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Dating Violence: Empowering Teens to Make Safe Dating Choices

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Penn State University
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PennState

In Partnership with the Department of Defense's Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy (DoD MC&FP)

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The Thrive Initiative

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

Universal Programming

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

Today's presenter

Dr. Julie Schatz-Stevens

Pennsylvania State University

Content Warning

This presentation will discuss issues related to teen dating violence, including physical and sexual assault. People who have experienced these traumas in their own lives can feel triggered emotionally and physically by this content. Those who have not experienced these adverse life events may also find this content difficult to hear about.

If you feel you need to take a break at any point during the presentation, please do so.

Counseling Services at PSU: 1- 814-863-0395

Penn State 24/7 Crisis Line: 1-877-229-6400

This Learning Session Covers…

- Developmental Factors that Influence Teen Relationships
- Typical Dating Progression During the Teen Years
- Unhealthy and Abusive Dating Behaviors
- Signs and Effects of Teen Dating Violence (TDV)
- Resources and Supports for Victims of TDV
- Parenting Behaviors that Promote Healthy Teen Relationships

What Do You Think?

1. The average age girls start dating is 14 years old.

2. Statistically speaking, TDV is rare.

3. Good grades and sports involvement keep teens safe from TDV.

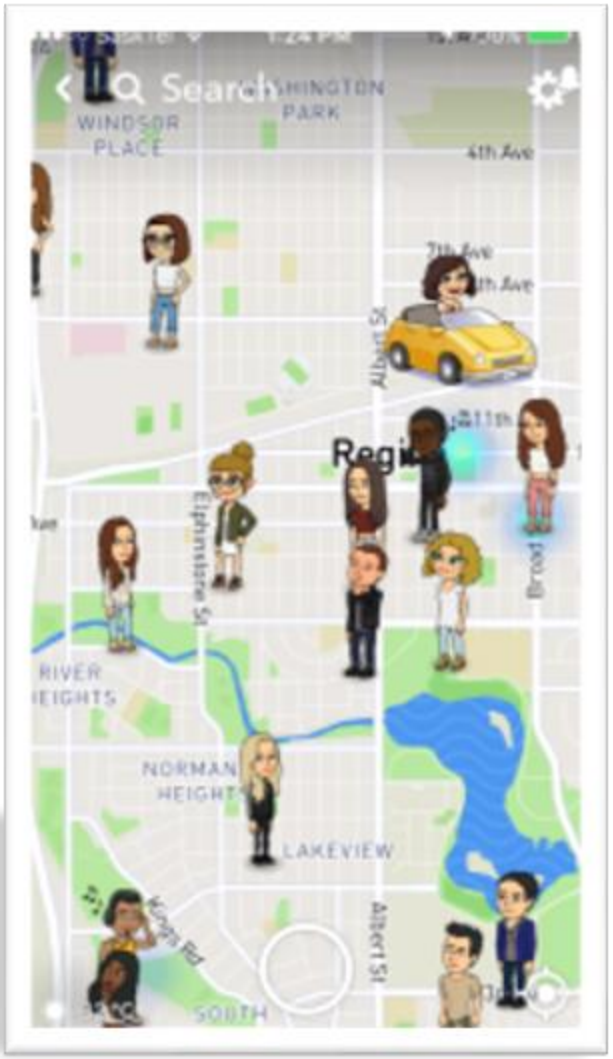
4. It's ok for a dating partner to demand passwords for social media accounts.

All statements are FALSE!

A Beginner's Guide To Dating

- New Experiences
- Unique Developmental Considerations
  - Social Influences: Friendships and Peers
    - Pressure to conform/not be judged by others
    - Fear of exclusion from a friend group
  - Biological Changes
    - Limbic system
    - PFC
  - Identity Exploration
    - Who am I?
    - Who am I in a relationship?
  - Autonomy
    - Not losing privileges
    - "I got this!"
  - Technology – This is a BIG one!

You Only Love Me If I Have Your Pin…



- Why Aren't You Answering Me?
- I Know Where You Are.
- Stop worrying so much. No one is going to see it.
- What are you doing that you can't share your passwords/pins with me?
- They did this in the video I just saw. It'll be fine.

Good, Bad, or Abuse?

