is close to a cut-off, you may need to check in with the participant after they have registered for a Thrive account and have reviewed the introduction video to confirm that *Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony* is the correct program for their family.

Complete Columns 6-8

- Send the *Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony* Parent Welcome Letter to the email address provided, and enter the date the *Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony* Parent Welcome Letter is sent.
 - By sending the *Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony* Parent Welcome Letter, you are providing the potential participant the information they need to make a decision about attending the hybrid implementation, such as the date, time, and location of meetings. It also provides information about how to create an account on the Thrive website.
- Encourage participants to create a Thrive account and enroll in *Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony* supplemental module.
- Follow up with the potential participant to see if they would like to register and attend the hybrid implementation of *Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony*

Complete Column 9

Send the *Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony* Parent Workbook and Syllabus.

Appendix C



Stepfamilies Parent Welcome Letter

Overview of Thrive Initiative

Thrive is a group of parenting programs that are designed to help you, a parent or caregiver, as you care for your child—from pregnancy until your child reaches 18 years of age. There are four online parenting programs that are part of the Thrive Initiative. The intent of the supplemental modules is to build on information and strategies discussed in the four universal Thrive parenting programs — Take Root, Sprout, Grow, Branch Out. Therefore, by participating in the age-appropriate Thrive parenting program before engaging with any of the supplemental modules, you will reap the most benefits.

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 & Toddlers (1 to 3 years)			

All Thrive programs share knowledge, skills, and strategies within three areas:

- positive parenting practices,
- stress management, and
- child physical-health promotion.

Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony Online

Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony is an online supplemental module for parents and caregivers who are part of a blended family system. Since *Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony* is online, you can complete it at your own pace.

Hybrid Implementation of Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony

The hybrid implementation of *Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony* means you will complete the program based on a schedule. After you complete the assigned sessions, you will meet with a facilitator and, possibly, other families to discuss the information from the sessions.

There are 2 – 3 meetings with a facilitator. Each meeting will range from 45 – 60 minutes.

Stepfamilies - Date/Time/Location Hybrid Implementation

Expectations

You will be asked to independently participate in online sessions of **Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony** and come to meetings ready for discussion. By completing the sessions and activities and answering provided questions, you will be prepared to engage in discussion regarding the content, ask additional questions, and learn from other parents and caregivers and their experiences.

How to Create a Thrive Account

- Visit <https://thrive.psu.edu/> → Navigate to "For Parents" → Go to "Register for THRIVE online" → Click "Sign Up."
- Enter your name, create a username and password, and share your military affiliation (Yes/No).
- Log In → Choose **Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony** by selecting **Stepfamilies: Blending Bonds, Building Harmony Overview** and then selecting "Start Course."

Still have Questions? Contact your Facilitator!

Stepfamilies Facilitator's Name

Phone Number/Email

Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy (DoD MC&FP) and the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State (Clearinghouse).
All programs are available free of charge.

Appendix D



Stepfamilies Screen Share Text Example

Thank you for joining our meeting for



stepfamilies

Blending Bonds, Building Harmony

The meeting will start at



You should hear soft music playing.

Take this opportunity to test your microphone, video, and other settings.

If you need technical assistance:

Email

or

Call

at

Appendix E



Best Practices for Online Learning



Best Practices for Online Learning

You can enhance your experience during this training by doing the following:



Joining the meeting early to test settings.



Testing your technology with a friend or family member prior to your meeting.



Finding a quiet place to complete the meetings.



Using a headset or headphones for voice clarity.



Knowing who to contact, and how, if you cannot connect or are having technical difficulties.



Having a backup plan if your computer won't connect to the meeting. Perhaps there is a call-in number you could use so you can hear the meeting.

