Abstract

SUCCESSFUL STEPFAMILIES:  
A FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION PROGRAM  
TO ADDRESS UNIQUE NEEDS

By Karin Schumacher Dyke

This thesis outlines a family life education curriculum that will service couples parenting children in stepfamilies. System theory is the basis for the organization of the curriculum in question. The goal of the family life education curriculum is to educate couples involved in establishing stepfamilies on the issues and implications that stepfamily development entails. The curriculum will incorporate best practice of other programs, along with unique strategies to authenticate learning. In addition, a comprehensive review of relevant literature is provided. Development of successful stepfamilies are encouraged through review of best practices of family life education and review of the most important issues that successful stepfamilies are aware of and practice.
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A significant body of current research addresses the problematic issues faced by stepfamilies in western society. However, a far smaller body of research addresses the practices of effective stepfamilies. The proposed project focuses on training couples working to establish viable stepfamilies. Unlike others, the curriculum focuses on the positive by training couples in new or second marriages in which children are present to use effective techniques, developed through observation of successful stepfamilies, as they build and maintain their family units. Therefore, this thesis begins by clarifying the unique needs and characteristics of stepfamilies through an extensive review of the literature on stepfamilies. The review focuses on best practices of both effective stepfamilies and family life education.

In the last decades of the 20th Century, there was a marked increase in the number of stepfamilies in the United States. This increase continues into the 21st Century. The Stepfamily Association of America [SAA] (Stepfamily Association of America, 2004) noted that seven out of 10 children in the United State were living in non-traditional families. The SAA also reported that of these children, 30 percent were living in stepfamilies which equates one American out of three is now a stepparent. Another source, the United States Census Bureau (2003), reported 16 percent of all families with children living at home were classified as stepfamilies. Finally, Jones (2003) asserted the importance of this issue when he found that about one third of the United States population lives as members of stepfamilies. Jones classified both minor children living in the home and adult children living independently as members of stepfamilies. The high divorce rates of couples engaged in co-parenting these stepfamilies, particularly those raising children who still lived in their households, indicates a need for intervention at the beginning of the marriage or as soon as problems arise.

The trend toward stepfamily formation follows a statistical pattern. Jones (2003) concluded that for every 100 marriages that take place in the United States, 55 of these marriages have a strong likelihood of failure. He noted that the overwhelming majority of those spouses who divorce eventually repartner. U.S. Census Bureau statistics (2003)
indicated that slightly more than 40 percent of all current marriages are second or third marriages. Arditi (1999) reported that 29 percent of mothers had remarried and 60 percent of fathers had remarried in the participant pool for her study. These statistics were representative of the overall United States population. In many cases, remarriage leads to the establishment of stepfamilies (Jones, 2003).

Jones (2003) noted that slightly in excess of 60 percent of couples heading stepfamilies end up divorcing. However, this figure significantly exceeds this 60 percent figure when the couples head families in which there are members under age 18. Amato (2000) noted that slightly more than half of all divorces involve children under the age of eighteen. Thus, research indicates that the viability of stepfamilies is in question. Stepparents need support in order to turn these trends in a new direction.

Family systems theory suggests a useful theoretical framework in which to consider the needs of stepparents (White & Klein, 2002). If, as the theory asserts, the entire family system is interdependent, instructing parents in stepfamilies on how to better work within the stepfamily has the potential to produce a positive change on the entire system (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). Additionally, the systems framework encourages “feedback” (White & Klein, 2002). Feedback can be either positive or negative. Positive feedback makes achievement of the desired change more likely (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993; White & Klein, 2002). Negative feedback makes achievement of the desired change less likely (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993; White & Klein, 2002). Assuming that families are goal-oriented systems with error correction as a goal, feedback, is an essential part of the proposed program (White & Klein, 2002).

Using the concept of feedback, negative feedback breeds less change within the family system while positive feedback breeds more change in the family unit (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993; White & Klein, 2002). Therefore, teaching couples forming stepfamilies more effective ways of behaving in these stepfamilies will affect all of the members of the family unit by making the situation in general more positive. In short, the more effective practices in building a positive stepfamily the couples are able to implement, the greater the catalyst for more success.

Examining family transitions from a family systems perspective is also useful. There is a change in families when there is a divorce and parents repartner. This change
creates disequilibrium” (Booth & Dunn, 1994). One example of disequilibrium in a
stepfamily occurs when stepparents engage in establishing a relationship with the
stepchildren living in the household. Commonly, stepchildren reject attempts at
establishment of a relationship between themselves and the stepparent (Booth & Dunn,
1994). The result of this perceived rejection on the part of the stepparent is that the
stepparent becomes more distant in the dealings with the stepchild, leading to less
monitoring behaviors on the part of the stepparent, leading to less desirable outcomes on
the part of the stepchild (Hetherington, 1999). It is easy to discern that there is a change
within the family system due to the less-functional relationships between the stepchild
and stepparent. This leads to the conclusion that in order to remediate the conflict that
goes on in a stepfamily, a parental transition is required (Booth & Dunn, 1994).

The capacity of the system, or family, to be able to transition with ease or with
difficulty, is referred to by systems theory as the “degree of variety” (White & Klein,
2002). A system, or family, with the most capacity for adaptation has the highest level of
variety. However, a system or family with less capacity to make transitions has a lower
level of variety. Family systems theory suggests that in stepfamilies, relationships
that affect the system extend beyond the borders of the home in which the child resides
most of the time thus creating a degree of permeability (White & Klein, 2002). Families
by definition are always, to varying degrees, open systems (Whitchurch & Constantine,
1993). As a result of this openness, the system, or family, is influenced to some degree
by the environment within its experience. In the view of the family systems framework,
everyone in the child’s environment is part of the system (Whitchurch & Constantine,
1993; Isaacs, 2002). The environment includes both the parent who is the ex-spouse and
society in general. With the spouse no longer married to the other biological parent, if
the child senses that there is difficulty in the relationship between the parents involved in
forming the stepfamily and the ex-partner, this too will cause adjustment problems for the
child (Isaacs, 2002). Therefore, forming equitable relationships between both biological
parents and ex-spouses is important in the adjustment process (Amato, 2000; Arditti,
1999; Benson-Von Der, 1987; Booth & Dunn, 1994; Everett, 2002; Gangong, Coleman,
Also important to improvement is the stepfamily’s realization that difficulties exist within the family system. How much the stepfamily is able to discern that there is need for correction is referred to in systems theory as system “levels” (White & Klein, 2002). Two levels of systems are apparent: first-order and second-order systems (White & Klein, 2002). First-order systems are defined as the flow of information from the environment through the stepfamily’s perceptions of the information, or “rules of transformation” (White & Klein, 2002). Rules of transformation allude to how the stepfamily perceives the event and how they are programmed to respond. In the first-order system, the responses are just a result of learned response, or rules of transformation, on the part of the stepfamily. Second-order systems have the addition of a “comparator” (White & Klein, 2002). With this addition, the comparator of the stepfamily has the ability to judge whether the inputs from the environment to the system, or family, are acceptable or not. If it judges that there is error, the comparator will alert the system, or family, to the error and will strive toward change for correction.

Additionally, in accordance with systems theory, there are subsystems within the stepfamily (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). An example of the concept of subsystems is the relationship of the husband and wife in the stepfamily. Various subsystems within the stepfamily work independently to make judgments as to whether or not change is needed in the family in order to make it “work” (White & Klein, 2002). Therefore, the stepfamily’s goals and the judgment of the comparator work in conjunction toward attainment of these familial goals. In order for stepfamilies to be able to change, the system at some level must determine that there is need for change and have enough variety (flexibility) within the system for the change, or as Whitchurch and Constantine (1993) refer to it, morphogenesis, to occur.

Society does not acknowledge the value of treating stepfamilies as entities with unique needs and issues. At best, society dictates that stepfamilies be treated like intact families that have biological mother and biological father living with their biological children (Jones, 2003; Mahoney, 2000). At worst, society sees stepfamilies and remarriage as inherently appalling and stigmatizes the entire institution of stepfamilies by having fewer institutional supports or social policy available than those that assists intact
families (F2004). Neither one of these societal approaches to stepfamilies appear to be viable.

When family life education applies these same societal principles to educating couples in the process of forming stepfamilies, similar failures occur. Trying to apply educational programs geared toward couples that are marrying for the first time does not meet the unique needs and characteristics of the stepfamily (Adler-Baeder & Higgenbotham, 2004). Thus, these programs fail.

However, family life education with the right instructional focus presents an excellent alternative for addressing the needs of stepfamilies as they form and maintain themselves. Kaplan and Hennon (1992) and Everett (2002) both called for the development of programs that assist stepfamilies in forming themselves. However, Michaels (2000) and Ganong and Coleman (2004) noted a lack programs that specifically deal with the unique issues faced by stepfamilies. There is also a lack of quality programs that are based on trustworthy, scholarly theory (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). Therefore, consumers must be vigilant about selecting programs that reflect worth (Ganong & Coleman, 2004).

Many family life education programs have attempted to apply relevant research on the unique qualities of stepfamilies to their own programs. Suggestions for subjects to be taught in a quality stepfamily program that endeavors to educate adult co-parents include (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004):

- acknowledgment of societal stigma and developing a plan for support for stepfamilies;
- addressing relationships in stepfamilies and educating couples about the processes innate in establishing these relationships;
- facilitation of establishing positive relationships among children and co-parents in the stepfamily;
- establishment of strong, cohesive bonds among the couple themselves in stepfamilies; and
- information about the founding of cooperative relationships with former spouses.
The program proposed in this thesis educates couples heading stepfamilies on these suggested topics. Materials have been developed based on a thorough analysis of best practices literature in order to maximize the quality of the proposed program. Instruction focuses on developing positive interactions between spouses in order to solidify the base for the entire family.

This thesis offers five chapters and an appendix. Chapter 1 is the introduction. It introduces the potential subject matter contained in the proposed program and gives a brief overview. Chapter 2 is a literature review of the relevant literature as it applies to the proposed program. Chapter 3 is a literature review that contains an appraisal of pertinent educational programs found in current literature. Chapter 4 focuses on how to best facilitate a family life education program that has application exclusive to stepfamilies. Chapter 5 summarizes the design of the proposed family life educational program including content, composition, delivery of the proposed program, and evaluation of the proposed program. The chapter also includes how the program is unique, the merits of the proposed program and a discussion that includes program limitations. Finally, an appendix outlines specific content for the family life education program and presents the program in its entirety.
Chapter Two
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Adjustment to the new situation in a stepfamily takes an average of three to five years (Golish, 2003). However, what propositions the stepfamily faces that maximize variety in the system, or family, along the way must be examined. This assessment of what will be organized around the suggestions for subjects to be taught in a quality stepfamily program that endeavors to educate adult co-parents include (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004):

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- information about the founding of cooperative relationships with former spouses.

Review of the Literature

Acknowledgment of Societal Stigma and Developing a Plan for Support for Stepfamilies

Stepfamily literature abounds with challenges faced by stepfamilies, not the least of which are societal views of stepfamilies. From trying to make stepfamilies fit into the traditional intact family model, to negative societal stereotypes of stepfamilies and their relationships, to policies imposed by society on stepfamilies that make the relationships between stepparent and stepchild clearly one of less relevance than the biological parent and biological child relationship, stepfamilies are viewed by society as problematic (Jones, 2003). Appreciation for stepfamilies and their uniqueness must be cultivated in the United States for normalization of an increasing, valid type of family composition (Jones, 2003).
Society theorizes that residing in stepfamilies is harmful for the children living within them (Amato, 2000; Fisher, Leve, O’Leary, & Leve, 2003; Ram & Hou, 2003). There are many varieties of stories, myths, and media that would perpetuate these societal attitudes (Jones, 2003). As a result of the challenges experienced within the stepfamily and in society itself when dealing with stepfamilies, there are no clearly established roles for stepparents in society (Corrie, 2002; Everett, 2002). If stepfamilies present themselves as the traditional, intact family, there is much more societal acceptance (Ganong, Coleman, Fine, & McDaniel, 1998; Lamb, 1999). Thus, stepfamilies have the choice of either presenting themselves as something that is conducive to societal acceptance, or presenting themselves accurately and living with the social stigma (Jones, 2003).

Mahoney (2000) illustrates that society does not take the role of stepparents seriously in terms of their commitment and attachment to their stepchildren. He pointed to the statistic that indicates that couples managing stepfamilies with children residing within the household tend to divorce at a rate of 60 percent. If, in the likely event as demonstrated by this statistic, divorce does occur, it is not the standard for children to be awarded any visitation with the stepparent (Felker et al., 2002). This societal practice exemplifies that there is little incentive for the child to bond with a stepparent.

Researchers present policy issues as very representative of the overall problems faced by stepparents. Legal issues identified as being out of the realm of stepparental authority include possible occurrences in stepfamilies and intact families alike, such as signing school permission slips, and authorizing emergency medical care for the child (Ganong et al., 1998). Critical decision-making is out of the jurisdiction of the stepparent.

Society does not recognize stepparents as real parents with the child’s best interest at heart (Fisher et al., 2003; Ganong et al., 1998, Jones, 2003). At best, stepparents are viewed as someone residing in the same house without full parental rights to the child (Ganong et al., 1998). Parenting the child is limited to the bare minimum of what is permissible by law. However, it is a normal expectation that the stepparent will participate in the financial support of the stepchild (Ahrons, 1995; Jones, 2003; Ram & Hou, 2003). This dichotomy in societal expectations keeps the tumultuous relationship
between parenting and role confusion ever-present in the relationship between the child and stepparent.

Looking from a theoretical perspective, family systems theory suggests that in stepfamilies, relationships that affect the system extend beyond the borders of the home in which the child resides most of the time, thus creating a degree of permeability (White & Klein, 2002). This is defined as the system, or family, being influenced to some degree by the environment within its experience. In the view of the family systems framework, everyone in the child’s environment is part of the system (Isaacs, 2002). If this environment is less accepting, as research shows, the child is led to believe that being part of a stepfamily is, as a product of what it is, problematic. If this is to be remediated, society in general must change.

A solution for the view of society is to create new public policies. Jones (2003) sited The Children Act of 1989 as a solution used in English Law. It provides that a stepparent who has lived with a biological parent and child for a period of two years is eligible to apply for a “residence order” (Jones, 2003, p. 234). This order, if established, extends parental rights and responsibilities to the stepparent without negating any of the rights and responsibilities that either of the biological parents (both residential and non-residential) includes. This law makes the job of a stepparent more credible and thus enables society to somewhat destigmatize the role of the stepparent.

Because changing policy is not a practical option for the common stepfamily, there are other practical solutions that literature offers to better accommodate the stepfamily in society in general (Olsen, 2000). Communication with teachers and the school community at large may help the school better accommodate the psychological as well as the physical needs of the stepfamily as they relate with the children’s school. Setting up a limited power of attorney for the stepparent better legitimizes the parental role of the stepparent. This often allows stepparents to sign student permission slips for school purposes, but it also allows stepparents to authorize emergency medical care. Working with the community at large in these same ways also helps legitimize the role of the stepfamily as well as assists others in knowing how to work with the family in the most effective ways. Additionally, making sure that stepparents as well as biological
parents are informed about the medical and educational history of each child assists in the process of transitioning and legitimization of the stepfamily (Olsen, 2000).

*Addressing Relationships in Stepfamilies and Educating Couples about the Processes Innate in Establishing these Relationships*

Often, when remarriage occurs in couples with children, the spouse identifies that they were not planning on remarriage including someone else’s children (Hetherington, 1999). However, addressing relationships that include children is a reality in stepfamilies with many factors affecting the alteration.

Timing seems to be an important aspect to the adjustment process in stepfamilies. If the remarriage occurs prior to or following children’s adolescents, adjustment seems to follow more easily for these families (Hetherington, 1999; Lamb, 1999). However, if children are adolescents, the process is more difficult. Literature suggests that the marked difference occurring in adolescence is the child needing to individuate from the family in the normal developmental process (Felker, Fromme, Arnaut, & Stoll, 2002). Just as the stepparent wants to get to know the child, the child is pushing further away from the family in general and often, especially, the new stepparent. In general, it is reported that adolescence brings on heightened conflict in stepfamilies whether the child was younger at the time of the inception of the stepfamily or whether the child is in adolescence.

Parental depression can lower the likelihood of effective parenting in stepfamilies and lead to more adjustment problems (Ahrons, 1995; Hetherington, 1999; Isaacs, 2003; Ram & Hou, 2003). Parental depression has the affect on the child of making them feel more responsible for the biological parent that is suffering (Wallerstein et al., 2000). This feeling of responsibility on the part of the child is ultimately crippling.

Formation of groups with the specific purpose of supporting parents in the stepfamily was reported in the literature as something that stepparents longed for (Arnaut, 2000; Everett, 2002). The specific purpose of these groups would be to discuss issues common to group members. Further, qualified leaders would be available to lead the group in a constructive problem solving process rather than the group being used exclusively for venting about issues (Everett, 2002). This could lower the parental stress
often identified with stepparenting and allow for some normalization of the stepfamily in general.

Daily routines in stepfamilies are also problematic (Braithwaite, Olson, Golish, Soukup, & Turman, 2003). Children in stepfamilies often must move between households maintained by both biological parents. This creates confusion for both the child and the parent. If routine establishment occurs jointly as a stepfamily with input from all members, this can ease confusion and enhance communication (Braithwaite et al., 2003; Doherty, 1997).

Problematic for adults and children alike are relationships with the non-custodial parent. Relationships among the adults involved in parenting the child, whether custodial or not, must remain as free from conflict as possible. If the child is especially close to the non-custodial parent, this may further retard progress in becoming close with the stepparent (Isaacs, 2003). If the ex-spouse can support the stepfamily and its formation, this can enhance relationships between the children and stepparent.

Further, children who have more agreeable temperament characteristics tend to accept stepparents and family formation more readily than children with more difficult temperaments (Isaacs, 2003). Black children seem better equipped to accept and benefit from stepfamily formation when compared with their white counterparts (Lamb, 1999).

Examining family transitions from a family systems perspective is also useful. There is a change in families when there is a divorce and parents repartner. This change creates disequilibrium (Booth & Dunn, 1994). The capacity of the system, or family, to be able to transition with ease or with difficulty, is referred to by systems theory as the degree of variety (White & Klein, 2002). The greater the degree of variety, the more easily stepfamilies will be able to transition easily into their new roles, however, the state of disequilibrium defines that the family has novel roles that must be established at the same time.

In summation, parents must be encouraged to be strong leaders of the family and do so in a purposeful, educated, moral manner (McGraw, 2004). Some guidelines for consideration include:

- it takes three to five years for stepfamilies to settle into predictable patterns (Golish, 2003),
• establishing routines and rhythms within the household that are predictable for children establishes security (Doherty, 1999; McGraw, 2004),
• creating realistic expectations about life in the stepfamily will help avoid feelings of failure (Felker et al., 2002),
• seeking assistance from family clinicians if pathology is a concern (Wallerstein et al., 2000).

Facilitation of Establishing Positive Relationships among Children and Co-Parents in the Stepfamily

From the inception of the remarriage, changes occur in the child’s life. Remarriage often brings families to a new house. There are new people to adjust to in these new surroundings. These changes often bring about behavior problems (Coleman et al., 2000, Ram & Hou, 2003). In addition, children of remarriage appear to experience detriments in school achievement (Coleman et al., 2000; Ram & Hou, 2003). Further, Lansford, Ceballo, Rosario, and Stewart (2001) pointed to problems of low self-esteem, difficulty with relationships, delinquent behavior, and alcohol and drug abuse in children residing in stepfamilies. With all of the symptoms that the children are exhibiting, parenting the child in stepfamilies seems to be less of a priority (Coleman et al., 2000; Ram & Hou, 2003). In fact, a vicious cycle is apparent: the more the children exhibit externalizing and internalizing symptomology, the worse the relationship is in the marriage of the stepfamily (Hetherington, 1999; Lamb, 1999).

Disciplining the child may be the natural response of the parents in a family. This is problematic in the stepfamily household. It is reported that discipline by biological parents after a divorce is the most difficult for whichever partner feels the most responsible for the divorce (Arnaut, Fromme, Stoll, & Felker, 2000). Also left over from divorce is that if the child has lived in a highly conflict ridden household prior to divorce, they seem to be at more risk post-divorce. If an environment can be established of a well-functioning family, this risk can be somewhat abated (Lamb, 1999).

Further, it has been liberally noted in the research pertaining to stepfamilies that there is a marked difference in stepparents parenting stepchildren. Stepparents tend to feel closer to their own biological children and thus more equipped to parent these
biological children (Banker, 1998; Benson-Von Der, 1987; Dunlop & Burns, 2001; Henderson, 1999; Hetherington, 1999; Lamb, 1999). This leads to more distance and less parenting between stepchildren and stepparents.

Parental tribulations are exemplary of the literature about stepfamilies. Coleman, Gangong, and Fine (2000) specifically suggested that there are no clearly established roles for stepparents to refer to and operate under. Further, Coleman, Gangong, and Fine suggested that there is a lack of time for raising a child because the new couple is trying to establish a new marital relationship. Stepparents try to take on the role of parent and this is problematic for the child in that this “de-emphasizes” the role of the biological parents (Jones, 2003). Also problematic is the expectation for the stepparent that they will instantly bond with the child (Everett, 2002; Jones, 2003). When this does not happen (as it takes time for people to bond), there is tremendous shame and guilt on the part of the stepparent. Overall, it appears that the stepparent and stepchild must explore resources for solutions in order to live in harmony.