Good

- Feels good
- Motivated by respect and care
- Give and take
- Respect of boundaries and what's important to the partner
- Intentionality of energy and investment in the relationship

Bad

- Doesn't feel great
- Motivated by immaturity, insecurity, or lack of experience with constructive communication skills
- Too much texting
- Lack of follow through on plans

Abuse

?

What Do You Think: Good, Bad, or Abuse?

Your 16-year-old comes home after hanging out with a friend and seems quieter than usual. After dinner, you catch him checking out the fridge and ask about his day. He pauses before he finally looks at you and asks you if he can tell you something without you getting all judgy. He shares that his new girlfriend had texted him like 15 times while he was outside shooting hoops with his best friend, Tre, but that he didn't see the messages because he left his phone inside. He also shared that he felt kind of weird when she unexpectedly stopped over while they were still shooting baskets - she had seen his location on Snapchat and walked a few blocks to Tre's house. Although he was happy to see her, he felt weird about the numerous texts that he found on his phone later on and her just coming over to Tre's house.

What Do You Think: Good, Bad, or Abuse?

Bad

- Excessive texting
- Location tracking
- Lack of respect for partner's time with friends, interests, and privacy
- Feeling confused about what happened

Are these indicators of abuse?

Good, Bad, or Abuse?

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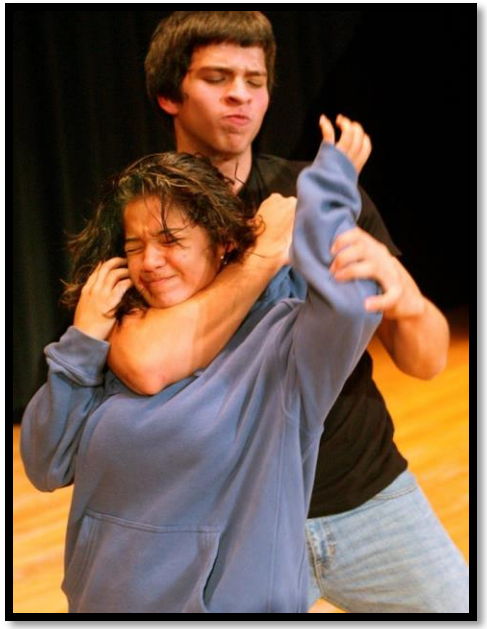
Abuse

- Hurts
- Motivated by power and control
- Disrespect for boundaries
- Isolation of partner from friends, family, and activities
- Patterns of these behaviors
- Gaslighting

Abuse = Power & Control



- Physical
- Sexual
- Psychological

- Economic
- Digital/Technology

- Stalking

Abuse = Power & Control

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Uses Physical Aggression

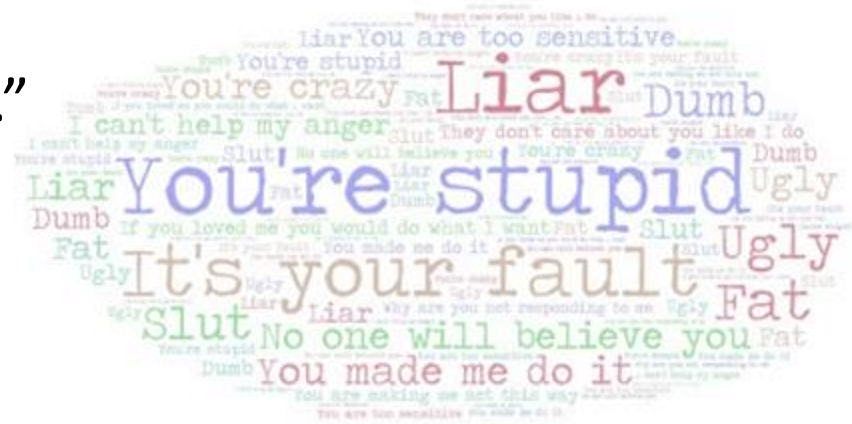
- Pushing, kicking, hitting, pinching, or slapping
- Grabbing wrist, arm, body
- Choking (ALERT!)
- Physically refraining or blocking from leaving
- Pulling hair
- Breaking personal property
- Punching holes in the wall next to partner
- Throwing things close by partner

Uses Sexual Aggression

- Threatening to share or sharing provocative pictures with others without consent
- Using guilting or shaming if partner is resistant to doing something sexually
- Using physical force to make partner do sexual acts
- Giving alcohol or drugs to off balance and create compliance
- Refusing to use, tampering with, or lying about birth control methods (reproductive coercion)
- Stealthing - taking off a condom midway through sex secretly
- Choking partner during sexual acts