With one more person to provide physical, emotional, and economic support, it would be surmised that the potential for children to have better outcomes in stepfamilies than in single parent households are at hand. These advantages have not been observed in research (Ram & Hou, 2003). Research suggested that the economics of the family do in fact improve, but the child showing improvement is not a reality (Lamb, 1999; Ram & Hou, 2003).

This is exemplified in research presented by Manning (2000). Manning indicated that biological fathers who do not have physical custody of the children conceived out of their first marriages feel less responsible for their economic well-being when additional children come along as the result of second marriages. Statistically speaking, the additional children that are born in subsequent marriages are born within two years of remarriage and with great statistical regularity. If these fathers are less invested in the existing biological children in an economic way, does it not make sense that they also feel less invested in parenting the existing biological child too? The answers to both of these questions are, sadly, resounding affirmatives (Manning, 2000; Ram & Hou, 2003). So what are the answers to developing a positive relationship between stepfamily members?
The goal for adults co-parenting in stepfamily households must be to establish intimacy between members while establishing boundaries and establishing authority (Braithwaite et al., 2003). The more the stepparent feels involved in the child rearing, the more satisfied the stepparent reports that the overall experience in the stepfamily is. Additionally, the more stepchildren interact with the stepparent, the more satisfaction is reported in the family (Everett, 2002).

The establishment of intimacy begins with the marriage ceremony. If the children feel unity right from this beginning, exemplified by having the family walk in together and leave together as a family during the ceremony, this can have an accelerating effect on the process of building a stepfamily (Doherty, 1997). Thus, establishment of a family identity can begin with the marriage ceremony itself.

In order for stepfamilies to solidify, they must establish family identity of their own and not try to fit a mold that they do not fit into (Lamb, 1999). Establishing a family identity unique to the new family system, namely the stepfamily, has been identified in literature as important (Felker et al., 2002; McGraw, 2004). This can be accomplished by creating new rituals and traditions within the stepfamily that create a bond with all members within the family (Doherty, 1997; McGraw, 2004). These rituals can include birthday celebrations where the stepparent gives a personal gift to demonstrate that they are aware of the child’s interests. They can also be exemplified by special family outings where none of the family members has been with either biological parent or stepparent (Doherty, 1997). The important premise is to make new, individualistic memories with the stepfamily and to capture the interest of a majority of its members. Also important is that family members create identities that are unique, perhaps, but that best service the stepfamily (Lamb, 1999).

Discipline roles in the stepfamily illustrate this premise. Discipline in stepfamilies needs to be developed over time. Stepchildren are more sensitized to discipline administered by stepparents (Everett, 2002). Stepparents initially should support the discipline administered by the biological parent (Hetherington, 1999). After that, over time, discipline can develop into decisions that coparents craft together. This also appears to instigate less conflict between the spouses themselves (Everett, 2002). Becoming a mentor to stepchildren rather than a disciplinarian is reported to be a more
productive way of relating to stepchildren (Felker et al., 2002). At the minimum, parental authority by stepparents should follow authoritative guidelines and be supportive, monitor children’s behavior, but pass up harsh penalties such as hitting the child (Amato & Fowler, 2002; Coleman et al., 2000).

Research has indicated that stepfamily relationships formed prior to the child’s adolescence can be closer than if the relationships are formed during adolescence (Cartwright, 2002; Hetherington, 1999). Adolescents in a study presented by Cartwright and Seymour (2002) indicated what is difficult for adolescents to obtain in their relationship with the stepparent. Causes of difficulty for adolescent stepchildren include:

- perceived loss of the biological parent’s attention by the child
- lack of information and consultation about family decisions
- perception of disloyalty of biological parents
- being required to bend to the stepparent’s authority
- perception of having to be loyal to both the stepfamily household and that of the non-custodial parent.

Factors that ameliorated pain in young adult stepchildren included (Cartwright & Seymour, 2002):

- perception of the adolescent of still getting to spend time alone with the biological parent to talk about what is going on in the child’s life and household,
- perception on the adolescent’s part of interest on the part of the biological parent of continuation of parenting responsibilities,
- perception by the adolescent of continuation on the part of the parent of nurturing the child.

Stepfamilies have problems that are unique to their situation. These problems are not always easily understood for both the child and the stepparent. Children, while not always knowing why they do not like a new stepparent, can be prone to have certain negative feelings for very legitimate reasons. According to research done by Seymour and Steffens (1995), the feelings to expect children to have include:

- loss of control over their environment,
• guilt over enjoying spending time with a stepparent and over feeling like the stepparent may take the biological parent’s place in their emotions,
• confusion over having loyalty for a stepparent,
• anger because the child has no input into the decisions that put them into a stepfamily in the first place,
• anger at the stepparent at having to adjust to having a biological parent and a stepparent make decisions for the family rather than just the biological parent,
• anger at having to share their biological parent with another adult,
• fear of having another relationship end in failure, fear over whether there will be a place in the family.

It is imperative that stepparents and biological parents alike have an appreciation for the reasoning behind the child’s feelings.

Awareness and appreciation of the child’s feelings can go a long way to making a difficult adjustment better on the entire family system. According to Seymour, Francis, and Steffens (1995), what biological parents and stepparents must understand include:

• the child has lost something valuable in the breakup of the biological family and this must be mourned,
• negative behavior on the part of the child is not always due to what would traditionally be thought; it may be a reaction to the situation,
• it is important that adults offer love and understanding to the child and try to help the child work out negative feelings.

In being aware of the child’s dilemma and acting like the adult in the situation, exceptional outcomes can be achieved.

Usable suggestions to parents and stepparents facing a child’s adjustment into a new family situation can be derived from a good understanding of the child. These suggestions need to be brought to parent’s attention as they may not be seeing things from the child’s perspective and may need to look at things from a different viewpoint.

Examining family transitions from a family systems perspective is useful. Change exists in families when there is a divorce and parents remarry. This change creates disequilibrium (Booth & Dunn, 1994). Disequilibrium in a stepfamily is likely
when stepparents try to establish a relationship with the stepchildren living in the household. Commonly, stepchildren reject attempts at establishment of a relationship between themselves and the stepparent (Booth & Dunn, 1994). This results in problems for both the stepparent and the stepchild. Ultimately, in order to remediate these difficulties for both the parent and the child, a parental transition is required (Booth & Dunn, 1994). However, the capacity that exists for this transition to occur is referred to in the systems theory literature as degree of variety (White & Klein, 2002). The higher the degree of variety, the more adaptation is possible in the family.

Because, as family systems theory proposes, the entire family system is interdependent, instructing parents in stepfamilies on how to better work within the stepfamily has the potential to produce a positive change on the entire system. Additionally, applying the systems framework definition of feedback, positive feedback must be established within the family (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993; White & Klein, 2002). Therefore, teaching couples forming stepfamilies more effective ways of behaving in stepfamilies will affect all of the members of the family unit by making the situation in general more positive. In short, the more effective practice in building a positive stepfamily the couples are able to implement, the greater the catalyst for more success.

The more that members of stepfamilies relate to each other in positive ways such as with “cooperation, equal status” (Banker & Gaertner, 1998, p. 310), the more satisfied they will be with the relationships that they have among the members. The more satisfying the relationships between all members of the stepfamily, the more satisfying the individual relationships will be (Banker & Gaertner, 1998). A determination can be made about whether the family needs help developing positive affect. It is reported that often, with time and work, a good relationship between members of stepfamilies can be established (Benson-Von Der, 1987). The job of a family life education program for stepfamilies is to provide direction for the work of establishing effective stepfamilies.

Establishment of Strong, Cohesive Bonds among the Couple Themselves in Stepfamilies

Systems theory sees the relationship between the husband and wife in a stepfamily as an example of a subsystem (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993; White & Klein, 2002). All of the relationships in the stepfamily, at one level or another are
examples of subsystems. If the relationship between the husband and wife is not functional, this is symptomatic that the whole family, which is subsystems of interrelated parts, is symptomatic (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993; White & Klein, 2002). This demonstrates the theoretical importance of a good relationship between the couple in a stepfamily.

Marriages subsequent to first marriages differ fundamentally from first marriages. They are considered by the spouses to be less a romantic endeavor and more a match of practicality (Coleman et al., 2000; Lamb, 1999). Additionally, spouses view each other as equal partners (Lamb, 1999). While reporting that they find remarriage as satisfying as first marriages, couples also have more negative interactions in second marriages (Lamb, 1999). Coleman, Ganong, and Fine (2000) noted that most of the conflict centers on children from previous relationships.

Further adding to this conflict is the shortening of the period of time and opportunity to get to know each other as a couple (Felker et al., 2002). This is directly a product of the couple being an immediate family with children who have transitioning and parenting needs that must be attended to simultaneously (Felker et al., 2002). This makes establishing and maintaining the relationship as a couple less of a priority in stepfamilies.

Couples who can separate how they feel about their marriage from how they feel about parenting the children tend to have more successful remarriages (Benson-Von Der, 1987). A turning point in second marriage relationships seems to come about as the result of becoming parenting partners (Afifi, 2003; Felker et al., 2002). This is typified in the relationship as a point in the marriage when the spouses agree that they are fundamentally committed to each other and the relationship, and, as a result, honoring the marital commitment (Felker et al., 2002; Golish, 2003). This transition seems to make a significant difference in how much inclusion the stepparent feels as well as how connected to the family that the stepparent is evaluated as being.

Becoming parental partners includes both parents involved in the stepfamily presenting a united front to the children. This union between parents can sometimes have the complication of making the child feel as if the biological parent is siding with the stepparent. However, in the long run, the child learns to accept the parental role of the
stepparent, the credibility of the stepparent goes up with both the child and the spouse, and loyalty conflicts are lessened (Afifi, 2003). Demonstration of the couple in the stepfamily as having this unified front included showing outward affection for each other. This enables the children to see how important the relationship is to the biological parent and thus make the couple’s relationship more valuable to everyone in the household (Golish, 2003).

This establishment of partnership between parents in stepfamilies follows predictable patterns. Literature offers four stages (Visher & Visher, 2001):

• bond formation between the parenting couple,
• valuation by both partners that all parenting is important and valid to the children that reside in the household,
• acceptance of the biological parent that the stepparent has credible stepparenting skills,
• sharing power with respect to the child with all households including the non-residential parent.

Acknowledging and dealing with stress in the marriage can be a useful strategy for coparents in a stepfamily to employ (Arnaut et al., 2000). Often, partners do not talk about the stress of dealing with the stepfamily and all of the sources of stress that can arise as a result of the situation. This is exemplified by dealing with the ex-spouse (Felker et al., 2002). Dealing with an ex-spouse may result in stress for the co-parents. If this is acknowledged, coping strategies can be employed that will assist. This acknowledgement puts the coparents in a situation of not only understanding the stress, but also coping in productive, unifying ways (Felker et al., 2002). Not only does this serve to illustrate a concept, but it also shows that maintaining a conflict-free relationship with the ex-spouse is also valuable in the stepfamily.

Information about the Founding of Cooperative Relationships with Former Spouses

In many stepfamilies, relationships between ex-spouses can prove to be riddled with conflict (Afifi, 2003). This can lead to such undesirable behaviors for the child as the child having to communicate between the spouses for the parents themselves. This is undesirable because this can lead to loyalty conflict on the part of the child and further confound the stepfamily establishing healthy family relationships (Felker et al.,
This makes it imperative that ex-spouses negotiate some kind of relationship without conflict.

Further, systems theory establishes that there is importance to a peaceful relationship with the ex-spouse for the whole system, or stepfamily, to function effectively. Family systems theory has defined the relationships that extend beyond the system boundaries in which the child resides most of the time and their effect as the interdependence of the system (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). Because of the varying environments that the child must live in, and the overlap these environments must have as a product of divorce in general, the relationship between the stepfamily and the ex-spouse is fundamentally important. Peace and stability between both biological and stepparents is inherently required for the most seamless adjustment process of the child (Amato, 2000; Amato & Fowler, 2002; Arditti, 1999; Benson-Von Der, 1987; Booth & Dunn, 1994; Everett, 2002; Ganong et al., 1998; Isaacs, 2002; Mahoney, 2000; Manning, 2000).

If relationships between the ex-spouses are problematic, interactions should focus on the children and their upbringing (Afifi, 2003; Braithwaite et al., 2003; Felker et al., 2002). In relationships functioning in this manner, rarely does the interactions of these adults focus on large problems, but instead, focus on requests or sharing of information involving the child (Afifi, 2003; Braithwaite et al., 2003). The goal of the conversations among the adults is not to maintain a personal relationship or even to evaluate the relationship between the adults (Braithwaite et al., 2003). In the long term, if these positive interactions achieve the child getting to see the non-custodial parent without restriction, the relationships among the members of stepfamilies are perceived by all involved with, and including the child, more positively (Everett, 2002).

Keeping the children out of the middle of any conflicts that might occur between biological parents is imperative (Felker et al., 2002; Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2000). Often, children are the sole support for the biological parent during and after the divorce. It is important that children not be involved with what goes on between the biological parents at this time and later during formation of new families. This involvement is unhealthy for both the biological parents and the child (Wallerstein et al., 2000).
To keep things functional for the parents, both biological and stepparents, and to facilitate healthy bonds in the stepfamily, alternate forms of communication, rather than face-to-face interactions, should be considered. These interactions between parents may be held best over the telephone or by email (Braithwaite et al., 2003).

The importance of good relationships between ex-spouses is established in a study done by Isaacs (2002). He found that tumultuous relationships between the biological parents can make the child’s adjustment in a stepfamily more difficult. Additionally, Visher and Visher (2001) added that the child loosing the relationship with the non-residential parent can have such detrimental effects as lowering the self-esteem of the child or even cause the child to idealize the absent parent to the point where the parents in the stepfamily cannot compete. Therefore, not only is it imperative that the relationship between ex-spouses remain as conflict-free as possible, but maintaining the relationship with the other biological parent is crucial to the child in important ways.

**Conclusion**

*Successful Stepfamilies: A Family Life Education Program to Address Unique Needs*

The program, “Successful Stepfamilies: A Family Life Education Program to Address Unique Needs,” is needed to service a unique cliental of people. These people, namely the parents involved in parenting stepfamilies, face unique circumstance. Primarily, the people intended for this curriculum principally face crisis in their stepfamilies, but this does not necessarily need to be the case. The curriculum could be presented to parents of well-functioning stepfamilies to affirm correct behaviors and offer new ideas for better functioning in stepfamilies.

Hughes and Schroeder (1997) suggested adults as the most likely consumer of a family life education program on the stepfamily because:

- parenting is identified as a major stressor for adults in stepfamilies,
- adults have the most influence on the family and how open they are to change.

The importance for family life education is that, “We continue to need more studies of factors that contribute to healthy and adaptive functioning in stepfamilies” (Coleman et al., 2000, p. 1301). For family life educators, this suggests that professionals, families, and society in general need to be educated as to how these families function and discontinue expecting the worst from stepfamilies. When the
prejudices are lifted from stepfamilies, their overall functioning may improve, rights for stepparents in stepfamilies may be recognized, professionals may understand how to better work with clients in stepfamilies, and overall, conditions may improve for stepfamilies. With the statistics indicating the overwhelming amount of children and adults who either are or will reside in stepfamilies at some time during their life course, it is imperative that those involved with stepfamilies become more proactive in this field.

Professionals working with stepfamilies must examine current policies and practices as well as their own attitudes. Professionals must discard negative attitudes regarding stepfamilies and replace these attitudes with less biased, more productive positions. In this way, a step is made toward replacing societal attitudes in order to treat an ever-growing proportion of families with more respect and less prejudice.

*What Can Family Life Education do to Remediate the Problems of Stepfamilies?*

Family life educators need to bring to stepfamilies’ attention that there are common problems faced by the majority of stepfamilies. In this way, stepfamilies through increased awareness can combat them and create stronger families. Further, indicating to stepfamilies what problems are identified as being dysfunctional in stepfamily relationships can be instructive. For instance, letting stepparent households know that monitoring of children is indicative of how well the child performs could sway the outcomes in stepfamilies. Likewise, solutions need to be established within stepfamilies. Instruction of stepfamilies including specific behaviors that well-functioning stepfamilies engage in provides a model for stepfamilies to follow.

**Discussion**

Solutions offered in the literature regarding stepfamilies are therapy, changing perceptions of society’s stereotypes, and attitudes. Developmental awareness of the behaviors that typifies both the child’s developmental stage of physical and psychological development coupled with what is normal in the acceptance of a new family situation, namely being a stepfamily, are suggested for parents both biological and nonbiological in origin. Stepparenting from all perspectives is a unique endeavor requiring unique skills and strategies. Insofar as training of stepparents and societal attitudes, family life education has a good chance of working toward these solutions by offering parenting classes and also informational seminars for professionals working with stepfamilies to let
them know of their unique problems and strengths. The potential of the advantageous effect of one more concerned, caring adult in the child’s life could be used to the greatest effect. Stepfamilies could be viewed as making the child’s life fuller, instead of diminished. Policy and the ways that professionals deal with stepfamilies need to be amended. The factions of society working with or in stepfamilies need to learn better skills to best facilitating this growing population. In this way, there will be none of the shame left for stepfamilies and none of the pressure to act like a traditional nuclear family. Specific suggestions from literature include:

- create new public policies,
- increase and perfect communication between the stepfamily, teachers, the school, and the community at large,
- establish a limited power of attorney for the stepparent,
- inform stepparents as well as biological parents about the medical and educational history of each child in all households,
- augment membership in already existing groups or form groups with the specific purpose of supporting parents in the stepfamily,
- institute routines and rhythms within the household that are predictable to facilitate children founding security,
- construct realistic expectations about life in a stepfamily to avoid feelings of failure on the part of family members,
- seek assistance from family clinicians if pathology is a concern,
- establish intimacy between members while establishing boundaries and authority,
- define a unique family identity,
- develop discipline over time and with authoritative parenting strategies in mind,
- increase understanding of the coparents of child development and the factors that affect the child in the stepfamily situation,
- interact in positive fashions both within the family and as a couple,
- separate how the couple feels about their marriage from how they feel about parenting the children,
• expand partnerships between the couple in the marriage as well as in parenting,
• acknowledge and deal with stress in the marriage,
• focus interactions between the ex-spouses on the children and their upbringing and include telephone conversations and the internet to keep face-to-face meetings between ex-spouses at a premium,
• manage conflict away from the children; keep the children out of the middle of any conflict.
Programs for stepfamilies have been, and, indeed, are continuing to be developed for assisting stepfamilies to address relevant issues. Scholars have endeavored to typify what a quality family life education program might include, as well as subject matter that might best assist stepfamilies and their concerns. Often, it is difficult for a review of family life education programs to be prepared by the neophyte, as the novice is obligated to purchase the programs to gain enough information for a thorough review.

For practicality, this thesis used two major resources to review information about the incorporated family life education programs that were both comprehensive and cost effective. An article by Kaplan and Hennon (1992) describing the Personal Reflections Program in adequate detail was one such resource. Another resource utilized was an article by Adler-Bader (2004) that described all other family life education programs included in this thesis. These articles chiefly gave sufficient description to allow inclusion of the programs without the actual cost of purchase. These articles were also chosen because they describe programs that endeavor to educate adults parenting stepfamilies.

Review of these programs further assists with comparative analysis of the proposed program. The programs that involve parent education include The Personal Reflections Program, The Stepfamily Enrichment Program, Designing Dynamic Stepfamilies: Bringing the pieces to peace (DDS), New Beginnings: A remarriage preparation workbook (NB), Skills Training for Stepparents: A personal developmental approach (STS), Smart Steps (SmSt), Stepping Stones (StSt), Stepping Together (ST), and Stepping Together: Creating strong stepfamilies (ST-CSS).

These programs will be evaluated in terms of the inclusion of all themes as presented by Hughes (1994). These include that the program will:

- be research-based,
- have a theoretical organization to its framework,
- employ a variety of teaching and learning strategies,
• teach skills that promote the best chance for positive outcomes for participants,
• be easily followed,
• include recruitment strategies,
• have a plan for implementation,
• contain evaluation suggestions and materials.

Review of the Literature

The Personal Reflections Program

Kaplan and Hennon created the Personal Reflections Program. The program has a theoretical basis of symbolic interactionism (Kaplan & Hennon, 1992). This program seeks to require couples to explore roles that are existent for adults in stepparent households (Hughes & Schroeder, 1997). This exploration revolves around expectations, partner ideations about parenting and family issues, and how to incorporate these roles into a partnership between spouses (Kaplan & Hennon, 1992). One issue not addressed by this program is relationships with the other household involved in parenting the child (Hughes & Schroeder, 1997).

The workshop-style classes designate meetings over a period of three sessions for a total of eight hours of instruction. The family life educator is to provide the group with structure, encouragement, advisement, and facilitation to get across the program’s intent. Provisions of goals and objectives for the family life educator as well as resource materials further assist in program presentation. No information as to how easily the program is to follow is available. Recruitment suggestions are available. While suggestions for evaluation of the program by participants were available, studies as to the long term effect on past participants was not available.

The Stepfamily Enrichment Program

The Stepfamily Enrichment Program endeavors to help parents negotiate the issues of family development inherent in stepfamily formation (Michaels, 2000). Five weekly, two-hour sessions offer information designed to tackle issues across the stepfamily cycle as well as form camaraderie among participants. The structure of information is one that encourages one week’s learning building on the new information
presented the following week. Participants in the program found that this made the lessons easy for them to follow. The workshop format includes lecture as well as group discussion to educate participants during the sessions, and subsequently homework to reinforce the learning throughout the week between each session. No theoretical framework is discernable for the program.

Weekly evaluation of the program takes place as well as a formal program evaluation performed upon completion of the program. Recruitment follows a process of advertisements through stepfamily organizations or advertisements, although as to what type of advertising there was little information. Materials were available, such as contracts and handouts.

*Designing Dynamic Stepfamilies: Bringing the Pieces to Peace (DDS)*

Taylor and Taylor brought about design of the DDS program in 2003 (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004). DDS is a unique program because of its video-based nature. The videos are lecture-oriented. Family life educators are encouraged to facilitate discussion between the participants by the inclusion of the discussion questions in the program manual. No information on the ease of the participant’s following the lessons is available. The duration of the sessions can vary from a one-day conference to an eight to twelve session workshop. There is not a theoretical framework specified.

While there are no other teaching aids besides the videos, recruitment suggestions are provided. Information is garnered for DDS through popular press and author experience rather than scholarly literature. The program materials do not include consumer evaluation suggestions, nor is there information provided about the program being evaluated by a study of past participants.

*New Beginnings: A Remarriage Preparation Workbook (NB)*

NB was developed in 1994 by Chidwick (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004). NB is designed to be an eight hour program. Adler-Baeder’s (2001) list of topics is not followed. Instead the list of topics is guided by what a panel of remarried couples determined would be important for a program for parents in stepfamilies. The topics include financial matters, realistic expectations, stepfamily development, couple relationships, relationships with the ex-spouse. Importantly, Adler-Baeder’s (2001) suggested topics of stepparent-stepchild relationships, and supports for stepfamilies are
absent from this curriculum. No information on the ease of the participant’s following the lessons is available.

While a theoretical framework is absent, a variety of teaching methods are encouraged. There are no resource materials included, however, there is a teacher manual and participants manual included in the program materials. Recruitment suggestions and a customer satisfaction evaluation are included with program materials. There was no empirical evidence of the effects of the program included in the materials.

*Skills Training for Stepparents: A Personal Developmental Approach (STS)*

Levant and Nelson developed this program in 1984 (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004). It offers eight, three-hour sessions or twenty-four hours of instruction. These sessions endeavor to develop communication skills between various family members, but never address the unique needs of stepfamilies specifically. Limited other issues that Adler-Baeder (2001) suggests in a quality family life education program are included. No information about the ease of participant’s following lessons is available.

Little reference to scholarly research is mentioned. There is no offering of a theoretical framework. There is a teacher’s manual and participant manual included but no other teaching resources are available. There is no consumer evaluation included in the program materials. A study is offered to show program effects. This study offers a comparison of fourteen families that participated in training and compares them with twenty untrained counterpart families. Because of the small sample pool, results of the comparisons are found to be ungeneralizable to the public-at-large.

*Smart Steps (SmSt)*

This program was developed by Adler-Baeder in 2001 (Adler-Baeder, 2001; Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004). It offers twelve hours of instruction. It is organized around an ecological family systems framework and trains both adults and children in stepfamilies. Many of the topics suggested by Adler-Baeder (2001) are utilized as are a session on recognition of negative couple’s interaction, and a session on stepfamily myths and realities. No information about ease of followed the curriculum is by participants is provided.
A variety of teaching methods are used to educate participants. Teaching aides are included in the form of research findings, Power Point slides, resource lists, and handouts. Recruitment suggestions and implementation strategies as well as evaluation supplies are also included. While an informal consumer evaluation is included, no formal evaluation has been done on SmSt to evaluate the overall effects of the program.

*Stepping Stones (StSt)*

This program was developed by Olsen in 1997 (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004; Olsen, 1997). Its six hour curriculum can be used either in a workshop environment or for in-home independent use. Facilitators are encouraged to use the resource guide to find extension web sites to garner information about child development and parenting skills and strategies. In this way, the specific age of children present in the participant’s home can be facilitated in an individual manner. There is no theoretical framework specified.

Instruction utilizes both reading of information by participants as well as group discussion and activities. A teaching guide with detailed instruction is provided for the first lesson only and, thereafter, there is limited information provided on each of the five additional lessons. Teaching aides are only provided for the first lesson as well. Recruitment materials are well developed and include specific items such as press releases, brochure masters, enrollment forms, and certificate forms. There is also an extensive implementation plan. Evaluations to use with participants are provided. The evaluation for the program is presented in the design of how thirty-two program participants appraise the program.

*Stepping Together (ST)*

This program was developed by Bosch, Gebake, and Meske in 1992 (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004). Its curriculum is in a six session, two-hour-per-session format. A family systems framework is the lens through which the curriculum is organized. Lesson facilitators are encouraged to lecture to participants about many of the subjects suggested by Adler-Baeder. Exercises in which participants apply lecture principles are after that provided in the curriculum. Guided discussion is also suggested as a teaching method for the curriculum.
Overheads, handouts, and a video are provided for the use of the instructor of the curriculum, but some of the materials are better defined for the purpose of the use in the curriculum than the video. Customer satisfaction evaluations as well as a more formal study of how the curriculum has changed participants with its use are included. Resources used in the curriculum are all dated prior to 1990.

*Stepping Together: Creating Strong Stepfamilies (ST-CSS)*

Visher and Visher developed this program in 1997 (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004). There is no theoretical framework provided for the program. Most of the topics suggested by Adler-Baeder (2001) are covered. Developmental issues of stepfamilies are also included in the curriculum. Teaching strategies utilize lecture and discussion groups among the participants. Handouts, a participant’s manual, and a video of a wedding involving a stepfamily are also provided in the curriculum.

Resource materials are provided although they are somewhat lacking in number. There is no evidence of reference lists, background readings or recruitment suggestions. A customer satisfaction evaluation is included in program materials, but there is no evidence of any other evaluations validating the use of the program.

**Conclusion**

*Successful Stepfamilies: A Family Life Education Program to Address Unique Needs*

From reviewing the literature about other programs, it becomes apparent that the program under development will have to follow the model employed for evaluation, namely, Hughes’ model (1994). To be specific, the following are employed in the curriculum:

- research-based – the program employs research from scholarly journals and books in order to specify the most dependably researched information in its program,
- have a theoretical organization to its framework – the program is developed around the theoretic framework of systems theory,
- employ a variety of teaching and learning strategies – the program will employ teaching methods of group discussion, lecture, and activities to best facilitate its goals,
• teach skills that promote the best chance for positive outcomes for participants – a measurement instrument will be employed to assess group needs. Additionally, subject matter will follow topics suggested by the literature to best capture unique instructional needs of stepfamilies,

• easily followed – the curriculum will follow a clear, concise direction to build on learning concepts presented from week to week. Additionally, the program will have eight sessions that are targeted to be an hour in length per session to best facilitate participant’s attention span.

• include recruitment strategies - recruitment strategies will be presented with the curriculum to best address the cliental that would be best served by attending the program. Specifically these will contain press releases, brochure masters, enrollment forms, and certificate forms,

• have a plan for implementation – an implementation plan will be included in the program development. Along with specific lesson plans for each session, these will incorporate overheads, handouts for instructional use, and a list of source books for participants,

• contain evaluation suggestions and materials – a consumer evaluation will be developed to best speak to the client attitudes and needs and assess if these were addressed.
Chapter Four
PROGRAM FACILITATION

To make the proposed program most effective, issues of best practice must be addressed. In looking at how to best maximize the potential for the proposed program, several issues will be addressed. These include:

• psychoeducational explanation of theory
• participant description
• optimal timing for intervention in stepfamilies,
• profile of educators to provide instruction, and,
• location of instruction

*Psychoeducational Explanation of Theory*

The theoretical background for the context of why a program is needed and how this relates to stepfamily functioning is presented earlier in this thesis. In addition to systems theory, to provide a full explanation of the education of participants, other theoretical description is necessary.

The proposed program proposes to use the most effective theory of education to bring about the desired results when working with adult populations involved in stepfamily formation. In addition to systems theory, the educational theory selected to use for this purpose is the theory of positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement looks at participant skills in the best light and uses participants as the experts on the subject, in this case, of stepfamily formation. After presentation of the skill being taught and the desired behaviors necessary for successful completion, participants will be required to apply these proficiencies to past and present situations in their own lives to make the learning meaningful to participants’ experiences. Examples of this situational learning will be evoked from participants for sharing with other participants to complete the learning cycle. Additionally, modeling will be employed as part of this contingent of positive reinforcement where films will be viewed of behaviors being discussed in sessions that will help clarify the target behaviors needed from participants.

Theoretically, positive reinforcement can be used to increase desired behaviors and decrease undesirable behaviors. Definitively, positive reinforcement teaches
appropriate behavior (Groden & Cautela, 1981). As part of this theory, modeling is used to reinforce positive, or desired, outcomes. Modeling is defined as the potential to change behaviors through observation of other’s behavior (Groden & Cautela, 1981).

In a study by Goodman (1975), positive reinforcement, and particularly modeling, was used with young mothers to teach them more effective infant care. This method of instruction was found to be effective especially in the domain of information processing. The mothers’ behavior was affected positively in a short duration of time and was found to be long lasting in a review of the mothers’ behaviors after the period of one year. It was thought that this method was particularly effective with these mothers because the mothers were found to feel isolated, felt that society was suggesting incompetence of their child rearing skills, and that the program itself highlighted how the mothers were effective with their children. The participants targeted for participating in the proposed program are very similar to this population: they feel isolated due to their designation as a stepfamily; they feel criticized by society because they are not the “societal norm,” and, they are often classified as wicked or inept, thus they are classified as incompetent.

Therefore, in the proposed program, participants will be taught using methods of positive reinforcement. Namely, participants will study effective models of other stepfamilies as well as engage in the instructional principles of positive reinforcement. What makes these families effective will be highlighted and discussed. Suggestions from other participants of how they use these behaviors, and others that participants have found effective, will be added to participant’s knowledge base. Participants will be used as experts in that, behaviors that they have found effective in stepfamily formation will be brought forward as exemplary behavior that other group members may choose to try.

*Participant Description*

The proposed program endeavors to educate the adult parents involved in the formation of stepfamilies. There is empirical evidence to support this assessment. Not only are adults the most common factors focused on in stepfamilies for intervention, but they have much influence over how the family copes with the formation of the stepfamily in general (Hughes & Schroeder, 1997). The parents, because of the stress that the couple endures, may motivate participation in family life educational endeavors.
Additionally, it appears to be important to have both parents in the stepfamily participate. It seems that hearing from others of both sexes helps participants identify with other families’ situations and take away more information (Michaels, 2000). Further, having both biological parents and stepparents together increases the understanding of both roles in the family. This knowledge increases marital stability and strengthens the actual process of family formation (Michaels, 2000).

Participants targeted for this family life education program will all be involved in stepfamily formation. According to research done by Michaels (2000), couples involved in parenting in stepfamilies feel censured by others not involved in similar situations. They tend to feel criticized by those not involved in similar parenting situations (Michaels, 2000). Further, couples involved in stepparenting tend to feel a camaraderie. Thus, this assists learning through peers more effectively (Michaels, 2000). Further, it appears that sharing between group members is easier when all members share belonging to stepfamilies. Commonalities among group members due to stepfamily membership appear to make it easier to talk about difficult personal issues and aids in the acceptance of peer advice. This facilitates a relaxed, positive atmosphere in the learning program and thus, optimizes the instruction through the facilitator and peer interaction.

Education with a feeling of camaraderie makes it easier for participants to recognize norms among families established as the result of remarriage (Michaels, 2000). Establishing these norms regarding typical stepfamilies allow participants to create reasonable expectations regarding their families (Michaels, 2000). This outlook supports stepfamilies in making change when necessary and reinforces couples when they were in doubt about the process of stepfamily formation (Michaels, 2000).

Further, because of the sharing of information about effective stepfamilies, the participants for the program may or may not be in crisis in regards to their own stepfamilies. Those not in crisis may want to participate in the program to reinforce what they are doing well. Those participating because of crisis in their stepfamilies may take advantage of the combination of participants to learn from, not only the information provided in the program, but peers who are having success in their own stepfamilies.

*Optimal Timing for Intervention*
Support exists that leads to the conclusion that stepfamily satisfaction deteriorates quickly (Michaels, 2000). However, there are few programs developed that address the needs of stepfamilies in the early stages of formation (Michaels, 2000). Specifically, in the first two and a half years, couples in stepfamilies begin to experience significant dissatisfaction (Michaels, 2000). Therefore, the optimal time to address the needs of stepfamilies through intervention is during this period between inception and two and a half years after stepfamily formation.

It has been surmised that stepfamilies that participate in intervention programs during this early period may adjust faster than those peers that do not have intervention (Michaels, 2000). Because stepfamilies have knowledge pertaining to what the norms are for family formation, this assists in a better understanding of family formation and better knowledge of how to problem solve within this family (Michaels, 2000). Instead of trial and error adjustment, stepfamilies with some background can be more conscious of what works and how to best ease the family into the formation of effective, healthy stepfamilies (Michaels, 2000).

Michaels (2000) research leads to the conclusion that a length of twelve weeks, as opposed to eight weeks, of instruction for the family life education program may be preferable to stepfamilies. This twelve-week length may allow the program to cover subject matter in-depth and thus provide enough time for materials to be thoroughly explored. Thus, the needs of the program are better served with additional time. Michaels (2000) also suggested that a way to incorporate this time length would be to allow three to four weeks of consecutive sessions, then allow a hiatus of a week or two in between for couples wanting to participate in some individual counseling, and then complete the remainder of the program sessions in the same way until the total twelve sessions have been presented. In this way, the family life education program could address both individual and group needs.

Profile of Instructors

It is apparent that stepfamilies feel most comfortable with people in similar circumstance. It would be optimal for instructors of educational endeavors with stepfamilies to also be members of stepfamilies themselves. While this is the most favorable situation, other criterion is of equal, or greater, importance.
In order to effectively educate stepfamilies, it is imperative that educators have strong background knowledge of stepfamilies and how stepfamilies are unique in their family composition. Realization of the factors that make stepfamilies unique from intact families sets the stage for effective teaching and best possible learning (Coleman et al., 2000). In addition, strong knowledge of stepfamilies and their formation can help facilitate participants in affecting necessary change and gaining increased satisfaction with their situation (Kaplan & Hennon, 1992).

Family life educators that endeavor to work with stepfamilies must be supportive and set of tone of friendly acceptance within the educational setting while also providing group structure (Michaels, 2000; Kaplan & Hennon, 1992). Stepfamilies tend to feel criticized by society in general, so it is imperative that the educator show that stepfamilies are valued and worthwhile types of families. Feedback from participants must be respected and accepted by all members of the group, starting with the educator. Parents of stepfamilies should be looked to as the experts, and as such, appreciated members of the group (Michaels, 2000). The educator must maintain a productive group atmosphere conducive to all participants maximizing learning.

Location of Instruction

It is imperative that instruction for family life educational programs be accessible to stepfamilies. For this reason, this program could be offered from a variety of venues. Churches could offer to sponsor both recruitment and locale for this program. The lack of religious affiliation could, in fact, be conducive to offering such classes in community settings. Community centers could exemplify this type of community sponsorship and provide recruitment for this program. Along these same lines, schools could offer such educational programs to parents during times when schools are not traditionally in use (such as evening or weekends).

Conclusions

Specifying areas of psychoeducational theory, participant description, optimal timing for intervention in stepfamilies, establishing profiles of educators to provide instruction, and, possible locations of instruction are important considerations for family life education programs to consider. Having a description of these issues makes the program look more feasible to those that would consider employing its techniques. All of
the specifications assist in establishing further credibility for family life education programs.

In addition, taking into consideration the unique needs of adult learners is important in the development of this program. According to Hitch and Youatt (2002), adults bring a background of much more experience as compared with younger learners. This experience must be valued and drawn on to make adult learners feel appreciated in the setting of family life education. Insuring respect from other participants and open, friendliness in the instructor is also imperative. The program development takes into account these requirements as well as the theoretical detailing to create a well-rounded, successful educational effort.
Chapter Five  
PROGRAM SUMMARY  
Introduction

Solutions offered in the literature regarding stepfamilies are therapy for stepfamilies and changing perceptions of society’s stereotypes and attitudes. Developmental awareness of the behaviors that typifies both the child’s developmental stage of physical and psychological development coupled with what is normal in the acceptance of a new family situation, namely being a stepfamily, is suggested for parents both biological and nonbiological in origin. Stepparenting from all perspectives is a unique endeavor requiring unique skills and strategies. With the correct program, family life education has a good chance of working toward these solutions by offering parenting classes and informational seminars for professionals working with stepfamilies. The likelihood of a positive outcome of an additional adult in the child’s life could be used to the greatest effect. Stepfamilies prospectively could be viewed as making the child’s life more fulfilling instead of diminished.

By reviewing current research on stepfamilies, specifically, identification of trends, biological and stepparents can establish specific avenues for effective practice for the stepfamily. The indications for the family life educator make clear that there are useful, usable suggestions that can be used in curriculum focusing on stepfamilies. This chapter will focus on the specifics of the program and its development.

Content of the Program

Lessons designed for the program will total twelve sessions. Each lesson will last an entirety of one hour and then some social time will be held for participants for an undetermined time following the formal lesson. This socializing is as valid as the scheduled time for the program to ease the sense of isolation that stepfamilies feel and, ideally, establish support systems that will last amid the learners far beyond the duration of the program itself. The lessons will include the following information:

Acknowledging societal stigma and developing a plan for support of stepfamilies, including:

• Awareness and development of the possibility for new public policies,
• communication between the stepfamily, teachers, the school, and the community at large,
• establishing a limited power of attorney for stepparents,
• information between stepparents and biological parents regarding the medical and educational history of each child in all households, and,
• membership in already existing groups or formation of groups with the specific purpose of supporting the stepfamily and its formation.

Addressing relationships in stepfamilies and educating couples about the processes innate in establishing these relationships, including:
• instituting routines and rhythms within the household that are predictable to facilitate children founding security,
• creating realistic expectations for how family life will be help avoid feelings of failure,
• seeking the assistance of family clinicians if pathology is a concern,
• inaugurating intimacy between members while setting up boundaries and authority, and
• defining a unique family identity.

Facilitating positive relationships between children and co-parents in the stepfamily, including:
• developing discipline over time and with authoritative parenting strategies in mind,
• parenting that includes an understanding of child development and the factors that affect the child included in the stepfamily, and,
• awareness of formation issues and the developmental process that emergent stepfamilies encounter.

Establishing strong, cohesive bonds among the couple themselves in stepfamilies, including:
• developing positive interaction both within the family and as a couple,
• separating how the couple feels about their marriage from how they feel about parenting to optimize the potential for a more successful marriage,
• encouraging partnership in the marital relationship as well as in the parenting connection, and,
• acknowledging and dealing with stress in the marriage.

Information about the founding of cooperative relationships with former spouses, including:
• Focusing interactions around the child and upbringing issues if the relationship between ex-spouses are problematic, and methods of contact should include telephone conversations and the internet to keep face-to-face meetings at a premium, and,
• Observance by both parents of keeping the children out of the middle of any conflict, as well as managing conflict out of the environment of the children.

Composition of the Program

In addition to highlighting models of effective stepfamilies found in research and sensible practice, program composition must include factors that make it the highest quality program possible. In order for the program to accommodate the guidelines initiated in research, the composition of the program will:
• be research-based – the program employs research from scholarly journals and books in order to specify the most dependably researched information,
• have a theoretical organization to its framework – the program is developed around the theoretic framework of systems theory,
• employ a variety of teaching and learning strategies – the program will employ teaching methods of group discussion, lecture, and activities to best facilitate its goals,
• teach skills that promote the best chance for positive outcomes for participants – a measurement instrument will be employed to assess group needs. Additionally, subject matter will follow topics suggested by research to best capture the unique instructional needs of stepfamilies,
• be easily followed – the curriculum will follow a clear, concise direction to build on learning concepts presented from week to week. Additionally, the program will have twelve sessions that are targeted to be an hour in length per
session to best facilitate participant’s attention span with additional time provided after each session for social bonding,

• include recruitment strategies - recruitment strategies will be presented with the curriculum to best address the cliental that would be best served by attending the program,

• have a plan for implementation – an implementation plan will be included in the program development. Along with specific lesson plans for each session, these will incorporate overheads, handouts for instructional use, a list of source books for participants, and include specific suggestions for movie clips that aid instruction, and,

• contain evaluation suggestions and materials – a consumer evaluation will be developed to best speak to the client attitudes and needs and assess if these were addressed.

Delivery of the Program

An important aspect of this program lies in the delivery. It is imperative that it be done face-to-face with participants. This allows stepfamilies opportunities to connect with other people in their same situation. The personal interaction within the group is vital to maximizing the potential for learning and support. This is something that many stepfamilies have indicated in research that they would value in the process of stepfamily formation.

Evaluation of the Program

A pre-post test design for evaluation will be employed for use with the program. Couples heading stepfamilies will be asked a series of questions prior to beginning the program. Then, upon completion of the program, these same couples will be asked the same questions. At time periods of six months and one year after program completion, these couples will be contacted again and asked the same questions to test the duration of the participants’ knowledge.

Specific questions can be located in the appendix.
Conclusions

How is the Program Unique?

The program will focus on what effective stepfamilies do as presented in literature. This will provide participants a model to emulate.

Early intervention with stepfamilies will be utilized. They will participate at some point between the immediately stepfamily inception, but prior to two and a half years after the stepfamily has been formed.

Merits of the Program

This program endeavors to focus on early intervention called for in the pertinent literature on stepfamilies.