Uses Emotional Abuse

- Creating self doubt and feelings of “less than” (especially in front of others)
- Guilting/shaming (for things that didn’t even happen)
- Name-calling
- Gas-lighting - Denying the truth, especially about abusive behaviors –
  - “You don’t remember that the way it actually happened.”
  - “Remember – you started it.”
- Invalidating needs or feelings



Isolates

- Demanding a lot of one-on-one time
- Fabricating reasons or using guilt to prevent time with friends and family
- Fabricating reasons or using guilt to reduce/stop involvement with activities and hobbies
- Creating conflict with others to harm relationships and create distance in those relationships
- Creating doubt about strength of those family and friendship relationships

Creates Fear/Threatens

- Creating worry about their emotional and/or physical well-being (I will cut myself if you don't come over right now! I will kill myself if you break up with me.)
- Creating worry about reputation (I will share this pic of you in your underwear with everyone I know!)
- Creating fear for safety because of things they say (threatening family, physical well-being) or do (hitting a wall nearby, throwing an object across the room)
- Driving fast or dangerously to create fear
- Having extreme emotions - getting angry in a way that is frightening (screaming, raging)
- Stalking

Gaslights (Minimizes & Denies)

- Changing the truth to create unbalance, feelings of being crazy
- Lying – “I would never say that!”
- Shifting the blame – the bad behaviors happened and were deserved because of victim’s choices
- Creating conflict for no reason
- Using phrases like - “you are too sensitive” “too emotional”
- Diverting/distracting from the real problems raised about the relationship or their behaviors

Controls/Disrupts Autonomy

- Taking car keys to prevent leaving
- Creating delays purposely to achieve selfish goals – (missing a family dinner, late to work, not able to make study group)
- Damaging possessions – homework, a beloved object (a special necklace)
- Acting possessive, demanding change (clothes, friends, activities) because of their jealousy
- Using personal accounts and posing to post and respond to others without permission so they can control what others see

Uses Tech to Control & Create Fear

- Threatening to share or sharing information with others – texts, pictures, passwords
- Having access to/monitoring all devices, social media accounts – reading content without permission, emails
- Tracking location and who with by location sharing or Apps
- Harassment through social media posts or messaging
- Constantly texting and demanding a response
- Constant communication, texts, phone calls
- Secretly taking pictures
- Using texts/media to threaten, insult
- Controlling online relationships
- Pushing set boundaries

Choking

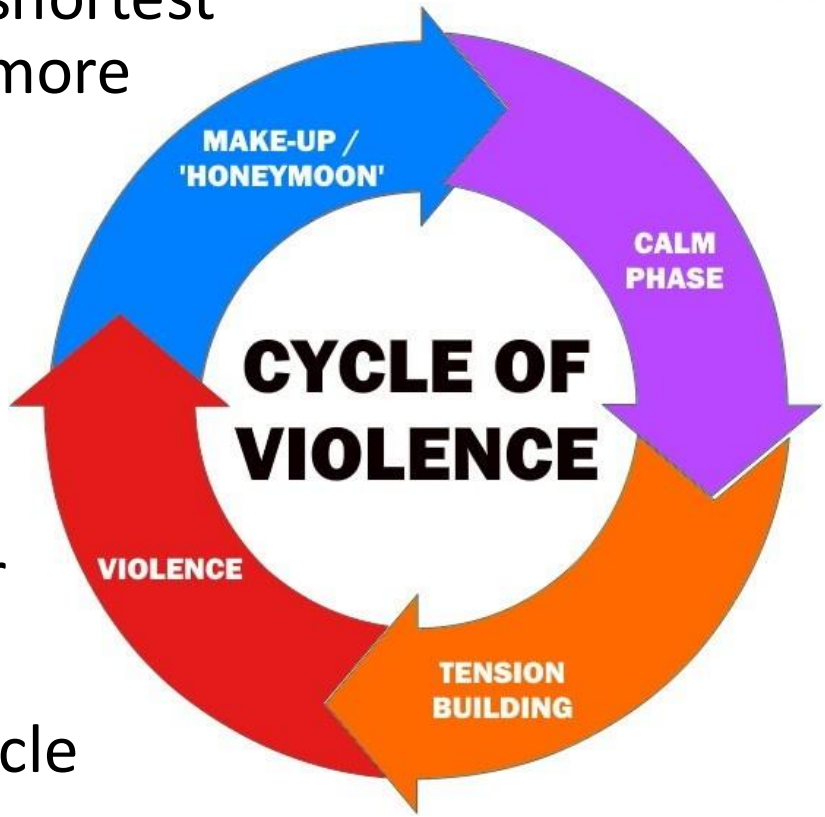
- Tech influenced (Porn, especially violent porn, media)
- Victims report being choked to the point of being unable to speak or breathe
- Can cause long-term brain damage and internal injuries
- Significant increase in choking behaviors in the last few years

Stalking

- In person and via tech
- Showing up unexpected, knowing schedules
- Tracking through posts or apps with location sharing
- Constantly calling, texting, messaging, or sending gifts (even when asked to stop)
- Following friends or family members
- Any other behavior that is used to contact, harass, threaten and create feelings of not being safe

Cycle of Abuse

- **Tension** – quick mood changes, criticisms, longest stage
- **Explosion** – abusive behaviors, shortest stage, becomes more frequent more over time
- **Reconciliation** – remorse, apologies, promises
- **Honeymoon/Lovebombing**– romantic gestures, affection, compliments, often gets shorter and shorter over time
- **Calm** – a small "break" in the cycle



Why Teens Don't Tell

- Uncertain if specific behaviors are abuse
- Afraid of being outed
- Feeling responsible for the abuse
- Fear
- Intense/passionate relationship
- Feels sorry for abuser and hopeful they can change
- School pressure – in same classes or friend group
- Feels that no one will believe what's happened
- Doesn't want to lose friend group
- Afraid parents will make them break up

Recognizing TDV in Teens

- Withdrawal from activities and time with friends and family
- Friendships lost/changed (especially all friends of a specific gender)
- Grade changes
- Change in usual behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes
- Constant change of plans to accommodate partner
- Missing family events, practices, or even school
- Changing style of clothing

- Wearing long sleeves or pants during warmer weather
- Sharing less about their lives with family
- Afraid to make partner angry
- Secrecy about communication and time spent with partner
- Partner seems excessively jealous
- Excessive texting and communication with partner
- Making excuses for partner

Outcomes Associated with TDV

- Bruises
- Broken bones
- Concussions
- Internal injuries
- PTSD
- Anxiety
- Suicidal ideation
- Depression
- Decline in grades
- Loss of friendships
- Loss of job
- Risky behaviors
- Substance use
- Risk for future DV
- Long-term health problems
- Death

How to Help

- Believe what they are telling you
- Listen without judgment
- Assure them that the abuse is not their fault
- Help connect with resources (medical, psychological, community, online, phone line)
- Safety plan

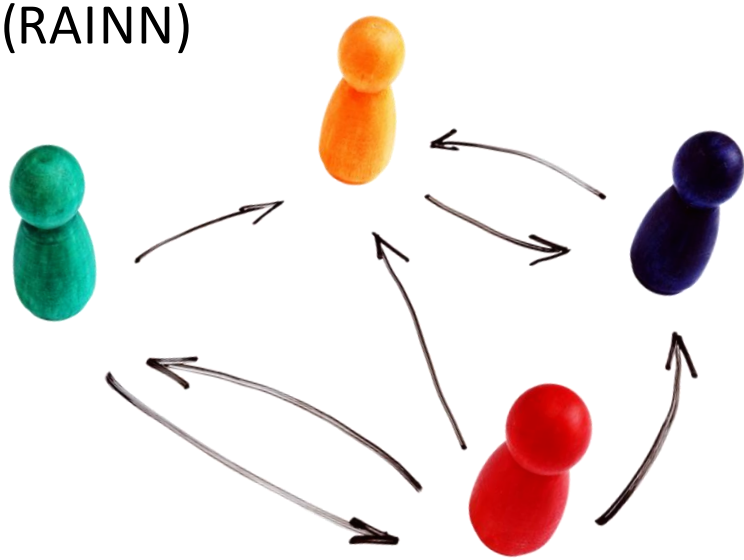
Resources

- National Domestic Violence Hotline
  24/7 hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
  TTY: 1-800-787-3224
  VP: 1-855-812-1011
  www.ndvh.org (online chat available)

- Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN)
  24/7 hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)
  www.rainn.org (online chat available)

- Break the Cycle
  www.breakthecycle.org

- Loveisrespect.org



Safety Plan

- The safest way for me to get to and from school is: _____.
- If I need to leave school in an emergency, I can get home safely by_____.
- I can make sure that a friend can walk with me between classes. I will ask: _____ and _____ .
- I will eat lunch and spend free periods in an area where there are school staff or faculty nearby. These are some areas on campus where I feel safe: _____, _____, and _____.