Additionally, this program undertakes a focus on the strengths of stepfamilies rather than the weaknesses thus making the families more receptive from the commencement of the program and giving a specific model to emulate. This also allows for a standard against which stepfamilies can measure what they do in their current practice and allow them to perfect performance that needs improvement. Further, research is calling for more articles and programs dealing with effective practices of stepfamilies.

Program Limitations

Most of the literature available on stepfamilies is done with white, middle class participants. This limits the generalizability of the research to homogenous populations and may hinder its effectiveness with heterogeneous, namely ethnically and economically diverse, populations.

Interviews conducted with participants for evaluation purposes will be conducted outside of the participant’s natural environment; specifically at the site that instruction is given. This may lead to less accurate information than might be observed within the actual stepfamily setting (Creswell, 2003).

Evaluation of permanent change of stepfamilies over time will not initially be available. Therefore, it will be difficult to determine the long-term effects of the program on the participants at the outset.
References


Appendix A

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Lesson Eleven – Unit 7, Handout

Lesson Plan Twelve - Unit 7, Lesson 2, “Celebration of the Stepfamily”
**Recruitment Strategies:**

It is imperative that instruction for family life educational programs be accessible to stepfamilies. For this reason, this program could be offered from a variety of venues. Churches could offer to sponsor both recruitment and locale for this program. The lack of religious affiliation could, in fact, be conducive to offering such classes in community settings. Community centers could exemplify this type of community sponsorship and provide recruit for this program. Along these same lines, schools could offer such educational programs to parents during times when schools are not traditionally in use (such as evening or weekends).

The following is a recruitment brochure that can be used with the program.
Are you a parent in a recently formed Stepfamily?

Have you been in this stepfamily for under 3 years?

Do you have questions?

Maybe you just want to make sure that you are doing the right things!

Would you like to meet others, share and receive some pointers and tips, and just plain HAVE FUN?

Then, Join us for a unique educational opportunity!

Successful Stepfamilies:

A Family Life Education Program

To Address Unique Needs

How can you sign up?
Participants should be either parents parenting children with a stepparent or stepparents themselves. Parenting couples are preferred so that you can build family skills together!

Dates:

Time:

Location:

Call this number to register:

Space is limited so be sure to make your reservation today!

**Parents are invited, but, unfortunately, children cannot be accommodated.
Evaluation of the Program

A pre-post test design for evaluation will be employed for use with the program. Couples heading stepfamilies will be asked a series of questions prior to beginning the program. Then, upon completion of the program, these same couples will be asked the same questions. At time periods of six months and one year after program completion, these couples will be contacted again and asked the same questions to test the duration of the participants’ knowledge. Pre and post test questionnaires are as follows:
Pretest Questionnaire  
(to be administered at the beginning of the first class, prior to beginning instruction) 
Please read each statement/question carefully. From the available choices, please select the one answer that best fits your view of the stepfamily in which you currently reside and put a checkmark next to the statement that best describes your answer. If the question is open-ended, please complete your answer as thoroughly as possible. The questionnaire’s purpose is: 
• to inform the presenter as to what you would most like to learn about in this class, and thus inform the instructor how to make this class best suit your needs, and, The answers to this questionnaire are confidential and will be used only for the purpose of this class. Please answer each question as completely and truthfully as possible.

1. How long have you lived with your current stepfamily? Please express to the nearest month and year (i.e. 6 months and 1 year)?
___________________________________________________________________

2. When you think of daily life in your stepfamily, how do you respond to the following statement, “Daily routines in our stepfamily household are well established and our household runs smoothly most of the time”?

_____ very true  
_____ seldom true 
_____ true  
_____ not at all true  
_____ don’t know

3. When you think of special occasions in your household, how do you respond to the following statement, “Special occasions and how we celebrate them are well established in our stepfamily household”?

_____ very true  
_____ seldom true 
_____ true  
_____ not at all true  
_____ don’t know

4. When you think of your overall knowledge of the biological and/or stepchildren that live in your household, how do you respond to the following statement, “I feel that I have enough information about all of the children in our household especially when it comes to their medical and educational histories”?

_____ very true  
_____ seldom true 
_____ true  
_____ not at all true  
_____ don’t know
5. When you think of the discipline in your stepfamily household, the best way to describe your feelings about discipline are…

_____ confident, I am comfortable with handling the discipline issues in the household.
_____ somewhat confident, I am usually comfortable when tackling discipline issues in the household.
_____ confused, I feel confused about tackling discipline issues in the household.
_____ inadequate, I feel that I don’t meet the challenges of discipline issues in the household well.
_____ totally inadequate, I do not feel up to the challenge of solving discipline issues in the household at all!
_____ other, please describe: ______________________________________
________________________________________________________________

6. The methods that I most often use when discipline is necessary in the household could best be described as:

_____ coercive (name calling, spanking/slapping, bullying)
_____ lenient (anything goes; kids will be kids, so what if they misbehave every so often?)
_____ neglectful (the children parent themselves most of the time; I have other things to worry about)
_____ rational (we discuss things as a family, the house is run most often as a democracy, when there is disciplining to be done, I try to be fair, I give consequences that make sense and fit the offense)
_____ controlling (it’s my way or the highway, it’s my house and my rules the majority of the time)
_____ other, please describe: ______________________________________
________________________________________________________________
7. When you think about your relationship with stepchildren in the household, how do you feel about your relationship?

_____ happy    _____ angry

_____ satisfied     _____ there is no relationship at all

_____ tense

_____ other, please describe: ______________________________________

________________________________________________________________

8. When you think about your relationship with your biological children that live in the household, how do you feel about your relationship?

_____ happy    _____ angry

_____ satisfied     _____ there is no relationship at all

_____ tense

_____ other, please describe: ______________________________________

________________________________________________________________

9. When you think about your relationship with your current spouse, how do you feel about your relationship?

_____ happy    _____ angry

_____ satisfied     _____ there is no relationship at all

_____ tense

_____ other, please describe: ______________________________________

________________________________________________________________
10. When you think about your relationship with your current spouse, how do you feel about the following statement, “My spouse and I have a reliable partnership and work as a team when it comes to issues in the home”?

_____ very true    _____ seldom true
_____ true    _____ not at all true
_____ don’t know

11. When you think about your relationship with your current spouse, how do you feel about the following statement, “My current spouse and I have identified most of the stressors in our marriage and know, to a reasonable degree, how to deal with them”?

_____ very true    _____ seldom true
_____ true    _____ not at all true
_____ don’t know

12. When you think about your relationship with your former spouse, how do you feel about the current relationship that exists between the two of you?

_____ happy    _____ angry
_____ satisfied    _____ there is no relationship at all
_____ tense
_____ other, please describe: ________________________________
13. When I think of my relationship with my former spouse (or partner’s former spouse) and how it affects my own children/stepchildren, I think its effects are best described as…

_____ my ex-spouse (or the ex-spouse of my partner) and the relationship between the adults in our household sets forth a good model for our children and would best be described as amiable.

_____ usually, my ex-spouse (or the ex-spouse of my partner) and I have a reasonably amiable relationship and seldom are there significant problems between us.

_____ my ex-spouse (or the ex-spouse of my partner) and the adults that live in our household seldom have any contact and only when it is about the children and child rearing issues.

_____ my ex-spouse (or the ex-spouse of my partner) and the adults that live in our house have frequent, unpleasant contact that sometimes puts the children in the middle.

_____ my ex-spouse (or the ex-spouse of my partner) and the adults that live in our household are in the midst of a war and the children are always upset and in the middle of our fights.

_____ there is no contact at all with my ex-spouse (or the ex-spouse of my partner) and they have no relationship with the children either.

_____ other, please describe: _______________________________________________________________

14. How would you respond to the following statement, “Being a part of a stepfamily is viewed as equally positively/negatively as being in any other type of family by others (friends, business associates, teachers, coaches, family, etc)”?

_____ strongly agree   _____ disagree

_____ agree    _____ strongly disagree

_____ neither agree nor disagree

15. How would you respond to the following statement, “As the result of being part of a stepfamily, I often feel that it is harder to make friends and/or have some sort of support system (other than the family members that I live with) in my life”?

_____ strongly agree   _____ disagree

_____ agree    _____ strongly disagree

_____ neither agree nor disagree

16. What would you identify as the biggest problem(s) in your stepfamily household?
17. What would you identify as the biggest strength(s) in your stepfamily household?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

18. What skill(s) would you like to learn in this class?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Post Test Questionnaire
(to be administered upon completion of the class at intervals of six months and one year)

Please read each statement/question carefully. From the available choices, please select the one answer that best fits your view of the stepfamily in which you currently reside and put a checkmark next to the statement that best describes your answer. If the question is open-ended, please complete your answer as thoroughly as possible. The questionnaire’s purpose is:

• to show individual progress at the completion of this educational experience and reflect how well your needs were met.

The answers to this questionnaire are confidential and will be used only for the purpose of this class. Please answer each question as completely and truthfully as possible.

1. How long have you lived with your current stepfamily? Please express to the nearest month and year (i.e. 6 months and 1 year)?

___________________________________________________________________

2. When you think of daily life in your stepfamily, how do you respond to the following statement, “Daily routines in our stepfamily household are well established and our household runs smoothly most of the time”?

_____ very true

_____ seldom true

_____ true

_____ not at all true

_____ don’t know

3. When you think of special occasions in your household, how do you respond to the following statement, “Special occasions and how we celebrate them are well established in our stepfamily household”?

_____ very true

_____ seldom true

_____ true

_____ not at all true

_____ don’t know

4. When you think of your overall knowledge of the biological and/or stepchildren that live in your household, how do you respond to the following statement, “I feel that I have enough information about all of the children in our household especially when it comes to their medical and educational histories”?

_____ very true

_____ seldom true

_____ true

_____ not at all true

_____ don’t know
5. When you think of the discipline in your stepfamily household, the best way to describe your feelings about discipline are…

_____ confident, I am comfortable with handling the discipline issues in the household.
_____ somewhat confident, I am usually comfortable when tackling discipline issues in the household.
_____ confused, I feel confused about tackling discipline issues in the household.
_____ inadequate, I feel that I do not meet the challenges of discipline issues in the household well.
_____ totally inadequate, I do not feel up to the challenge of solving discipline issues in the household at all!
_____ other, please describe: ________________________________

6. The methods that I most often use when discipline is necessary in the household could best be described as:

_____ coercive (name calling, spanking/slapping, bullying)
_____ lenient (anything goes, kids will be kids, so what if they misbehave every so often?)
_____ neglectful (the children parent themselves most of the time; I have other things to worry about)
_____ rational (we discuss things as a family, the house is run somewhat as a democracy, when there is disciplining to be done, I try to be fair, I give consequences that make sense and fit the offense)
_____ controlling (it’s my way or the highway, it’s my house and my rules the majority of the time)
_____ other, please describe: ________________________________
7. When you think about your relationship with the stepchildren that live in the household, how do you feel about your relationship?

_____ happy   _____ angry

_____ satisfied   _____ there is no relationship at all

_____ tense

_____ other, please describe: ______________________________________

_____________________________________________________________

8. When you think about your relationship with your biological children that live in the household, how do you feel about your relationship?

_____ happy   _____ angry

_____ satisfied   _____ there is no relationship at all

_____ tense

_____ other, please describe: ______________________________________

_____________________________________________________________

9. When you think about your relationship with your current spouse, how do you feel about your relationship?

_____ happy   _____ angry

_____ satisfied   _____ there is no relationship at all

_____ tense

_____ other, please describe: ______________________________________

_____________________________________________________________

10. When you think about your relationship with your current spouse, how do you feel about the following statement, “My spouse and I have a reliable partnership when it comes to issues in the home”?

_____ very true   _____ seldom true

_____ true   _____ not at all true

_____ don’t know
11. When you think about your relationship with your current spouse, how do you feel about the following statement, “My current spouse and I have identified most of the stressors in our marriage and know, to a reasonable degree, how to deal with them”?

____ very true    ____ seldom true
____ true     ____ not at all true
____ don’t know

12. When you think about your relationship with your former spouse, how do you feel about your current relationship?

____ happy    ____ angry
____ satisfied   ____ there is no relationship at all
____ tense
____ other, please describe: ______________________________________

13. When you think of how your relationship with your former spouse (or the former spouse of your partner) effects your stepchildren/biological children, its effects are best described as...

_____ my ex-spouse (or the ex-spouse of my partner) and the relationship between the adults in our household sets forth a good model for our children and would best be described as amiable.
_____ usually, my ex-spouse (or the ex-spouse of my partner) and the adults who live in our household have a reasonably amiable relationship and seldom are there significant problems between us.
_____ my ex-spouse (or the ex-spouse of my partner) and the adults who live in our household seldom have any contact and only when it is about the children and child rearing issues.
_____ my ex-spouse (or the ex-spouse of my partner) and the adults who live in our household have frequent, unpleasant contact that sometimes puts the children in the middle.
_____ my ex-spouse (or the ex-spouse of my partner) and the adults who live in our household are in the midst of a war and the children are always upset and in the middle of our fights.
_____ there is no contact at all with my ex-spouse (or the ex-spouse of my partner) and they have no relationship with the children either.
_____ other, please describe: ______________________________________
14. How would you respond to the following statement, “Being a part of a stepfamily is viewed as positively/negatively as being in any other type of family by others (friends, business associates, teachers, coaches, family, etc)”?

_____ strongly agree   _____ disagree

_____ agree   _____ strongly disagree

_____ neither agree nor disagree

15. How would you respond to the following statement, “As the result of being part of a stepfamily, I often feel that it is harder to make friends and/or have some sort of support system (other than the family members that I live with) in my life”?

_____ strongly agree   _____ disagree

_____ agree   _____ strongly disagree

_____ neither agree nor disagree

16. What would you identify as the biggest problem(s) in your stepfamily household?

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

17. What would you identify as the biggest strength(s) in your stepfamily household?

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

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18. What skill(s) do you think you have learned as a result of this class?
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

19. Have these skills been useful to you and how have they affected your stepfamily in positive/negative ways?
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

20. As the result of the class entitled, “Successful Stepfamilies,” would you consider taking other classes if the opportunity presents itself?

_____ Yes, definitely!  _____ Yes, probably.

_____ Undecided.  _____ Probably not.

_____ Definitely not!
Lesson Plan One  
Unit 1, Lesson 1

Lesson Title: “Opening the Class”

Total Time: 1 hour for the opening and pretest questionnaire, plus time for a social hour afterwards.

Goals: To introduce the instructor and the learners to each other.  
To administer/take the needs assessment for reference to future classes.

Objectives: Upon completion of Lesson Plan One, learners will:

1. Have familiarity with the instructor and his/her background.  
2. Have familiarity with other learners that are in the group

Materials: enough pretest questionnaires for each student to have one to mark, enough writing implements for entire class (pencils preferably for the pretest questionnaire and pens for writing names on nametags), nametags, a class roster, door prize of some sort, snack items, list of class dates for participants to sign up for a snack that they would like to share with the group.

Room Set-up: Desks set in rows for this first meeting set facing the front of the room. Proper lighting so that learners will be able to read the pretest questionnaire well. Room temperature set at a comfortable level so learners are neither too hot or too cold.

Background Information: No background information is needed from research at this session. The session will introduce learners and instructor, and administer the pretest questionnaire.

Schedule: 15 minutes prior to the scheduled time for beginning, the presenter should greet the learners as they arrive, provide them with nametags, and offer them a place to sit during the class time.

(10 minutes) The teacher should introduce him/her self and go over qualifications for teaching the class. Any information that student’s might relate with a special knowledge of stepfamilies will be helpful (i.e. if the instructor is a member of a stepfamily themselves, if the instructor has done research into the issue of stepfamilies, etc.). Students should be told where the bathrooms are and told to use them at any time during the class session. Additionally the tone of the class should be set such that the students identify the instructor as friendly and supportive. The environment should be described as one where the learner experience is valued and the learners should be seen as the experts (since they have stepfamilies of their own). Learner participation
should be explain as being regarded as important and should be looked upon respectfully by classmates.

(5 minutes) The learners should introduce themselves with names, how long they have been members of a stepfamily, how many children reside with them, and the approximate ages of the children (the instructor may have to prompt the learners if information is forgotten).

(5 minutes) The instructor should introduce a game that all learners will come together and do just prior to ending the session for the evening. Explain just prior to the administration of the pretest questionnaire, learners should take a few minutes to look at participants and name tags, making a mental note of just who each person is in the group. Just before the formal ending of the class, a game will be played where all chairs will be rearranged in a circle and learners will recall as many names as they can. The winner(s) will receive a door prize at the end. The instructor should be prepared with a class list and a pencil. All the correct name recognition should be recorded next to the student’s name by the instructor, thus making the person with the most checks next to their name the “winner”.

(5 minutes) The instructor should provide an explanation of the pretest questionnaire. This explanation should include clarification of the purpose so that students understand that this is not a test. There are no right and wrong answers. The questionnaire will be used to guide the learner needs and steer the curriculum for the class. In addition, a similar test will be used at the end of the class to show student change in their understandings and, eventually, how long their learning lasts in duration (but this is at the 6 month and 1 year time periods).

Students should know that the questionnaire, although students will write their names on the questionnaire to identify responses for future comparison purposes, will not be seen by anyone not involved with the class, and so will only be used for class reasons. The students should be as truthful and complete as possible in their responses. Students should also not compare answers. This is so that we can get an accurate picture of each learner’s needs. Quiet during the test should be encouraged to give all students the opportunity they need to read and answer the questions. If help is needed during the test, the students should be encouraged to raise their hand and the instructor will come around and help students individually.
(30 minutes) Time allowed for students to take questionnaire.

The instructor can have early finishers help themselves to refreshments in the other room but encourage them to stay and participate in the game and door prize at the end of the test-taking.

(15-25 minutes) The instructor should encourage those just finishing with the pretest questionnaire to go and use the bathroom, get some refreshments, and chat outside the classroom until all learners are finished with the questionnaire. Upon all learners finishing the questionnaire, refreshments can be obtained and brought back to the room to facilitate playing the game and leaving on schedule. Students already getting their snack should be brought back into the classroom at this time to facilitate the entire group playing the name game.

Game Procedures:

1. Desks should be put in a circle around the room.
2. Have all students take one last look around the room at the student’s name tags.
3. Have all students remove their name tags.
4. Starting with a student sitting nearest the instructor and moving clockwise around the group, students should name as many participants as they can while the instructor puts checks for all correct answers by the student name.
5. The student that knows the most names wins the door prize for the evening.

(5 minutes) Wrap-up: Students should be told that their pre-test questionnaire answers will be compiled into a class agenda that is most meaningful to the students. This class agenda will be shared at promptly the time that class is to start and learners should be encouraged to be on-time. Additionally, ask learners to be thinking about if they would like a directory of student names and phone numbers. This will be determined at the next class session. Ask students if they would like to sign up to share a snack with the group for other class sessions. Have a sign up list available for this purpose. Students can sign up as they leave the building. Thank all students for coming and say good-by as students exit the building.
Sample Syllabus for,
“Successful Stepfamilies: A Family Life Education Program
To Address Unique Needs”

Instructor
Karin Schumacher Dyke

Contact Information
Phone: 513-755-3727
E-mail Address: Auntkarin@direcway.com

Proposed Schedule of Classes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, April 6</td>
<td>“Opening the Class”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, April 13</td>
<td>“Stepfamilies in society”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, May 4</td>
<td><strong>Hiatus and opportunity for individual family counseling</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through Thursday, May 18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, May 25</td>
<td>“Positive Relationships with the Children and the Adults Who Parent Them: Intimacy, Boundaries and Authority are Balancing Acts”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, June 1</td>
<td>“Positive Relationships with the Children and the Adults Who Parent Them: Discipline in the Effective Stepfamily”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, June 8</td>
<td>“So What About Our Relationship? Couples Establishing Strong, Cohesive Bonds”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, June 15</td>
<td>“So What about Our Relationship? Learning to be Partners”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, June 22</td>
<td><strong>Hiatus and opportunity for individual family counseling</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through Thursday, July 13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday, July 13</td>
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<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday, July 20</td>
<td>“Cooperative Relationships with the Former Spouse: How to Get along with the Ex Even if You Don’t See Eye-to-Eye”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, July 27</td>
<td>“Cooperative Relationships with the Former Spouse: The Continuation of How to get along with the Ex Even if You Don’t See Eye-to-Eye”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, August 3</td>
<td>“Culminating Effective Practice in Stepfamilies”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, August 10</td>
<td>“Celebration of the Stepfamily”</td>
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Lesson Plan Two
Unit 2, Lesson 1

Lesson Title: “Stepfamilies in Society”

Total Time: 1 hour of instructional time and about 30 minutes for couples to socialize upon completion of formal instruction.

Goal: To look at the roles of stepfamilies in popular culture and determine what kind of role stepfamilies have. As a result of this, actions for group members should be determined.

Objectives:

1. Learners will evaluate some examples of popular culture and come up with roles of stepfamilies.
2. Learners will become acquainted with some strategies for dealing with societal roles that is culturally prevalent.
3. Strategies for dealing with the cultural roles of stepfamilies will be evaluated and learners will share choices with the group.

Materials: VCR /DVD movie entitled, “Cinderella (Walt Disney Home Video version)” set to run at the 1 minute, 35 second count from the beginning of the movie and end at the 3 minute, 24 second count from the beginning of the movie, VCR/DVD player, enough chairs to accommodate people, a syllabus should be created by the instructor and shared with the group (instructor should also consider giving the class his/her phone number to use in case of emergency), chart paper, post-it notes, pens, snack sign up list should be available for class participants, name tags enough for all learners.

Room Set Up: For the initial part of the class, chairs should face the video player, possibly in rows so all can see. Chairs can be set up in a circle after the video has been played to facilitate group discussion.

Background Information:

Society does not acknowledge the value of treating stepfamilies as entities with unique needs and issues. At best, society dictates that stepfamilies be treated like intact families that have biological mother and biological father living with their biological children (Jones, 2003; Mahoney, 2000). At worst, society sees stepfamilies and remarriage as inherently dysfunctional. Society responds by stigmatizing the entire institution of stepfamilies by having fewer institutional supports or social policy that assists intact families (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004). Neither one of these societal approaches to stepfamilies appear to be viable.

Stepfamily literature abounds with challenges faced by stepfamilies, not the least of which are societal views of stepfamilies. From trying to make stepfamilies fit into the traditional intact family model, to negative societal stereotypes of stepfamilies and their
relationships, to policies imposed by society on stepfamilies that make the relationships between stepparent and stepchild clearly one of less relevance than the biological parent and biological child relationship, stepfamilies are viewed by society as problematic (Jones, 2003). Appreciation for stepfamilies and their uniqueness must be cultivated in the United States for normalization of an increasing, valid type of family composition (Jones, 2003).

Society theorizes that residing in stepfamilies is harmful for the children living within them (Amato, 2000; Fisher, Leve, O’Leary, & Leve, 2003; Ram & Hou, 2003). There are many varieties of stories, myths, and media that would perpetuate these societal attitudes (Jones, 2003). As a result of the challenges experienced within the stepfamily and in society itself when dealing with stepfamilies, there are no clearly established roles for stepparents in society (Corrie, 2002; Everett, 2002). If stepfamilies present themselves as the traditional, intact family, there is much more societal acceptance (Ganong, Coleman, Fine, & McDaniel, 1998; Lamb, 1999). Thus, stepfamilies have the choice of either presenting themselves as something that is conducive to societal acceptance, or presenting themselves accurately and living with the social stigma (Jones, 2003).

Mahoney (2000) illustrates that society does not take the role of a stepparent seriously in terms of their commitment and attachment to their stepchildren. He pointed to the statistic that indicated that couples managing stepfamilies with children residing within the household tend to divorce at a rate of 60 percent. If, in the likely event as demonstrated by this statistic, divorce does occur, it is not the standard for children to be awarded any visitation with the stepparent (Felker et al., 2002). This societal practice exemplifies that there is little incentive for the child to bond with a stepparent.

Researchers present policy issues as very representative of the overall problems faced by stepparents. Legal issues identified as being out of the realm of stepparental authority included possible occurrences in stepfamilies and intact families alike, such as signing school permission slips, and authorizing emergency medical care for the child (Ganong et al., 1998). Critical decision-making is out of the jurisdiction of the stepparent.

Society does not recognize stepparents as real parents with the child’s best interest at heart (Fisher et al., 2003; Ganong et al., 1998, Jones, 2003). At best, stepparents are viewed as someone residing in the same house without full parental rights to the child (Ganong et al., 1998). Parenting the child is limited to the bare minimum of what is permissible by law. However, it is a normal expectation that the stepparent will participate in the financial support of the stepchild (Jones, 2003; Ahrons, 1995; Ram & Hou, 2003). This dichotomy in societal expectations keeps the tumultuous relationship between parenting and role confusion ever-present in the relationship between the child and stepparent.

Looking from a theoretical perspective, family systems theory suggests that in stepfamilies, relationships that affect the system extend beyond the borders of the home in which the child resides most of the time, thus creating a “degree of permeability” (White & Klein, 2002, p. 125). This is defined as the system, or family, being influenced to some degree by the environment within its experience. In the view of the family systems framework, everyone in the child’s environment is part of the system (Isaacs, 2002). If this environment is less accepting, as research shows, the child is led to
believe that being part of a stepfamily is, as a product of what it is, problematic. If this is to be remediated, society in general must change.

A solution for the view of society is to elect new public policies. Jones (2003) sited The Children Act 1989 as a solution used in English Law. It provides that a stepparent who has lived with a biological parent and child for a period of two years is eligible to apply for a “residence order” (Jones, 2003, p. 234). This order, if established, extends parental rights and responsibilities to the stepparent without negating any of the rights and responsibilities that either of the biological parents (both residential and non-residential) includes. This law makes the job of a stepparent more credible and thus enables society to somewhat destigmatize the role of the stepparent.

Since changing policy is not a practical option for the common stepfamily, there are other practical solutions that literature offers to better accommodate the stepfamily in society in general. Communication with teachers and the school community at large may help the school better accommodate the psychological as well as the physical needs of the stepfamily as they relate with the children’s school (Olsen, 2000). Setting up a limited power of attorney for the stepparent better legitimizes the parental role of the stepparent. This often allows stepparents to sign student permission slips for school purposes, but it also allows stepparents to authorize emergency medical care (Olsen, 2000). Working with the community at large in these same ways also helps legitimize the role of the stepfamily as well as assists others in knowing how to work with the family in the most effective ways (Olsen, 2000). Additionally, making sure that stepparents as well as biological parents are informed about the medical and educational history of each child assists in the process of transitioning and legitimization of the stepfamily (Olsen, 2000).

Schedule: 15 minutes prior to the scheduled time for beginning, the presenter should greet the learners as they arrive, provide them with nametags, and offer them a place to sit during the class time.

(5 minutes) Instructor should reintroduce him/her self. Ask learners if anyone remembers the name of the person sitting beside them other than their spouse without looking at anyone’s name tag. If not then request that reintroductions are made. Pass out a syllabus (see page xvii and xviii to view a sample syllabus) to review class content. Stress that the content choices were made as a result of the pretest questionnaire results. Make sure that everyone knows that the class has periodic dates that the class will not meet and people will be given a list of individual counselors that work with families with stepfamily issues and that the participant sign-up is totally their own choice-not a class requirement. Remind people as well that the sign up list for snacks is still available if anyone wants to sign up after the completion of the formal class portion of the session. Take care of any other housekeeping issues.

(5 minutes) Show clip of the movie, “Cinderella”.
(30 minutes) Ask learners questions that help them process the video such as:

1. Does anyone recognize the movie clip we've just watched? Please indicate with a show of hands.
2. Roughly what percentage of people in this room have seen this movie?
3. Do you think that the number of people in here that have seen this movie is roughly representative of the total population in the United States that have seen this movie?
4. What is the name of the movie?
5. Who does this movie appeal to?
6. Are there other versions of this same story available to this general audience (like books, etc)?
7. What type of stereotypic labels do you hear in this brief clip?
8. What sort of labeling do you hear in this movie clip?
9. Do you think this label is largely representative of the majority of other societal messages encountered about stepfamilies?

10. Each of you write down one movie that has this similar negative portrayal of stepfamilies (write down on a post-it note).
11. Each of you write down one movie with a positive portrayal of stepfamilies (write down on a post-it note).

Upon completing questions 10 and 11, have learners come up and put answers on a pre-made t-graph on chart paper to visually compare their responses.

12. How do these lists compare?
13. What do you think this means about the societal attitudes toward stepfamilies?
14. Have any of you ever portrayed your stepfamily as being an intact family or one where both of you are the biological parents of all the children residing in your household?
15. How did that make you feel?
16. What are some of the problems that are inherent to being “not quite” societally accepted?

17. What could be some of the solutions?

After asking question 17, write some of the solutions that are brainstormed with the group on a clean piece of chart paper.

Share some of the solutions found in the literature about what effective stepfamilies have done to make their family compositions more successful.
(i.e. England’s Child Act 1989, changing public policy, establishing a Limited Power of Attorney over the non-biological, residential child for the stepparent, knowing all the pertinent information about your stepchild like complete medical and educational histories, formation of or joining existing groups with the specific purpose of supporting stepfamilies, etc).

(10 minutes) Group students into groups of about four participants per each group. Have student’s come up with their own lists of what they think would work for them or what they have found in the way of solutions. Have them identify why these solutions would/do work especially well for them.

(10 minutes) Allow groups to share what they’ve come up with and why the solutions chosen would/do work for them.

End of the formal educational class time.

(30 minutes) Socializing and snack time for learners. INSTRUCTORS SHOULD BE SURE TO THANK LEARNERS THAT PROVIDED THE SNACK FOR THE EVENING! Instructor should circulate among the group and facilitate social bonding between the learners.

At the end of the social time, the instructor should thank people for and see the learners to the door thank them for coming and for their participation in the evening.
Lesson Plan Three
Unit 3, Lesson 1


Total Time: 1 hour of instructional time and about 30 minutes for couples to socialize upon completion of formal class time.

Goal: Acquaint new stepfamilies on the process of forming effective stepfamilies.

Objectives:

1. Learners will identify the stages that stepfamilies go through in becoming family.
2. Learners will create realistic expectations when it comes to stepfamily formation.

Materials: Chart paper, post-it notes, pens, name tags, handouts (1 per participant) on stepfamily developmental stages, overheads made up prior to lesson on stepchildren’s perceptions on problems and solution, overhead projector

Room Set-up: Chairs and set in rows facing toward the front of the room initially so that overheads are visible to the group; after overheads and brief lecture on the developmental stages of a stepfamily, chairs and desks can be moved in groupings more conducive to small groups discussion and presentations to the class.

Background Information:

The trend toward stepfamily formation follows a statistical pattern. Jones (2003) concluded that for every 100 marriages that take place in the United States, 55 of these marriages have a strong likelihood of failure. He noted that the overwhelming majority of those spouses who divorce eventually repartner. U.S. Census Bureau statistics (2003) indicated that slightly more than 40 percent of all current marriages are second or third marriages. Arditi (1999) reported that 29 percent of mothers had remarried and 60 percent of fathers had remarried in the participant pool for her study. These statistics were representative of the overall United States population. In many cases, remarriage leads to the establishment of stepfamilies (Jones, 2003).

Jones (2003) noted that over 60 percent of couples heading stepfamilies end up divorcing. The figure goes over 60 percent when the couples head families in which there are members under age 18. Amato (2000) noted that slightly more than half of all divorces involve children under the age of eighteen. Thus, research indicates that the viability of stepfamilies is in question. Stepparents need support in order to turn these trends in a new direction.

Family systems theory suggests a useful theoretical framework in which to consider the needs of stepparents (White & Klein, 2002). If, as the theory asserts,
Additionally, the systems framework encourages “feedback” (White & Klein, 2002, p.125). Feedback can be either positive or negative. Positive feedback makes achievement of the desired change more likely (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993; White & Klein, 2002). Negative feedback makes achievement of the desired change less likely (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993; White & Klein, 2002). Assuming that families are goal-oriented systems with error correction as a goal, feedback, is an essential part of the proposed program (White & Klein, 2002). Using the concept of feedback, negative feedback breeds less change within the family system while positive feedback breeds more change in the family unit (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993; White & Klein, 2002). Therefore, teaching couples forming stepfamilies more effective ways of behaving in these stepfamilies will affect all of the members of the family unit by making the situation in general more positive. In short, the more effective practice in building a positive stepfamily the couples are able to implement, the greater the catalyst for more success.

Examining family transitions from a family systems perspective is also useful. There is a change in families when there is a divorce and parents repartner. This change creates “disequilibrium” (Booth & Dunn, 1994). One example of disequilibrium in a stepfamily occurs when stepparents engage in establishing a relationship with the stepchildren living in the household. Commonly, stepchildren reject attempts at establishment of a relationship between themselves and the stepparent (Booth & Dunn, 1994). The result of this perceived rejection on the part of the stepparent is that the stepparent becomes more distant in the dealings with the stepchild, leading to less monitoring behaviors on the part of the stepparent, leading to less desirable outcomes on the part of the stepchild (Hetherington, 1999). It is easy to discern that there is a change within the family system due to the less-functional relationships between the stepchild and stepparent. This leads to the conclusion that in order to remediate the conflict that goes on in a stepfamily, a parental transition is required (Booth & Dunn, 1994). The capacity of the system, or family, to be able to transition with ease or with difficulty, is referred to by systems theory as the “degree of variety” (White & Klein, 2002, p. 126). A system, or family with the most capacity for adaptation has the highest level of variety. However, a system, or family with less capacity to make transitions has a lower level of variety. Family systems theory suggests that in stepfamilies, relationships that affect the system extend beyond the borders of the home in which the child resides most of the time thus creating a “degree of permeability” (White & Klein, 2002, p. 125).

It takes four to seven years for stepfamilies to settle into predictable patterns (Golish, 2003). In a study by Papernow (2001), these stages are typified. There are a total of seven stages. Each stage has a unique name. They are described as:

- **Stage one**, known as the fantasy stage is such that, parents and children alike have unrealistic expectations. Parents dream of unifying the stepfamily, rescuing the children from all of the “wrongs” in their lives, and having an instant, close relationship with children, including the parent loving the child and the child loving the parent in return. The parent’s fantasies seem to center around the family and getting “close” while the child’s fantasies focus around the stepparent disappearing and the biological parents getting back together again.

- **Stage two**, known as the assimilation phase, is one in which the parent tries to make all his/her fantasies come true. However, this is also a phase characterized
by discontentment: the parent may feel jealousy, confusion, and inadequacy because the stepparent can’t quite be included in the biological parent/child relationship. The stepchild, on the other hand, very likely will reject any attempt on the stepparent’s part for shared intimacy with the child because of their grief, fear of making the biological parents feel unloved if they love the stepparent, and the child fears that the place that s/he had in the single-headed household will be usurped.

• Stage three, known as getting clear, is typified by realizations that help the family begin to settle into the family with all it’s good and bad. Clarity about feelings, both positive and negative are identified, and then the needs that these feelings bring about are defensible.

• Stage four, known as the middle restructuring phase is marked by more honesty about feelings and needs within the family. This can cause caos in the family if these now revealed needs can’t or won’t be met within the family. The stepparent often instigates these conflicts because they are trying to establish the roles and boundaries of their own family, while the biological family may be trying to hold onto what the former family had and want the stepparent to go along with these expectation.

• Stage five is known as the action, or going into business together phase. This stage is when the couple begins working together as partners. The family life and rituals of the ex-spouse is now under reconstruction. Immerging from this stage is a new family based on the needs of the ones residing in the household. There is now real possibility that the family subsystems in the stepfamily will come together and make some meaningful decisions about what their unique family will look like.

• Stage six is known as contact intimacy in step relationships. At this phase, couples actually make an authentic relationship between each other without the child being a part of this relationship. It is a time of developing a unique relationship unto their marriage. In addition, the biological parent no longer plays a part in the relationship between the stepfamily household. Therefore, genuine intimacy can begin to develop between the child and stepparent.

• The final stage, stage seven, is also known as the resolution or holding on/letting go stage. The relationship in the stepfamily household are seen as more reliable and more predictable. This often happens around the time that the children have busy lives themselves with peer group relationships and societal commitments (i.e. school, job, boyfriend/girlfriend, etc.) There isn’t such an intense focus now on the family and how its defined. People at this time have routines and rhythms to specify family expectations. There is some grieving that happens because stepparents realize they will have to share the child forever with the biological parent, and the biological parent grieves over the divorce and change in the parenting that occurred as a result of this as well as having to forever share the child with the stepparent. Further, Coleman, Gangong, and Fine suggested that there is a lack of time for raising a child because the new couple is trying to establish a new marital relationship. Stepparents try to take on the role of parent and this is problematic for the child in that this “de-emphasizes” the role of the biological parents (Jones, 2003). Also problematic is the expectation for the
stepparent that they will instantly bond with the child (Everett, 2002; Jones, 2003). When this does not happen (as it takes time for people to bond), there is tremendous shame and guilt on the part of the stepparent. Overall, it appears that the stepparent and stepchild must explore resources for solutions in order to live in harmony.

Research has indicated that stepfamily relationships formed prior to the child’s adolescence can be closer than if the relationships are formed during adolescence (Cartwright & Seymour, 2002; Hetherington, 1999). Adolescents in a study presented by Cartwright and Seymour (2002) indicated what is difficult for adolescents to obtain in their relationship with the stepparent. Causes of difficulty for adolescent stepchildren include:

- perceived loss of the biological parent’s attention by the child
- lack of information and consultation about family decisions
- perception of disloyalty of biological parents
- adolescent being required to bend to the stepparent’s authority
- perception of the adolescent of having to be loyal to both the stepfamily household and that of the non-custodial parent.

Factors that ameliorated pain in young adult stepchildren included (Cartwright & Seymour, 2002):

- perception of the adolescent of still getting to spend time alone with the biological parent to talk about what is going on in the child’s life and household
- perception on the adolescent’s part of interest on the part of the biological parent of continuation of parenting responsibilities
- perception by the adolescent of continuation on the part of the parent of nurturing the child.

Stepfamilies have problems that are unique to their situation. These problems are not always easily understood for both the child and the stepparent. Children, while not always knowing why they do not like a new stepparent, can be prone to have certain negative feelings for very legitimate reasons. According to research done by Seymour and Steffens (1995), the feelings to expect children to have include:

- loss of control over their environment,
- guilt over enjoying spending time with a stepparent and over feeling like the stepparent may take the biological parent’s place in their emotions,
- confusion over having loyalty for a stepparent,
- anger because the child has no input into the decisions that put them into a stepfamily in the first place,
- anger at the stepparent at having to adjust to having a biological parent and a stepparent make decisions for the family rather than just the biological parent,
- anger at having to share their biological parent with another adult,
- fear of having another relationship end in failure, fear over whether there will be a place in the family.

It is imperative that stepparents and biological parents alike have an appreciation for the reasoning behind the child’s feelings. Awareness and appreciation of the child’s
feelings can go a long way to making a difficult adjustment better on the entire family system. According to Seymour, Francis, and Steffens (1995), what biological parents and stepparents must understand include:

- the child has lost something valuable in the breakup of the biological family and this must be mourned,
- negative behavior on the part of the child is not always due to what would traditionally be thought; it may be a reaction to the situation,
- it is important that adults offer love and understanding to the child and try to help the child work out negative feelings.

In being aware of the child’s dilemma and acting like the adult in the situation, exceptional outcomes can be achieved.

Very usable suggestions to parents and stepparents facing a child’s adjustment into a new family situation can be derived from a good understanding of the child. These suggestions need to be brought to parent’s attention as they may not be seeing things from the child’s perspective and may need to look at things from a different viewpoint. Other indicators have also been explored in research.

**Schedule:** 15 minutes prior to the scheduled time for beginning, the presenter should greet the learners as they arrive, provide them with nametags, and offer them a place to sit during the class time.

(10 minutes) Review previous lesson. Ask students if they remember the topic reviewed last week. Ask them to name 3 solutions used by effective stepfamilies that help with societal stereotyping. Ask if anyone in the class has actually implemented any of the solutions, or plans to implement any of the solutions.

The instructor now will link tonight’s discussion with previous learning explaining that in order for stepfamilies to be perceived in society as viable and equal, they must also have a well-functioning family internally. This can start with the couple because the entire family system is interdependent, instructing parents in stepfamilies on how to better work within the stepfamily has the potential to produce a positive change on the entire system (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). Therefore, teaching couples forming stepfamilies more effective ways of behaving in these stepfamilies will affect all of the members of the family unit by making the situation in general more positive. In short, the more effective practice in building a positive stepfamily the couples are able to implement, the greater the catalyst for more success. Family systems theory suggests that in stepfamilies, relationships that affect the system extend beyond the borders of
the home in which the child resides most of the time thus creating a “degree of permeability” (White & Klein, 2002, p. 125). In more simplistic terms, the better the family functions, because of the interdependency of family systems, the more functionally they will behave in society as well.

One way that stepfamilies can function better is to learn what typifies the ordinary stepfamily.

Tonight, learners will develop better parental understanding regarding both children and adolescents and how they function in stepfamilies. In this way, effective stepfamilies turn these understandings into positives and accommodate the process of forming a successful stepfamily.

(20 minutes) The age of the child when you are forming a stepfamily has a lot to do with how easily or how hard it will be for all members of the stepfamily to accept the situation. Children before the onset of the teen years (up to about age ten or eleven) seem to have an easier time with acceptance. Children in their teen years have a harder time. But why? Adolescents in a study presented by Cartwright and Seymour (2002) indicated what was difficult for adolescents about the remarriage of their parent and the subsequent addition of a stepparent. Causes of difficulty for adolescent stepchildren include:

- perceived loss of the biological parent’s attention by the child
- lack of information and consultation about family decisions
- perception of disloyalty of biological parents
- adolescent being required to bend to the stepparent’s authority
- perception of the adolescent of having to be loyal to both the stepfamily household and that of the non-custodial parent.

Solutions that help with the pain experienced in young adult stepchildren included (Cartwright & Seymour, 2002):

- perception of the adolescent of still getting to spend time alone with the biological parent to talk about what is going on in the child’s life and household
- perception on the adolescent’s part of interest on the part of the biological parent of continuation of parenting responsibilities
- perception by the adolescent of continuation on the part of the parent of nurturing the child.

Children, younger than ten or eleven, while not always knowing why they do not like a new stepparent, can be prone to have certain negative feelings for very legitimate
reasons. According to research done by Seymour and Steffens (1995), the feelings to expect children to have include:

- loss of control over their environment,
- guilt over enjoying spending time with a stepparent and over feeling like the stepparent may take the biological parent’s place in their emotions,
- confusion over having loyalty for a stepparent,
- anger because the child has no input into the decisions that put them into a stepfamily in the first place,
- anger at the stepparent at having to adjust to having a biological parent and a stepparent make decisions for the family rather than just the biological parent,
- anger at having to share their biological parent with another adult,
- fear of having another relationship end in failure,
- fear over whether there will be a place in the newly composed stepfamily for the child.