If You Are The Parent

- Believe, listen, support, and validate your child's feelings

- Understand that it may take time for your child to get out and that your patience and support during this time is essential – pressuring your child to leave the relationship immediately can make it difficult for your teen and push them closer to their partner as well as make it more challenging for them to tell you anything in the future about the relationship

- Try to connect your child with a mental health professional (one who has experience with TDV)

- Depending on the type of abusive behaviors, knowing your teen's legal options is also important and can help ensure additional safety measures

Helping Your Teen Make Safe Choices

- Invest in your relationship with your child throughout their life
- Model emotion management
- Model healthy relationship behaviors
- Begin conversations early about relationships and continue them throughout middle childhood and adolescence
- Teach and demonstrate consent
- Teach about and model healthy boundaries (physical, emotional, relational, and digital) – Allow and encourage your child to express their feelings about touch and personal space
- Have expectations for technology use and teach appropriate online communication
- Model appropriate boundaries in your own life
- Make the most of teachable moments – like a TV episode that deals with relationship issues or a news story

Important Conversations to Have

- What do you appreciate most about your closest friends?
- What have been challenges you have seen in your friend groups? How did you handle them?
- What do you like about how our family communicates with each other? Is there anything you wish were different?
- Do you think a dating partner should be like a friendship? In what ways? In what ways is it different?
- What do you think about dating?
- Have you seen any classmates, family, or friends have a dating relationship that didn't work out like they wanted? What happened?
- What relationship behaviors would be too much for you? (like texting you constantly when you are with friends or getting jealous a lot)
- What is important for you to look for in a future dating partner?
- What behaviors would you definitely want to see in a relationship? (like checking in with you, spending time with your family)
- What behaviors would make you immediately get out of a relationship? (Cheating? Pushing? Lying?)
- Who would you go to if something happened in one of your relationships that felt uncomfortable ?

Educate About Healthy Relationships

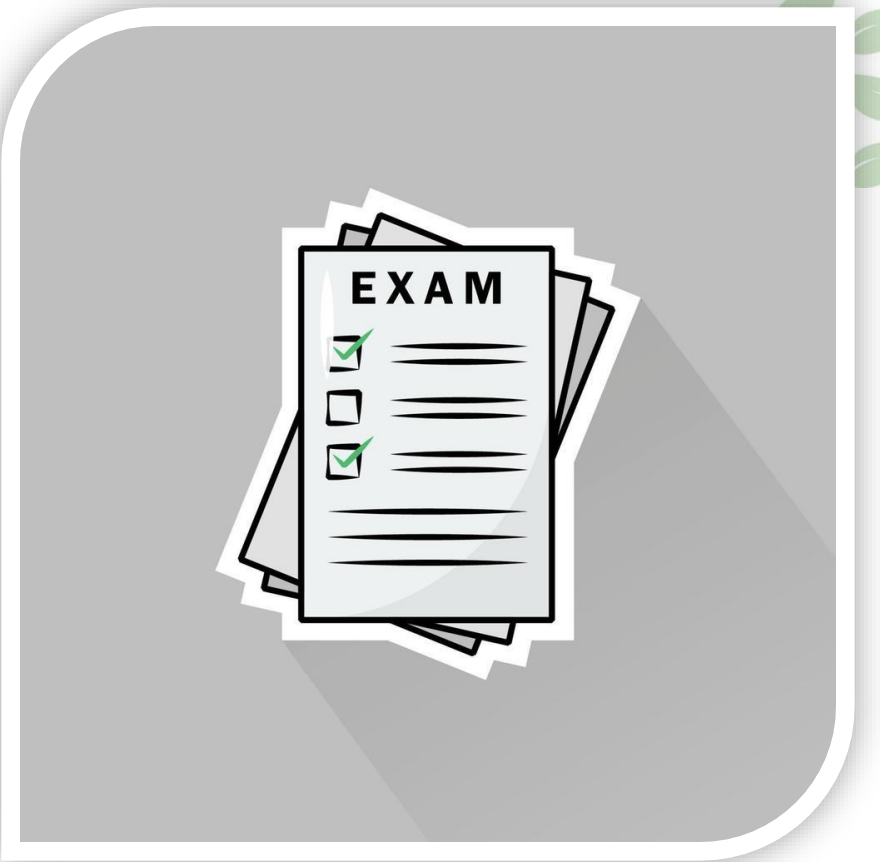
- Communicate
- Have conflict but it's not destructive
- Make you feel good about yourself
- Encourages you
- Supports Independence
- Respect
- Equality