It is imperative that stepparents and biological parents alike have an appreciation for the reasoning behind the child’s feelings. Awareness and appreciation of the child’s feelings can go a long way to making a difficult adjustment better on the entire family system. According to Seymour, Francis, and Steffens (1995), what biological parents and stepparents must understand include:

- the child has lost something valuable in the breakup of the biological family and this must be mourned,
- negative behavior on the part of the child is not always due to what would traditionally be thought; it may be a reaction to the situation,
- it is important that adults offer love and understanding to the child and try to help the child work out negative feelings.

In being aware of the child’s dilemma and acting like the adult in the situation, exceptional outcomes can be achieved. In addition to becoming aware of some typical child reactions, there are also some excellent books on the subject for children. Here’s an overhead that gives you an idea of some books that you will find in the library on this subject. These books are divided by child age, the top books being for younger children, the bottom books being for six through twelfth grade children.

Now that we understand a bit about the developmental issues that face the stepfamily, especially the stepchildren and how we as adults can help, let’s look at the stepfamily as a whole. There are actually 7 stages that stepfamilies typically go through in establishing healthy, effective families. I will pass out the handout so that we can look at some of the developmental phases that stepfamilies move through (pass out handout and have one copy on overhead projector film ready for the overhead projector).
Ask learners the following questions as you move through the handout:

- How many people are in the fantasy phase (ask this question about all of the phases)?
- What experiences typified this phase for you and your family?
- What makes/made this phase tough/easy for your family?
- Some models say that families adjust in 3-5 years and some say stepfamilies adjust in 4 to 7 years. What do you think could be some factors that get stepfamilies “stuck” or might make some stepfamilies “slower” in these stages?

Upon completion of going through the developmental model of stepfamilies, have small groups get together and discuss which stage they think they are closest to in their stepfamily and what makes them think this is the correct characterization. At the completion, let groups share with the class what they’ve come up with.

(30 minutes) Social hour! Group facilitator should circulate around the room accommodating the formation of friendships and talk. BE SURE TO THANK WHOEVER BROUGHT REFRESHMENTS FOR SHARING AND REMIND THOSE WHO WOULD STILL LIKE TO SIGN UP FOR REFRESHMENTS TO DO THAT TONIGHT.

As the social hour ends, thank students for coming.
Handout for Program Entitled
Successful Stepfamilies: A Family Life Education Program To Address Unique Needs
To be Used With
Lesson Plan Three
Unit 3, Lesson 1

Lesson Title: “The Process of Establishing Family Relationships in Stepfamilies:
Formation of Effective Stepfamilies”
(Taken from Papernow, P (2001). The stepfamily cycle: An experiential model of stepfamily development. Family
Relations, July, 1984: 355-363.)

The Stepfamily Developmental Cycle:

Stage one. The fantasy stage is such that,

1. parents and children alike have unrealistic expectations.
2. Parents dream of unifying the stepfamily, rescuing the children from all of the “wrongs” in their lives,
3. Parents have an expectation of an instant, close relationship with children, including the parent loving the child and the child loving the parent in return.
4. The parent’s fantasies seem to center around the family and getting “close”.
5. The child’s fantasies focus around the stepparent disappearing and the biological parents getting back together again.

Stage two. Known as the assimilation phase, is described as,

a. The parent tries to make all his/her fantasies come true from stage one.
b. Characterized by discontentment: the parent may feel jealousy, confusion, and inadequacy because the stepparent can’t quite be included in the biological parent/child relationship.
c. The stepchild, on the other hand, very likely will reject any attempt on the stepparent’s part for shared intimacy with the child because of the child’s grief, fear of making the biological parents feel unloved if they love the stepparent, and the child fears that the status that s/he had in the single-headed household will be usurped.

Stage three. Known as getting clear, is typified by,

a. Making realizations that help the family begin to settle into a more typical family with all its good and bad.
b. Clarify feelings, both positive and negative, and identify these feelings so that something can be done about them within the family.

Stage four. Known as the middle restructuring phase,

a. It is marked by more honesty about the true feelings and needs within the family.
b. This phase has a tendency towards caos in the family, especially if these now revealed needs can’t or won’t be met within the family.

c. The stepparent often instigates these conflicts because they are trying to establish the roles and boundaries of their own within the family, while the biological family may be trying to hold onto what the former family had and want the stepparent to go along with these expectation.

Stage five. Known as the **action, or going into business together phase**;

a. This stage is when the couple begins working together as partners.

b. The family life and rituals established previously when the ex-spouse was part of the household, is now under reconstruction.

c. Immerging from this stage is a new family based on the needs of the ones residing in the household.

d. There is now real possibility that the family subsystems in the stepfamily will come together and make some meaningful decisions about what their unique family will look like.

Stage six. Known as **contact intimacy in step relationships**. Characterized by;

a. Couples actually make an authentic relationship between each other without the inclusion of child being a part of the relationship between the husband and wife.

b. The biological, ex-spouse parent, not living in the stepfamily household, no longer plays a part in the day-to-day considerations of the stepfamily household.

b. Therefore, genuine intimacy can begin to develop between the child and stepparent.

Stage seven. This stage is known as the **resolution or holding on/letting go stage**:

a. The relationships in the stepfamily household are seen as more reliable and more predictable than in previous stages.

b. This often happens around the time that the children have busy lives themselves with peer group relationships and societal commitments (i.e. school, job, boy/girlfriend, etc.)

c. There isn’t such an intense focus now on the stepfamily and how it is defined.

d. People at this time have routines and rhythms to specify family expectations.

e. There is some grieving that happens because stepparents realize they will have to share the child forever with the biological parent, and the biological parent grieves over the divorce and change in the parenting that occurred as a result of this as well as having to forever share the child with the stepparent.
Lesson Plan Four
Unit 3, Lesson 2


Total Time: 1 hour of instructional time and about 30 minutes for couples to socialize upon completion of formal class time.

Goal: Stepfamilies will become aware of the process of establishing a secure, predictable environment for all family members.

Objective:

1. Stepfamilies will identify some routines that would aid the household in having a better flow, becoming more predictable, and, as a result, seeming like a more secure environment for the family.
2. Stepfamilies will identify some ways to make their stepfamily identity unique to their household.

Materials: VCR/DVD movies entitled, “

- “Man of the house,” set to run at the 9 minute, 42 second count from the beginning of the movie and ending at the 10 minute, 48 seconds (assuming the count starts from the beginning of the movie),
- “Man Of the House,” set to run at 16 minutes, 49 seconds and ending at 20 minutes, three seconds,
- “Stepmom.” The clip starts at 1 hour, five minutes, and 42 seconds and ends at 1 hour, 10 minutes, 14 seconds,
- “Rhapsody in Bloom.” The clip will begin at 28 minutes, 11 seconds. The clip will end at 31 minutes, 34 seconds,

VCR/DVD player, enough chairs and desks and/or tables to accommodate learners, pens/pencils, nametags, paper for each group to write on.

Room Set-up: Chairs and desks, enough to accommodate the entire group, should face the front of the room in rows initially so that all learners can see the movie clips. During discussion, the desks/chairs should be moved into a circle so that everyone can see each other as they converse. Make sure that the room is not too cold or too hot so that everyone is comfortable.

Background Information:

Examining family transitions from a family systems perspective is useful. There is a change in families when there is a divorce and parents repartner. This change creates “disequilibrium” (Booth & Dunn, 1994). The capacity of the system, or family, to be
able to transition with ease or with difficulty, is referred to by systems theory as the “degree of variety” (White & Klein, 2002, p. 126). The greater the degree of variety, the more easily stepfamilies will be able to transition easily into their new roles, however, the state of disequilibrium defines that the family has novel roles that must be established at the same time.

Daily routines in stepfamilies are also tumultuous (Braithwaite, Olson, Golish, Soukup, & Turman, 2003). Children in stepfamilies often must move between households maintained by both biological parents. This creates confusion for both the child and the parent. If routine establishment occurs jointly as a stepfamily with input from all members, this can ease confusion and enhance communication (Braithwaite et al., 2003; Doherty, 1997).

In order for stepfamilies to solidify, they must establish family identity of their own and not try to fit a mold that they do not fit into (Lamb, 1999). Establishing a family identity unique to the new family system, namely the stepfamily, has been identified in literature as important (Felker et al., 2002; McGraw, 2004). This is best accomplished with a concern toward sensitivity to the family members. Sensitivity, for example can best be catered to by, instead of insisting that children call the new stepparent Mom or Dad, the child be allowed to come up with what is comfortable for him/her to refer to the new stepparent by. Creating new rituals and traditions within the stepfamily that create a bond with all members within the family (Doherty, 1997; McGraw, 2004) is also a fine goal. These rituals can include birthday celebrations where, the stepparent gives a personal gift to demonstrate that they are aware of the child’s interests. They can also be exemplified by special family outings where novel destinations are attended to. When none of the family members has experienced the destination with either biological parent or stepparent, there is a feeling of making new familiarities together as a new family (Doherty, 1997). The important premise is to make new, individualistic memories with the stepfamily and to capture the interest of a majority of its members. Also important is that family members create identities that are unique, perhaps, but that best service the stepfamily (Lamb, 1999).

**Schedule:** 15 minutes prior to the scheduled time for beginning, the presenter should greet the learners as they arrive, provide them with nametags, and offer them a place to sit during the class time.

(10 minutes) Ask review questions to review learning from last week:

- What did we talk about last week?
- How many stages are there as identified by Papernow in stepfamily development?
- What stage of development is your own stepfamily in?
- How do you know?
- What are some reasons that adolescents find being in a stepfamily is difficult?
How can you best support the adolescent members of your stepfamily household in their adjustment?

What are some of the reasons that younger children find difficulty being in a stepfamily?

How can younger children best be accommodated in their adjustment?

Are there any examples from last week where you applied this information to your real-life family?

(5 minutes)

Now that we know the typical stages associated with stepfamily development and how to accommodate the different developmental levels of being a stepfamily, exploration will continue with family course of action. Let’s brainstorm on the following questions:

- What would you think that a family ritual is?
- Why would you think that it would be important to maintain a schedule with as much continuity in it from household to household?
- Why would you think that it is important to discuss family routines and get input from the children living in the house?
- What do you think a family identity might include?
- What are some ideas that might help your family develop a unique identity?

(5 minutes)

Now let’s watch some clips of some popular films and see if you can identify if the film clips are talking about routines, rituals, or family identities. Write down a few of your ideas so that we can discuss them after the movies.

(Film Clips are selected as the result of: Leon, K. & Angst, E. (2005). Portrayal of stepfamilies in film: Using media images in remarriage education. Family Relations, 54: 3-23.

Instructor will show the film clip from the “Man of the House.” The clip starts at 9 minutes, 42 seconds and ends at 10 minutes, 48 seconds. This clip reinforces the routines in a new family.

(30 minutes)

Instructor will show the film clip from “Man Of the House.” The clip starts at 16 minutes, 49 seconds and ends at 20
minutes, three seconds. This clip reinforces the routines in a new family.

Questions to ask after clip while the next clip is prepared:
- Does anyone recognize the movie?
- What does this clip illustrate?

Instructor will show a clip from the movie “Stepmom.” The clip starts at 1 hour, five minutes, and 42 seconds and ends at 1 hour, 10 minutes, 14 seconds. This clip identifies the process of establishing new roles.

Questions to ask after the clip while the next clip is being prepared:
- Does anyone recognize the movie?
- What does this clip illustrate?

Instructor will show clip from movie “Rhapsody in Bloom.” The clip will begin at 28 minutes, 11 seconds. The clip will end at 31 minutes, 34 seconds. The clip will illustrate unfamiliarity with family routines and unrealistic expectations.

Questions to ask after the clip while the player is being turned off and stored:
- Does anyone recognize the movie?
- What does the clip illustrate?

(10 minutes) Divide the class now into three groups. Have each group discuss one of three subjects: routines, rituals, or family identities. Give them 5 minutes to come up with real-life examples of how these concepts relate to their stepfamilies. These examples will then be shared with the class if not during this class session, then they will be saved for the following session.

(30 minutes) Social hour! Group facilitator should circulate around the room accommodating the formation of friendships and talk. BE SURE TO THANK WHOMEVER BROUGHT REFRESHMENTS FOR SHARING AND REMIND THOSE WHO WOULD STILL LIKE TO SIGN UP FOR REFRESHMENTS TO DO THAT TONIGHT.

As the social hour ends, thank students for coming.
Lesson Plan Five  
Unit 4, Lesson 1

Lesson Title: “Positive Relationships with the Children and the Adults Who Parent Them: Intimacy, Boundaries and Authority are Balancing Acts”

Total Time: 1 hour of instructional time and about 30 minutes for couples to socialize upon completion of formal class time.

Goal: Learners will develop an understanding of intimacy and boundaries and how there are positive and negative uses of each.

Objectives:

1. Learners will achieve a sense of understanding intimacy formation from given examples. The learners will apply this knowledge to their own household and come up with novel examples.
2. Learners will identify issues of unhealthy boundary issues. They will identify these issues and verbalize how these boundaries need to be repaired. Further, learners will apply this knowledge to their own households and come up with either unhealthy boundaries and explain why these boundaries would be repaired or healthy boundaries and explain why these boundaries are healthy.

Materials: movies entitled
- “Man of the House,” starting at 59 minutes, 24 seconds and ending at 1 hour, 2 seconds,
- “A Rumor of Angels,” starting at 1 hour, 14 minutes and 50 seconds, ending at 1 hour 19 minutes, 49 seconds
- “Stepmom,” starting at 15 minutes, 52 seconds and ending at 18 minutes, 1 second,
- “Stepmom,” starting at 49 minutes and 39 seconds and ending at 51 minutes and 59 seconds,
- “Stepmom,” starting at 30 minutes, 23 seconds and ending at 31 minutes 43 seconds.
- Tumbleweeds. The clip starts at 9 minutes, 48 seconds, and ends at 11 minutes, 25 seconds. Another clip starting at 23 minutes, 49 seconds, and ends at 24 minutes, 35 seconds, and also a DVD/VCR player that matches the movie format selected, enough tables, chairs, and/or desks to accommodate all learners, paper, pens/pencils, nametags (if still required).

Room Set-up: Tables or desks and chairs should be facing the front, in rows so that all learners can see the movie clips. The arrangement can then be made into small groups to
accommodate the wrap-up learning activity. The temperature should not be too hot or too cool to keep learners physically comfortable.

**Background Information:**

Parental tribulations are exemplary of the literature about stepfamilies. Coleman, Gangong, and Fine (2000) specifically suggested that there are no clearly established roles for stepparents to refer to and operate under. Further, Coleman, Gangong, and Fine suggested that there is a lack of time for raising a child because the new couple is trying to establish a new marital relationship. Stepparents try to take on the role of parent and this is problematic for the child in that this “de-emphasizes” the role of the biological parents (Jones, 2003). Also problematic is the expectation for the stepparent that they will instantly bond with the child (Everett, 2002; Jones, 2003). When this does not happen (as it takes time for people to bond), there is tremendous shame and guilt on the part of the stepparent. Overall, it appears that the stepparent and stepchild must explore resources for solutions in order to live in harmony.

The goal for adults co-parenting in stepfamily households must be to establish intimacy between members while establishing boundaries and establishing authority (Braithwaite et al., 2003). The more the stepparent feels involved in the child rearing, the more satisfied the stepparent reports that the overall experience in the stepfamily is. Additionally, the more stepchildren interact with the stepparent, the more satisfaction is reported in the family (Everett, 2002).

The establishment of intimacy begins with the marriage ceremony. If the children feel unity right from this beginning, exemplified by having the family walk in together and leave together as a family during the ceremony, this can have an accelerating effect on the process of building a stepfamily (Doherty, 1997). Thus, establishment of a family intimacy can begin with the marriage ceremony itself.

The more stepfamilies relate to each other in positive ways such as with, “cooperation, equal status” (Banker & Gaertner, 1998, p. 310), the more satisfied they will be with the relationships that they have among the members. The more satisfying the relationships between all members of the stepfamily, the more satisfying the individual relationships will be (Banker & Gaertner, 1998). A determination can be made about whether the family needs help developing positive affect. It is reported that often, with time and work, a good relationship between members of stepfamilies can be established (Benson-Von Der, 1987). The job of a family life education program for stepfamilies is to provide direction for the work of establishing effective stepfamilies.

**Schedule:** 15 minutes prior to the scheduled time for beginning, the presenter should greet the learners as they arrive, provide them with nametags, and offer them a place to sit during the class time.

(5 to 10 minutes) Review of last week’s learning
- Finish sharing examples of stepfamilies routines, rituals and family identities,
- Check and see if any of these rituals, routines, or identities have been exemplified in learners’ lives
this past week,
- Relate how last week’s learning link with this week’s subject matter of establishing intimacy
- Ask learners:
  - How is establishing roles, rituals or identities in stepfamilies important in developing intimacy?
  - Why is it important to have shared experience in new families?
  - What sort of rituals are useful in establishing routines in stepfamilies?

(Film Clips are selected as the result of:

(40 minutes)

Instructor will show the film clip from Man Of the House. The clip starts at 59 minutes, 24 seconds and ends at 1 hour, 2 minutes. This clip reinforces why it is imperative to the child that family promises are kept to develop intimacy among family members.

Ask learners at the end of clip while preparing the next clip:
How does this clip explain something about intimacy formation? Does this example seem like something effective stepfamilies would do? Explain.

Instructor will show a film clip from A Rumor of Angels. The clip starts at 1 Hour, 14 minute, 50 seconds and ends at 1 hour, 19 minutes, and 49 seconds. This clip depicts the stepmother honoring the biological mom in very concrete ways.

Ask learners at the end of clip while preparing for the next clip:
How does this clip explain something about intimacy formation? Does this seem like something effective stepfamilies would do? Why/why not?

Instructor will show a clip from the movie Stepmom. The clip starts at 15 minutes, 52 seconds, and ends at 18 minutes, one
second. This clip tells the children depicted in the clip that even though Mothers and Fathers fall out of love, they never fall out of love with the children.

Ask learners at the end of the clip while preparing for the next clip: How does this clip explain something about intimacy formation? Does this seem like an example that effective stepfamilies might practice? Why/why not?

Instructor will show a clip from the movie Stepmom. The clip starts at 49 minutes and 39 seconds and ends at 51 minutes and 59 seconds. The clip reinforces the concept that different parents (in this case a mom and a stepmom) can provide support in different things, but still, both have the ability to support and care for the child.

Ask learners at the end of the clip while preparing for the next clip: How does this clip explain something about intimacy formation? Does this seem like an example that effective stepfamilies might agree with or not? Why/why not?

Instructor will show a clip from the movie Stepmom. The clip starts at 30 minutes, 23 seconds and ends at 31 minutes 43 seconds. This clip shows some very serious boundary issues when parents argue about parenting in front of the children.

Ask learners at the end of the clip: How does this clip explain something about boundary issues? Does it seem that the boundaries are healthy that are being set? Why/why not?

Instructor will show a clip from the movie Tumbleweeds. The clip starts at 9 minutes, 48 seconds, and ends at 11 minutes, 25 seconds. Another clip starting at 23 minutes, 49 seconds, and ends at 24 minutes, 35 seconds. Both clips exemplify a relationship between a child and parent where the child has become the parent.

Ask the students how the clips both explain something about boundary issues. Ask the students
if these boundaries seem like healthy or unhealthy boundaries. Ask them to explain their answers.

(10 to 15 minutes)
Divide the group up into groups of 4 people each. Have them come up with examples of developing intimacy or developing healthy boundaries. These examples will be used the following week as the review of this lesson. Ask students to write two down examples, and save them for the coming week’s session.

(30 minutes)
Social hour! Group facilitator should circulate around the room accommodating the formation of friendships and talk. BE SURE TO THANK WHOEVER BROUGHT REFRESHMENTS FOR SHARING AND REMIND THOSE WHO WOULD STILL LIKE TO SIGN UP FOR REFRESHMENTS TO DO THAT TONIGHT.

As the social hour ends, thank students for coming.
Lesson Plan Six  
Unit 4, Lesson 2

Lesson Title: “Positive Relationships with the Children and the Adults Who Parent Them: Discipline in the Effective Stepfamily”

Total Time: 1 hour of instructional time and about 30 minutes for couples to socialize upon completion of formal class time.

Goal: Learners will understand different discipline styles and form opinions on how to best develop their own discipline style.

Objectives:

1. Learners will familiarize themselves with different types of discipline styles.
2. Learners will discern the discipline styles that work best in effective stepfamily households.
3. Learners will identify that stepparents, as opposed to biological parents, must develop discipline over time with children living in the household and the reasons for this.

Materials: Chart paper with the 5 types of parenting written on it: coercive, lenient, neglectful, rational, and controlling. Scenarios, cut apart and ready for group work, nametags (if still needed), pencils, pens, homework reviewing last week’s lesson assigned for tonight.

Room Set-up: tables and/or desks with enough chairs for everyone, all chairs should be in rows and facing forward. Temperature in the room should be neither too hot or cold to facilitate the comfort of the participants.

Background Information:

From the inception of the remarriage, changes occur in the child’s life. Remarriage often brings families to a new house. There are new people to adjust to in these new surroundings (Coleman et al., 2000). These changes often bring about behavior problems (Coleman et al., 2000; Ram & Hou, 2003). In addition, children of remarriage appear to experience detriments in school achievement (Coleman et al., 2000; Ram & Hou, 2003). Further, Lansford, Ceballo, Rosario, and Stewart (2001) pointed to problems of low self-esteem, difficulty with relationships, delinquent behavior, and alcohol and drug abuse in children residing in stepfamilies. With all of the symptoms that the children are exhibiting, parenting the child in stepfamilies seems to be less of a priority (Coleman et al., 2000; Ram & Hou, 2003). In fact, a vicious cycle is apparent: the more the children exhibit externalizing and internalizing symptomology, the worse the relationship is in the marriage of the stepfamily (Hetherington, 1999; Lamb, 1999).
Disciplining the child may be the natural response of the parents in a family. This is problematic in the stepfamily household. It is reported that discipline by biological parents after a divorce is the most difficult for whichever partner feels the most responsible for the divorce (Arnaut, Fromme, Stoll, & Felker, 2000). Also left over from divorce is that if the child has lived in a highly conflict ridden household prior to divorce, they seem to be at more risk post-divorce. If an environment can be established of a well-functioning family, this risk can be somewhat abated (Lamb, 1999).

Further, it has been liberally noted in the research pertaining to stepfamilies that there is a marked difference in stepparents parenting stepchildren. Stepparents tend to feel closer to their own biological children and thus more equipped to parent these biological children (Banker & Gaertner, 1998; Benson-Von Der, 1987; Dunlop & Burns, 2001; Henderson & Taylor, 1999; Hetherington, 1999; Lamb, 1999). This leads to more distance and less parenting between stepchildren and stepparents.

Parental tribulations are exemplary of the literature about stepfamilies. Coleman, Gangong, and Fine (2000) specifically suggested that there are no clearly established roles for stepparents to refer to and operate under. Further, Coleman, Gangong, and Fine suggested that there is a lack of time for raising a child because the new couple is trying to establish a new marital relationship. Stepparents try to take on the role of parent and this is problematic for the child in that this “de-emphasizes” the role of the biological parents (Jones, 2003).

Discipline roles for stepparents in stepfamilies needs to be developed over time. Stepchildren are more sensitized to discipline administered by stepparents (Everett, 2002). Stepparents initially should support the discipline administered by the biological parent (Hetherington, 1999). After that, over time, discipline can develop into decisions that coparents craft together. This also appears to instigate less conflict between the spouses themselves (Everett, 2002). Becoming a mentor to stepchildren rather than a disciplinarian is reported to be a more productive way of relating to stepchildren (Felker, et al., 2002). At the minimum, parental authority by stepparents should follow authoritative guidelines and be supportive, monitor children’s behavior, but pass up such harsh penalties such as hitting the child (Amato & Fowler, 2002; Coleman et al., 2000).

**Schedule:** 15 minutes prior to the scheduled time for beginning, the presenter should greet the learners as they arrive, provide them with nametags, and offer them a place to sit during the class time.

(10 to 15 minutes) Have the groups from the previous week present their remaining examples of developing intimacy and healthy boundaries. Have class members review why it is important to have intimacy and healthy boundaries. Have learners explain the difference between intimacy in instant love. Have learners explain why it is important to maintain healthy boundaries within stepfamilies.
(5 minutes) Present to learners the concept of discipline being an extension of intimacy. Explain that it is very important in stepfamilies first to get used to each other, especially the family members that are the stepparent and stepchildren in the household. It is imperative, in this case that discipline be done as a last resort by the stepparent. The initial relationships between the stepparent and stepchild should be one of mentoring the child and supporting the discipline of the biological parents. Eventually, after a genuine friendship is developed, stepparents may want to take on the role of being a co-player in discipline matters.

(30 minutes) Instructor will introduce the different types of parenting:

- coercive (name calling, spanking/slapping, bullying)

- lenient (anything goes, kids will be kids, so what if they misbehave every so often?)

- neglectful (the children parent themselves most of the time; I have other things to worry about)

- rational (we discuss things as a family, the house is run somewhat as a democracy, when there is disciplining to be done, I try to be fair, I give consequences that make sense and fit the offense)

- controlling (it’s my way or the highway, it’s my house and my rules the majority of the time)

The instructor will use the 5 scenarios and have learners act each discipline scenario out. Learners will be divided up into 5 groups and allowed 10 minutes to work out their “skit”. At the end, learners will choose a method of discipline and explain why, overall, it is the best choice for parenting in stepfamilies.

The instructor at the conclusion of this discussion points out what makes scenario four,
also known as authoritative parenting, used more in effective stepfamilies. This type of behavior goes along with parental support (such as helping with everyday problems), parental monitoring (such as knowing where the child is when s/he goes out with friends and who the friends are), “catching the child being good”, praising the child, and showing affection.

(10 minutes) Students should discuss how they will use/do use authoritative parenting in their own household. Then, as an assignment for the coming week, students need to report back an incident where they use authoritative parenting.

(30 minutes) Social hour! Group facilitator should circulate around the room accommodating the formation of friendships and talk. Be sure to thank those who brought treats for the group for the night. Remind those who are bringing treats for the following week.

As the social hour ends, thank students for coming.
Scenarios for Program Entitled
Successful Stepfamilies:  A Family Life Education Program To Address Unique Needs
To be Used With
Lesson Plan Six
Unit 4, Lesson 2

Lesson Title:  “Positive Relationships with the Children and the Adults Who Parent Them: Discipline in the Effective Stepfamily”

Scenario One: coercive (name calling, spanking/slapping, bullying)
Players:  Stepmom, Dad, and Little Jo

Little Jo has just come in from outside playing.  He is covered with mud from head to toe.  Jo’s Stepmom and Dad are furious with him!  “Little Jo,” screams his Dad, “Didn’t we tell you not to get dirty?  Tonight is the night that we are to go to your Grandma’s and celebrate our first year as a stepfamily!”  Little Jo starts to cry in a loud wail.  Joe’s Stepmom says, “What did you eat for breakfast?  A big bowl of stupid flakes?”  This makes Little Joe cry even louder.  Dad says, “Come over here Jo!  I’m really going to give you something to cry about!”

Scenario Two: lenient (anything goes, kids will be kids, so what if they misbehave every so often?)
Players:  Stepmom, Dad, and Little Jo

Little Jo has just come in from outside playing.  He is covered with mud from head to toe.  Jo’s Stepmom and Dad are sitting on the couch.  They look up and start to laugh.  Little Jo looks down at his clothes and smiles.  Little Jo says, “When are we leaving to go see Grandma?  I can’t wait for her to see my clothes!  But she might be mad!”  Dad says, “Yes, Grandma probably will be mad, but so what?  Boys will be boys.  Besides, that new white carpet and furniture of hers needs to be broken in!”  Stepmom agrees, “Yeah!  If she gets mad, then I guess the three of us will just go out for burgers!”
**Scenarios for Program Entitled**
Successful Stepfamilies: A Family Life Education Program To Address Unique Needs
To be Used With
Lesson Plan Six
Unit 4, Lesson 2

**Lesson Title:** “Positive Relationships with the Children and the Adults Who Parent Them: Discipline in the Effective Stepfamily”

Scenario three: neglectful (the children parent themselves most of the time; I have other things to worry about)
Players: Stepmom, Dad, and Little Jo

Little Jo runs in from outdoors. He is filthy and caked with mud. His nose is bleeding and he is crying. He calls out, “Stepmom! Dad! Where is everyone?” There is no one home. Little Joe wipes the blood on his already filthy t-shirt and sits down to watch TV. Hours later and well after dinner time, Stepmom and Dad walk in. They start for their bedroom, but Little Jo stops them and says, “I’m hungry!” Dad says, “Sorry to hear that Little Jo! We had a big dinner with Grandma. I guess you’ll just have to find something in the cupboard to eat.” Stepmom says, “I’m tired everyone, so I’ll say goodnight now.” Little Joe is left alone in the living room to fend for himself.
Scenarios for Program Entitled
Successful Stepfamilies:  A Family Life Education Program To Address Unique Needs
To be Used With
Lesson Plan Six
Unit 4, Lesson 2

Lesson Title:  “Positive Relationships with the Children and the Adults Who Parent Them:  Discipline in the Effective Stepfamily”

Senario 4:  rational (we discuss things as a family, the house is run somewhat as a democracy, when there is disciplining to be done, we try to be fair, we give consequences that make sense and fit the offense)

Players:  Stepmom, Dad, and Little Jo

Little Jo runs in the house.  He is muddy from playing outdoors.  Stepmom and Dad greet him at the door.  Stepmom says, “Hey Jo, didn’t I tell you that we are going to Grandma’s tonight to eat dinner?”  Jo says, “Yeah, I guess you did.”  Dad says, “What’s up?  If you knew that we were going to Grandma’s and had to leave for dinner, then why are you all dirty?”  Jo says, “I was having so much fun, I guess I just forgot.”  Dad says, “I can understand how you might have been having fun, but now you’ll have to clean up before we go to Grandma’s and that’s going to make us late.  What do you think about that?”  Jo says, “I should have been thinking about keeping my promise to stay clean so that we could make it to Grandma’s house on time.  I’m sorry!”  Dad says, “OK, but to remind you to be on time next time, I’m going to take the amount of time that you make us late tonight and deduct it from your bedtime.  Now hurry and get cleaned up so that your punishment won’t be so bad.”  Jo goes to his room to clean up and get ready to go.
Scenarios for Program Entitled
Successful Stepfamilies: A Family Life Education Program To Address Unique Needs
To be Used With
Lesson Plan Six
Unit 4, Lesson 2

Lesson Title: “Positive Relationships with the Children and the Adults Who Parent Them: Discipline in the Effective Stepfamily”

Scenario five: controlling (it’s my way or the highway, it’s my house and my rules the majority of the time)

Players: Stepmom, Dad, and Little Jo

Little Jo runs in the house. He is muddy from playing outdoors. Stepmom and Dad greet him at the door. Dad says, “Hey Jo! What have we told you about getting dirty when you’re in this house?” Little Jo starts to cry. Stepmom yells, “Joe, you are in big trouble now! What were you thinking when you decided not to follow your Dad and my rules?” Dad screams, “That’s it! I’m tired of your total disobedience to us and our rules! Either you follow the rules around here, or don’t let the door hit you in the butt too hard on the way out!” Little Jo screams back, “Why is everything such a big deal to you guys? It’s just a little dirt! I hate you! I’m going to live at Mom’s!” Dad says, “I’ll help you pack your bags.”
Lesson Plan Seven
Unit 5, Lesson 1

Lesson Title: “So What about Our Relationship? Couples Establishing Strong, Cohesive Bonds”

Total Time: 1 hour of instructional time and about 30 minutes for couples to socialize upon completion of formal class time.

Goal: Learners will learn to have a better relationship as a couple, and as a result, as a family.

Objective:

1. Learners will learn how to separate their feelings about the marriage from feelings about parenting to become more realistic about the actual relationship as a couple.
2. Learners will develop positive interaction both within the family, and as a couple.

Materials: Chart paper or chalk board with chalk, or white board with markers, pencils, pens, nametags (if still needed), VCR or DVD player with tapes to accommodate type of player (VHS or DVD) entitled “Stepmom” and “Rhapsody in Bloom”

Room Set-up: tables and/or desks with enough chairs for everyone, all chairs should be in rows and facing forward so that player is able to be seen. Chairs can be moved into a circle for discussion times. Temperature in the room should be neither too hot or cold to facilitate the comfort of the participants.

Background Information:

Systems theory sees the relationship between the husband and wife in a stepfamily as an example of a subsystem (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993; White & Klein, 2002). All of the relationships in the stepfamily, at one level or another are examples of subsystems. If the relationship between the husband and wife is not functional, this is symptomatic that the whole family, which is subsystems of interrelated parts, is symptomatic (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993; White & Klein, 2002). This demonstrates the theoretical importance of a good relationship between the couple in a stepfamily.

Marriages subsequent to first marriages differ fundamentally from first marriages. They are considered by the spouses to be less a romantic endeavor and more a match of practicality (Coleman et al., 2000; Lamb, 1999). Additionally, spouses view each other as equal partners (Lamb, 1999). While reporting that they find remarriage as satisfying as first marriages, couples also have more negative interactions in second marriages (Lamb, 1999). Coleman, Ganong, and Fine (2000) notes that most of the conflict centers on children from previous relationships.
Further adding to this conflict is the shortening of the period of time and opportunity to get to know each other as a couple (Felker et al., 2002). This is directly a product of the couple being an immediate family with children who have transitioning and parenting needs that must be attended to simultaneously (Felker et al., 2002). This makes establishing and maintaining the relationship as a couple less of a priority in stepfamilies.

Ironically, a turning point in second marriage relationships seems to come about as the result of becoming parenting partners (Afifi, 2003; Felker et al., 2002). This is typified in the relationship as a point in the marriage when the spouses agree that they are fundamentally committed to each other and the relationship, and, as a result, honoring the marital commitment (Felker et al., 2002; Golish, 2003). This transition seems to make a significant difference in how much inclusion the stepparent feels as well as how connected to the family that the stepparent is evaluated as being. Demonstration of the couple in the stepfamily as having this unified front included showing outward affection for each other (Golish, 2003). This enables the children to see how important the relationship is to the biological parent and thus make the couple’s relationship more valuable to everyone in the household (Golish, 2003).

This clarification of commitment seems to be based on determination and creativity. In situations where there are few occasions to cultivate the relationship of the couple, novel solutions must be initiated. Couples who can separate how they feel about their marriage from how they feel about parenting the children tend to have more successful remarriages (Benson-Von Der, 1987).

Schedule: 15 minutes prior to the scheduled time for beginning, the presenter should greet the learners as they arrive, provide them with nametags, and offer them a place to sit during the class time.

(10 Minutes) Review authoritative parenting and share some family stories from over the week where authoritative parenting either was used or could have been used.

(5 Minutes) Segue: In effective stepfamilies, couples decide early on that they are committed to their relationship and intend to make their marriage work. There is a realization that they must come together as a united front to the children in order for the family to unite. This front must be obvious to the children involved in the stepfamily. Sometimes this means that couples model what they feel for each other to the children. Couples who openly (but appropriately) display affection and coalition in front of the children not only are providing a good model of what happy couples and marriages
look like for their children, but they are also showing the children how much they care for each other and how much they value their relationship. If the children see that the couple’s bond is important to their biological parent, and that it makes the parent happy, then it will become important to the child as well.

(30 minutes)
(Film Clips are selected as the result of:

The presentation of the partnership between the point that the parent introduces the new partner into the lives of the children. The following clips show couples telling the children of their plans for remarriage to their new partners. Watch each clip and compare the two. Look for which clip you think is the more appropriate model for telling the children about plans for remarriage. Look for specific reasons why one is better than the other scenario. Instructor could chart on chart paper as whole group discusses.

Show clip from movie, “Stepmom,” starting at 47 minutes, 38 seconds and ending at 49 minutes, 31 seconds. Then, before beginning next film clip, briefly have learners synopszie what the learners have seen in the clip. Write this on the charting paper. Next, show the film clip from the movie, “Rhapsody in Bloom,” beginning at 30 minutes, 4 seconds and ending at 32 minutes, 20 seconds. Briefly synopszie the clip and chart this synopsis on the chart paper. Then compare and contrast which model has the most potential for success and what specifically brings learners to this conclusion. Chart these ideas on chart paper.

(5 minutes)

Have learners come up with some best strategies, overall, that can aid in the stepfamily accepting the relationship of the couple and even move toward valuing this relationship.
(10 minutes) As a group, come up with some ways that couples can find time to nurture their own relationship outside of the relationship they have with the stepfamily, particularly the children. Chart some things that couples can do with the entire family to nurture their relationships and chart these suggestions.

(30 minutes) Social hour! Group facilitator should circulate around the room accommodating the formation of friendships and talk. Be sure to thank those who brought treats for the group for the night. Remind those who are bringing treats for the following week.

As the social hour ends, thank students for coming.
Lesson Plan Eight
Unit 5, Lesson 2

Lesson Title: “So What about Our Relationship? Learning to be Partners”

Total Time: 1 hour of instructional time and about 30 minutes for couples to socialize upon completion of formal class time.

Goal: Learners will learn partnership formation and how this leads to effective stepfamily interactions.

Objective:

1. Learners will enhance previous knowledge about forming partnerships and apply this to their relationships.
2. Learners will enhance knowledge about stress in stepfamily couples and learn how sharing about this stress (coping) will enhance their effectiveness as a couple.

Materials: Chart paper or chalk board with chalk, or white board with markers, pencils, pens, nametags (if still needed), scenarios to read to the class and discuss

Room Set-up: tables and/or desks with enough chairs for everyone, all chairs should be in rows and facing forward so that player is able to be seen. Chairs can be moved into a circle for discussion times. Temperature in the room should be neither too hot or cold to facilitate the comfort of the participants.

Background Information:

Becoming parental partners includes both parents involved in the stepfamily presenting a united front to the children. This union between parents can sometimes have the complication of making the child feel as if the biological parent is siding with the stepparent. However, in the long run, the child learns to accept the parental role of the stepparent, the credibility of the stepparent goes up with both the child and the spouse, and loyalty conflicts are lessened (Afifi, 2003). This establishment of partnership between parents in stepfamilies follows predictable patterns. Literature offers four stages: (Visher & Visher, 2001)

- bond formation between the parenting couple,
- valuation by both partners that all parenting is important and valid to the children that reside in the household,
- acceptance of the biological parent that the stepparent has credible stepparenting skills, and finally
- sharing power with respect to the child with all households including the non-residential parent.

Acknowledging and dealing with stress in the marriage can be a useful strategy for coparents in a stepfamily to employ (Arnaut, et al., 2000). Often, partners do not talk
about the stress of dealing with the stepfamily and all of the sources of stress that can arise as a result of the situation. This is exemplified by dealing with the ex-spouse (Felker et al., 2002). Dealing with an ex-spouse may result in stress for the co-parents. If this is acknowledged, coping strategies can be employed that will assist. This acknowledgement puts the co-parents in a situation of not only understanding the stress, but also coping in productive, unifying ways (Felker et al., 2002). Not only does this serve to illustrate a concept, but it also shows that maintaining a conflict-free relationship with the ex-spouse is also valuable in the stepfamily.

Schedule: 15 minutes prior to the scheduled time for beginning, the presenter should greet the learners as they arrive, provide them with nametags, and offer them a place to sit during the class time.

(15 minutes) Review some of the things that we know about the couples’ relationship in stepfamilies. Instructor presents the 4 stages couples go through in a typical stepfamily:

1. bond formation between the parenting couple,
2. evaluation by both partners that all parenting is important and valid to the children that reside in the household,
3. acceptance of the biological parent that the stepparent has credible stepparenting skills, and finally
4. sharing power with respect to the child with all households including the non-residential parent.

Present scenarios and have students evaluate where the scenario participants are in the continuum and how the scenarios could be geared toward more successful interactions among the family members:

Scenario 1 (Stage 1)
John and Sue, Mary’s new stepchildren, have just come in from school. Mary greets them at the door and tells them to sit down to do their homework before going outside to play. The children both balk at the thought of having to do their homework right away. They begin to yell at Mary and tell her that she’s not their mother and she can’t make them do that! Ted, Mary’s new husband and father of John and Sue enters the room. He asks what’s going on. John and Sue tell Ted what is going on as Mary stands with her arms crossed across her chest. Ted, after listening to the children’s account says, “That’s OK kids, you can go play outside for now.”
Focus Questions (Instructor could chart on chart paper as the group discusses):

- What stage does this scenario illustrate?
- What do you think Mary will say next?
- What do you think of Ted’s proposal?
- Do you think that they picked an appropriate place to have their discussion?
- How could this scenario be made to play out better for everyone?
- What sorts of advanced planning could be made in order to make this situation a non-issue?

Scenario 2 (stage 2)

Janey and Bill have been married for 5 months. Janey’s eighteen year old daughter lives with them and is getting ready for a big date. Janey brings Julie, her daughter, down the steps to show Bill how nice she looks in her dress. Janey then informs Bill that she and Julie have decided that Julie’s curfew will be extended from the normal midnight curfew to 2 am. Bill looks surprised and says, “I thought I already set the rule that Julie will be home by midnight. What do you think you’re doing making a new curfew behind my back?” Julie says to Bill, “Hey! don’t yell at my mom! You don’t make my rules! You’re not even my real Dad! Besides, I’m eighteen and I don’t have to follow your dumb rules!” Bill says, “This is my house and you will follow my rules or you will get out!”

Focus Questions (Instructor could chart on chart paper as the group discusses):

- What type of parenting do you see here?
- What type of parenting might work better?
- How would this parenting look in comparison with what is going on now in this scenario?
- What stage does this scenario illustrate?
- How could Bill and Janey handle this differently so that things could work out more peacefully?
- What some of the mistakes that took place with Janey?
• What were some of the mistakes that Bill made?

Scenario 3 (Stage 3)
Don is stepdad to Kevin and Sue. Don is feeding dinner to the two children as the biological dad, Rick, walks in. Rick says his hellos to everyone sitting around the table. Rick then begins asking the children if their homework is done. Sue says that Don doesn’t make them do their homework until after dinner. Rick says, “Well sure! That’s just great for Don because I have you after dinner! I can’t understand why you can’t have the children do their homework when they’re at your house Don!”

Focus Questions (Instructor could chart on chart paper as the group discusses):
What stage does this scenario illustrate?
How do you know?
What do you think Don is feeling as Rick is talking to him?
What do you think the kids are thinking as Don and Rick are talking?
How could this scenario played out better?