- What do they look like?
  - Honesty
  - Trust
  - Safety
  - Support
  - Pace
  - Intensity
  - Balance

Remind your teen that dating, especially during the teen years, is supposed to be FUN!

Evaluate Your Relationships

- Do I feel bad about myself with this person?
- Do I feel nervous to upset this person?
- Can I be authentic with this person?
- Have I changed in any ways because of this person? Positive or negative?
- Do I feel like I can't say no to this person?
- Can I hold all of my boundaries with this person? Why or why not?
- Do I have to keep parts of my relationship secret?
- Do I trust this person?



Key Take Aways

- Dating violence is unfortunately common in teen relationships
- Many elements of adolescence make it challenging for victims to recognize, respond to, and leave abusive relationships
- Abuse is ALWAYS hurtful and creates serious short and long-term effects
- Recognizing the signs of TDV can help a teen get out of a relationship that isn't safe and parents play a powerful role in supporting their teens during this time
- There are many resources available to help teens who have experienced TDV
- Many parenting behaviors can lay the foundation for healthy relationship choices

Questions?

Please enter any questions or comments into the chat box.

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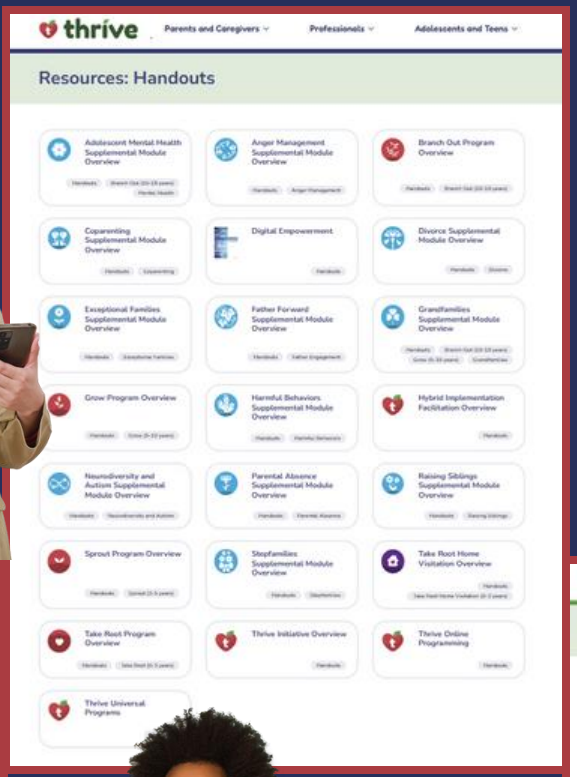
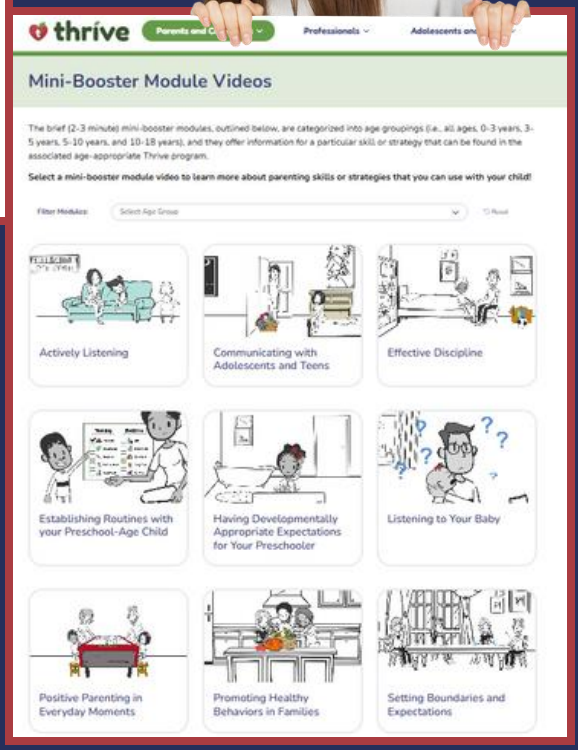