Scenario 4 (Stage 4)
Luis and Kim were formerly married and are biological parents to Sam. Kim is now married to Ray. Ray, Luis, and Kim are seated around the dining room table. A discussion is going on about Sam’s most recent grade card. Luis says, “I just don’t understand Sam’s grades! I know he’s smarter than this!” Kim agrees. Ray says, “Maybe we should look into having Sam tested for learning disabilities. It does seem that he’s smart enough but something is holding him back.” Luis says, “hey, that’s a great suggestions! Kim, why don’t you call and talk to the teacher about that?” Kim says, “well, Luis, you weren’t so red-hot when it came to school. If Sam has a learning disability, it’s probably all your fault anyway. You call the school!”
Focus Questions (Instructor could chart on chart paper as the group discusses):
What stage does this scenario illustrate?
What makes you think so?
What were some of the good things that you heard in this scenario?
What are some of the things that this family could work on?

Have class divide into 4 groups and come up with some situations that are either factual or contrived about their own household and forming partnerships. Have each group talk about how the situation presented could become more of an opportunity to make partnerships with some of the skills learned in this class.

(30 minutes)

Social hour! Group facilitator should circulate around the room accommodating the formation of friendships and talk. Be sure to thank those who brought treats for the group for the night. Remind those who are bringing treats for the following week.

As the social hour ends, thank students for coming.
Lesson Plan Nine
Unit 6, Lesson 1

Lesson Title: “Cooperative Relationships with the Former Spouse: How to get along with the Ex Even if You Don’t See Eye-to-Eye”

Total Time: 1 hour of instructional time and about 30 minutes for couples to socialize upon completion of class time.

Goal: Development of productive relationship between the ex-spouse and the adult coparents in the stepfamily.

Objectives:

1. Learners will examine why it is best for cooperative relationships to exist between the ex-spouse and the stepfamily.
2. Learners will come up with some strategies that will enable relationships between the ex-spouse to be productive.
3. Learners will select some strategies that they can use in their own situations that will ease the establishment of productive relationships with their ex-spouse (or the ex-spouse of their partner).

Materials: Chart paper or chalk board with chalk, or white board with markers, pencils, pens, nametags (if still needed)

Room Set-up: tables and/or desks with enough chairs for everyone, all chairs should initially be in a circle to accommodate playing a game, then be moved into rows and facing forward so that movie is able to be seen by all participants. Chairs can be moved again at the completion of the movie clips into a circle to better accommodate a discussion forum. The temperature in the room should be neither too hot or cold to facilitate the comfort of the participants.

Background Information:

Problematic for adults and children alike are relationships with the non-custodial parent. Relationships among the adults involved in parenting the child, whether custodial or not, must remain as free from conflict as possible. If the child is especially close to the non-custodial parent, this may further retard progress in becoming close with the stepparent (Isaacs, 2003). If the ex-spouse can support the stepfamily and its formation, this can enhance relationships between the children and stepparent. Therefore, it can be surmised that getting along with the ex-spouse has benefits for everyone in the family. In many stepfamilies, relationships between ex-spouses can prove to be riddled with conflict (Afifi, 2003). This can lead to such undesirable behaviors for the child as the child having to communicate between the spouses for the parents themselves.
This is undesirable because this can lead to loyalty conflict on the part of the child and further confound the stepfamily establishing healthy family relationships (Felker et al., 2002). This makes it imperative that ex-spouses negotiate some kind of relationship without conflict.

Further, systems theory establishes that there is importance to a peaceful relationship with the ex-spouse for the whole system, or stepfamily, to function effectively. Family systems theory has defined the relationships that extend beyond the borders in which the child resides most of the time and their effect as the degree of permeability (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993; White & Klein, 2002). Because of the varying environments that the child must live in, and the overlap these environments must have as a product of divorce in general, the relationship between the stepfamily and the ex-spouse is fundamentally more important. Peace and stability between both biological and stepparents is inherently required for the most seamless adjustment process of the child (Amato 2000; Amato & Fowler, 2002; Arditti, 1999; Benson-Von Der, 1987; Booth & Dunn, 1994; Everett, 2002; Gangong, Coleman et al., 1998; Isaacs, 2002; Mahoney, 2000; Manning & Smock, 2000).

If relationships between the ex-spouses are problematic, interactions should focus on the children and their upbringing (Afifi, 2003; Braithwaite et al., 2003; Felker et al., 2002). In relationships functioning in this manner, rarely did the interactions of these adults focus on large problems, but instead, focused on requests or sharing of information involving the child (Afifi, 2003; Braithwaite et al., 2003). The goal of the conversations among the adults was not to maintain a relationship between the two or even to evaluate the relationship between the adults (Braithwaite et al., 2003). In the long term, if these positive interactions achieve the child getting to see the non-custodial parent without restriction, the relationships among the members of stepfamilies are perceived more positively (Everett, 2002).

Keeping the children out of the middle of any conflicts that might occur between biological parents is imperative (Felker et al., 2002; Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2000). Often, children are the sole support for the biological parent during and after the divorce. It is important that children not be involved with what goes on between the biological parents at this time and later during formation of new families. This involvement is unhealthy for both the biological parents and the child (Wallerstein et al., 2000).

To keep things healthy for the parents, both biological and stepparents, and to facilitate healthy bonds in the stepfamily, alternate forms of communication, rather than face-to-face interactions, should be considered. These interactions between parents may be held best over the telephone or by email (Braithwaite et al., 2003).

The importance of good relationships between ex-spouses is established in a study done by Isaacs (2002). He found that tumultuous relationships between the biological parents can make the child’s adjustment in a stepfamily more difficult. Additionally, Visher and Visher (2001) added that the child loosing the relationship with the non-residential parent can have such detrimental effects as lowering the self-esteem of the child or even cause the child to idealize the absent parent to the point where the parents in the stepfamily cannot compete. Therefore, not only is it imperative that the relationship between ex-spouses remain as conflict-free as possible, but maintaining the relationship with the other biological parent is crucial to the child in important ways.
Schedule: 15 minutes prior to the scheduled time for beginning, the presenter should greet the learners as they arrive, provide them with nametags, and offer them a place to sit during the class time.

(15 Minutes)

Introduction: In the last lesson, we saw that one the stages of partnering has to do with the ex-spouse. Which stage is this (stage 4). How does the ex-spouse have anything to do with partnering? What is something that can be done to make partnering with the ex-spouse go more smoothly at this stage of partnership development? Tonight, we are going to talk about working with the ex-spouse and why it is so important. We will also talk about what can be done to facilitate a productive relationship between households. First, we are going to play a game to illustrate the importance of communication with the ex-spouse. The game is called telephone.

Procedures:
The instructor has everyone seated in a circle. Very quietly, s/he whispers into the ear of the person sitting next to her a message such as, “My cat is colored yellow and her name is Tasha.” The message can only be said one time, and then the person who received the message passes it along to the next person sitting adjacent to them in the same manner as the instructor did. When the message has gone all the way around the circle, the last person tells the entire group what the content of the message they received was. At this point, the instructor should write the original message up on a piece of chart paper (or use the chalk board, or some other way that the message can be shared with the entire group through written message).

Focus Questions:
What do you think this game illustrates as far as communication with the ex-spouse?
What are some reasons that you might not directly communicate with your spouse?
Who might have to take messages back and forth between households?
Why might this be problematic?
Instructor then stresses that in the model of the effective stepfamily, ex-spouses strive to never put children in the middle of communication between households. They find ways of communicating directly between the spouses even if the relationship is less-than-ideal between the adults thus lessening confusion between adults and making children more secure in their role as the child.

(15 minutes)

Brainstorm some things that can be done in effective stepfamilies to overcome difficulties with the ex-spouse. For this activity, the instructor can set up chart paper in 4 areas of the room and divide the whole group up into 4 smaller groups. The groups then can brainstorm answers to each question and put their best one response up on the board. A signal will then be given and the groups can rotate around the room until all chart papers have at least 4 suggestions. The brainstorming can take place on questions such as:

- When communicating with the ex-spouse, communication doesn’t have to be done face-to-face. It can be done by:
  
  * Answers could include
  * email
  * Telephone
  * Snail mail

- When communicating with the ex-spouse, it is best to talk only about things pertaining to the children and parenting if the relationship is contentious. These things could include:
  
  * Answers could include
  * School meetings
  * Pick-up times
  * Sports schedules

When communicating with the ex-spouse, it is best to not involve the children in the middle or make the children feel as if they need to defend the other parent. This includes:

  * Answers could include
  * Not talking in front of the children about other parent’s faults,
Not making the stepparent solely responsible for communicating with the ex-spouse,
Making opportunity for talking directly with the ex-spouse when necessity dictates

If talking with the ex-spouse causes tension, be upfront about that with your partner and come up with some ways that this tension might be diffused like:

Answers could include
Going to another room after talking with the ex-spouse and talking privately with your partner about what issues in the conversation were upsetting,
Having a signal that lets your partner know who is on the phone to let them know that this phone call must be kept private from the children but you can talk about it later,
Learning to laugh about the pettiness that might be causing you stress in your conversation with the ex-spouse and seeing the humor in it with your partner later.

When thinking of how to treat your ex-spouse, it is best to think of it like working with a business associate. Some of the things that would be important to think about then are:

Answers could include
Never using foul language
Using a polite tone of voice

End discussion by having learners indicate which solutions would work the best for them in their situations and why.

Cue learners that next week, they should have some examples of communications between their family and their former spouse that they want to examine in-depth.

(30 minutes)

Social hour! Group facilitator should circulate around the room accommodating the formation of friendships and talk. Be sure to thank those who brought treats for the group for the night.
Remind those who are bringing treats for the following week.

As the social hour ends, thank students for coming.
Lesson Plan Ten
Unit 6, Lesson 2

Lesson Title: “Cooperative Relationships with the Former Spouse: The Continuation of How to Get Along with the Ex Even if You Don't See Eye-to-Eye”

Total Time: 1 hour of instructional time and about 30 minutes for couples to socialize upon completion of class time.

Goal: Making communications between ex-spouses more effective.

Objectives:

1. Learners will evaluate communications between ex-spouses exemplified in movie clips and come up with how the communications were effective and how they needed assistance.
2. Learners will come up with real life examples of communications between ex-spouses and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses.

Materials: paper (one sheet per participant), pens, pencils, VCR or DVD player with tapes to accommodate type of player (VHS or DVD) entitled “Stepmom,” “Man of the House,” “Monkey Trouble,” and, “Life as a House.”

Room Set-up: tables and/or desks with enough chairs for everyone, all chairs should initially be moved into rows and facing forward so that students can write on a comfortable surface and so that the movie is able to be seen by all participants. Chairs can be moved again at the completion of the movie clips into a circle to better accommodate a discussion forum. The temperature in the room should be neither too hot or cold to facilitate the comfort of the participants.

Background Information:

Problematic for adults and children alike are relationships with the non-custodial parent. Relationships among the adults involved in parenting the child, whether custodial or not, must remain as free from conflict as possible. If the child is especially close to the non-custodial parent, this may further retard progress in becoming close with the stepparent (Isaacs, 2003). If the ex-spouse can support the stepfamily and its formation, this can enhance relationships between the children and stepparent. Therefore, it can be surmised that getting along with the ex-spouse has benefits for everyone in the family.

In many stepfamilies, relationships between ex-spouses can prove to be riddled with conflict (Afifi, 2003). This can lead to such undesirable behaviors for the child as the child having to communicate between the spouses for the parents themselves. This is undesirable because this can lead to loyalty conflict on the part of the child and further confound the stepfamily establishing healthy family relationships (Felker et al,
This makes it imperative that ex-spouses negotiate some kind of relationship without conflict.

Further, systems theory establishes that there is importance to a peaceful relationship with the ex-spouse for the whole system, or stepfamily, to function effectively. Family systems theory has defined the relationships that extend beyond the borders in which the child resides most of the time and their effect as the degree of permeability (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993; White & Klein, 2002). Because of the varying environments that the child must live in, and the overlap these environments must have as a product of divorce in general, the relationship between the stepfamily and the ex-spouse is fundamentally more important. Peace and stability between both biological and stepparents is inherently required for the most seamless adjustment process of the child (Amato 2000; Amato & Fowler, 2002; Arditti, 1999; Benson-Von Der, 1987; Booth & Dunn, 1994; Everett, 2002; Gangong, Coleman et al., 1998; Isaacs, 2002; Mahoney, 2000; Manning & Smock, 2000).

If relationships between the ex-spouses are problematic, interactions should focus on the children and their upbringing (Afifi, 2003; Braithwaite et al., 2003; Felker et al., 2002). In relationships functioning in this manner, rarely did the interactions of these adults focus on large problems, but instead, focused on requests or sharing of information involving the child (Afifi, 2003; Braithwaite et al., 2003). The goal of the conversations among the adults was not to maintain a relationship between the two of the or even to evaluate the relationship between the adults (Braithwaite et al., 2003). In the long term, if these positive interactions achieve the child getting to see the non-custodial parent without restriction, the relationships among the members of stepfamilies are perceived more positively (Everett, 2002).

Keeping the children out of the middle of any conflicts that might occur between biological parents is imperative (Felker et al., 2002; Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2000). Often, children are the sole support for the biological parent during and after the divorce. It is important that children not be involved with what goes on between the biological parents at this time and later during formation of new families. This involvement is unhealthy for both the biological parents and the child (Wallerstein et al., 2000).

To keep things functional for the parents, both biological and stepparents, and to facilitate healthy bonds in the stepfamily, alternate forms of communication, rather than face-to-face interactions, should be considered. These interactions between parents may be held best over the telephone or by email (Braithwaite et al., 2003).

The importance of good relationships between ex-spouses is established in a study done by Isaacs (2002). He found that tumultuous relationships between the biological parents can make the child’s adjustment in a stepfamily more difficult. Additionally, Visher and Visher (2001) added that the child loosing the relationship with the non-residential parent can have such detrimental effects as lowering the self-esteem of the child or even cause the child to idealize the absent parent to the point where the parents in the stepfamily cannot compete. Therefore, not only is it imperative that the relationship between ex-spouses remain as conflict-free as possible, but maintaining the relationship with the other biological parent is crucial to the child in important ways.
Schedule: 15 minutes prior to the scheduled time for beginning, the presenter should greet the learners as they arrive, provide them with nametags, and offer them a place to sit during the class time.

(5 minutes) Review with learners some of the strategies that effective stepfamilies use in dealing with the ex-spouse from last week.

(10 minutes) Review assignment from last week where learners were to come up with some examples from their own communications with their own ex-spouse (or those of their partner’s communications with their ex-spouse). Have students write an example of their choosing of this communication and keep this communication anonymous so that it can be used in a group activity. Have students fold and put communication in a box designated at the front of the room.

(30 minutes) (Film Clips are selected as the result of:

Instructor will then exemplify some other important things to think about in the relationship with the ex-spouse by showing some movie clips including:

- “Stepmom,” starting at 31 minutes, 58 seconds and ending at 32 minutes, 47 seconds exemplifying keeping children out of the middle,
- “Man of the House,” starting at 35 minutes, 39 seconds and ending at 39 minutes, 24 seconds exemplifying contentious relationship between the stepparent and the biological parent over issues regarding the child,
- “Monkey Trouble,” starting at 6 minutes, 21 seconds and ending at 7 minutes, 59 seconds exemplifying a peaceful drop off of children between homes,
- “Stepmom,” starting at 1 hour, 18 minutes, 10 seconds and ending at 1 hour, 19 minutes, and 51 seconds exemplifying
discussion of issues between stepparent and biological parent,

• “Life as a House,” starting at 44 minutes, 14 seconds and ending at 46 minutes, 5 seconds exemplifying biological parents’ concern over fitness of each other as parents to their child

As the movie clips finish, the learners can identify the problems and how the problems might be solved.

(15 minutes) The instructor will randomly select communication examples written at the beginning of the lesson for examination by the group. These communications will be analyzed for what went well and what could have been done better by the players to further instill methods of effective communication strategies when dealing with the ex-spouse.

(30 minutes) Social hour! Group facilitator should circulate around the room accommodating the formation of friendships and talk. Be sure to thank those who brought treats for the group for the night. Remind those who are bringing treats for the following week.

As the social hour ends, thank students for coming
Lesson Plan Eleven
Unit 7, Lesson 1

Lesson Title: “Culminating Effective Practice in Stepfamilies”

Total Time: 1 hour of instructional time and about 30 minutes for couples to socialize upon completion of class time.

Goal: To create a family plan that enhances effective behavior in stepfamilies for presentation in lesson #12.

Objective:

1. Learners will bring together strategies of effective stepfamilies presented during the duration of the course to provide them with a plan of action for their own stepfamilies.

Materials: Pens/pencils, several sheets of paper for each person in the class, enough handouts (obtained from pages lxiii through lxv) for 1 per each student.

Room Set-up: Desks and chairs enough for each participant set in either a large circle or moved into smaller groupings to accommodate participant discussion.

Background Information:

Schedule: 15 minutes prior to the scheduled time for beginning, the presenter should greet the learners as they arrive, provide them with nametags, and offer them a place to sit during the class time.

(1 hour) Students will be given the handout (page lxiii through lxv) summarizing lesson objectives presented in the class. Using and the help of the instructor and class participants, each couple will come up with a plan of action for developing effective practice in their own stepfamily. Plans will be required to contain:

- a plan for dealing with societal stigma,
- a plan for establishing routines and rituals in the household and some examples of what these routines and rituals will include,
- a plan for developing a unique family identity and some specific examples of strategies to achieve this unique identity,
- a discipline plan including developmental issues of both stepfamilies and children and
how the discipline plan will take into account these issues and the type of discipline to strive toward and examples of how this discipline will be used,

• a plan for establishing strong connections as a couple and some examples of how this will be achieved, and,
• a plan for dealing with the ex-spouse (or the ex-spouse of the partner) and how the desired relationship will be established by the partners.

If there is ample time, volunteers will share their plans with the group. This activity could carry over into the next week to give everyone a chance to share.

(30 minutes)

Social hour! Group facilitator should circulate around the room accommodating the formation of friendships and talk. Be sure to thank those who brought treats for the group for the night. Remind those who are bringing treats for the following week.

As the social hour ends, thank students for coming
Lesson Title: “Culminating Effective Practice in Stepfamilies”

Acknowledging societal stigma and developing a plan for support of stepfamilies, including:

- Awareness and development of the possibility for new public policies,
- communication between the stepfamily, teachers, the school, and the community at large,
- establishing a limited power of attorney for stepparents,
- information between stepparents and biological parents regarding the medical and educational history of each child in all households, and,
- membership in already existing groups or formation of groups with the specific purpose of supporting the stepfamily and its formation.

Addressing relationships in stepfamilies and educating couples about the processes innate in establishing these relationships, including:

- instituting routines and rhythms within the household that are predictable to facilitate children founding security,
- creating realistic expectations for how family life will be help avoid feelings of failure,
- seeking the assistance of family clinicians if pathology is a concern,
- inaugurating intimacy between members while setting up boundaries and authority, and
- defining a unique family identity.
Facilitating positive relationships between children and co-parents in the stepfamily, including:

- developing discipline over time and with authoritative parenting strategies in mind,
- parenting that includes an understanding of child development and the factors that affect the child included in the stepfamily, and,
- awareness of formation issues and the developmental process that emergent stepfamilies encounter.

Establishing strong, cohesive bonds among the couple themselves in stepfamilies, including:

- developing positive interaction both within the family and as a couple,
- separating how the couple feels about their marriage from how they feel about parenting to optimize the potential for a more successful marriage,
- encouraging partnership in the marital relationship as well as in the parenting connection, and,
- acknowledging and dealing with stress in the marriage.

Information about the founding of cooperative relationships with former spouses.

- Focusing interactions around the child and upbringing issues if the relationship between ex-spouses are problematic, and methods of contact should include telephone conversations and the internet to keep face-to-face meetings at a premium, and,
Observance by both parents of keeping the children out of the middle of any conflict, as well as managing conflict out of the environment of the children.
Lesson Plan Twelve
Unit 7, Lesson 2

Lesson Title: “Celebration of the Stepfamily”

**Total Time:** 30 minutes for administration of post test questionnaire, time for remainder of class to present their effective stepfamily plans (about 30 minutes), 30 minutes for socializing after formal class activities.

**Goal:** Presentation of Family Plans for Lesson Plan Eleven. Administration of Post-Test Questionnaires. Celebrating Stepfamilies.

**Objective:**

1. Students will be given the opportunity for presenting the compilation of what they have learned during the class through the presentation of their action plans for their effective stepfamily.

**Materials:** Family plans from lesson #11, enough post test questionnaires so that each participant can have one, pencils for marking post test questionnaires.

**Room Set-up:** For post test questionnaire administration, students should have desks and chairs set up in rows. Thereafter, desks and chairs should be set up in a large circle so that everyone can see and participate.

**Background Information:**

**Schedule:** 15 minutes prior to the scheduled time for beginning, the presenter should greet the learners as they arrive, provide them with nametags (if still necessary), and offer them a place to sit during the class time.

(30 minutes) Administration of post test questionnaire. Students should be encouraged to be quiet during the administration so that all students can read and concentrate as much as they need to. If students finish early, they should be encouraged to take a break, get a snack, and socialize outside the classroom until everyone is finished.

(30 minutes) Students share action plans from lesson #11 for how they will establish their own effective stepfamilies.
(30 minutes)

Social hour! Group facilitator should circulate around the room accommodating the formation of friendships and talk. Be sure to thank those who brought treats for the group for the night.

As the social hour ends, thank students for coming