Upcoming Event

Dr. Tara Saathoff-Wells

NEAR Science Across the Lifespan: Understanding Early Adversity and Providing Supports

- **December 11, 2025**
- **12 pm ET**

PennState CLEARINGHOUSE FOR MILITARY FAMILY READINESS

Open Office Hours

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

Fall 2025 Open Office Hour Dates

- Wednesday, August 27 from 2-3 p.m.
- Wednesday, Sept. 24 from 2-3 p.m.
- Wednesday, October 29 from 2-3 p.m.

Sign up here: https://militaryfamilies.psu.edu/open-office-hours/

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

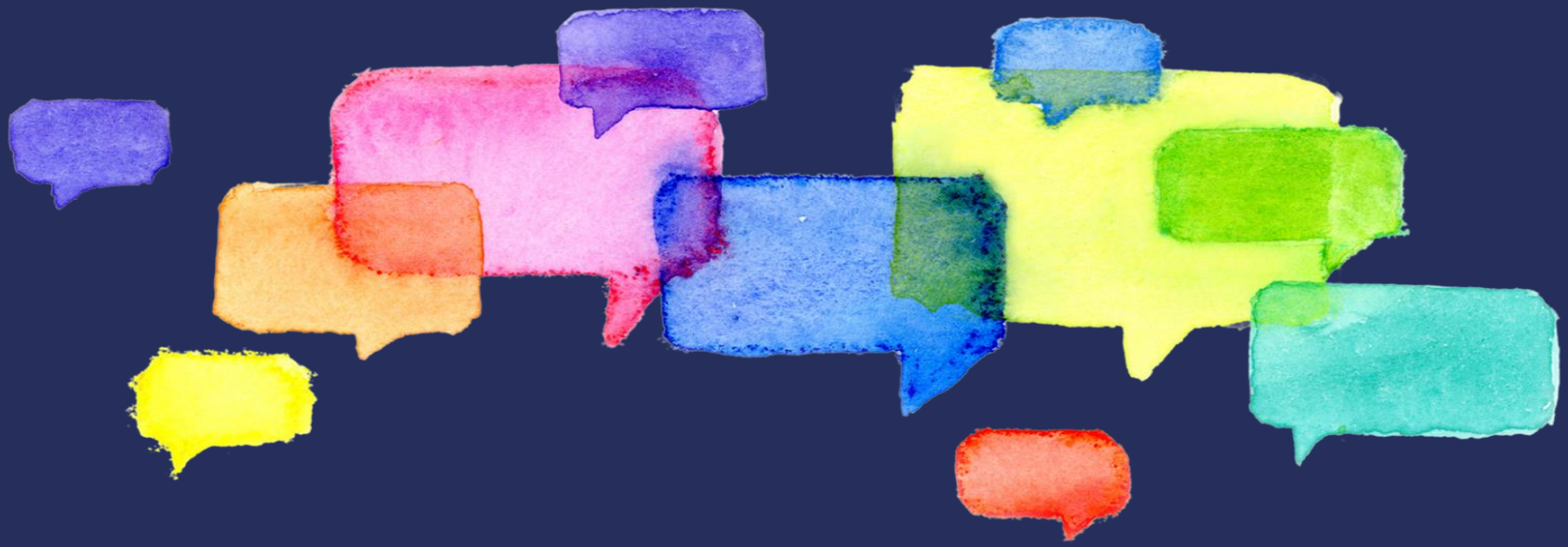
For more information contact us:

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

Meet with our research team to get support with:

- Data collection & evaluation
- Finding effective programs or trainings
- Implementation questions
- Connect with others supporting Service members, Veterans, and military-connected families.

Need a different time? Request a 1-on-1 session!



Presentation survey

https://bit.ly/3VZXU5v

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

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Thank You

Contact Us

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