



National Stepfamily
Resource Center

STEPFAMILY EDUCATION
PROGRAMS:
EVALUATIONS AND RESEARCH



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STEPFAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Three Primary Characteristics:

1. Prevention (vs. Treatment)

- Help families face common challenges
- Prevent problems from developing

(continued on next slide)



STEPFAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Three Primary Characteristics, continued:

2. Educating stepfamilies

- Typical stepfamily development processes
- Realistic expectations

3. Group Format

- Cost effective
- Reduce isolation, normalize experience



GENERAL RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Many relationship education programs

- See www.smartmarriages.com
- Several effective in improving couple communication and relationship quality



GENERAL RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION PROGRAMS: LIMITATIONS FOR STEPFAMILIES

- Designed for first-marriage couples without children from previous union
- Don't address many stepfamily challenges
- Language and examples suggest stepfamilies should look like first-marriage families



STEPFAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAMMING – WHAT IS AVAILABLE?

Advisable to use a stepfamily-specific relationship education program

Information on 8 programs in Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham (2004)

www.smartmarriages.com

- Program Type: Stepfamilies & Remarriage
- Program Type: Step-parenting Education



RESEARCH AND EVALUATIONS OF STEPFAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAMS: OVERVIEW

Very little research

- 21 programs with any evaluation
- Only 15 published
- Many limits to what the research tells us
 - Generally no comparison to controls
 - Small samples
 - No consistent measures

See Whitton, Nicholson, & Markman (2008)



RESEARCH AND EVALUATIONS: POSITIVE POINTS

1. Recent improvement

- Two programs evaluated vs controls
 - Improvement in certain parenting skills
 - Reduced unrealistic expectations for stepfamily life



RESEARCH AND EVALUATIONS: POSITIVE POINTS

2. SmartSteps evaluations

- Large sample
- Participants showed more knowledge, abilities, agreement between partners, and commitment after the program (vs. before program)



EDUCATION ABOUT STEPFAMILIES

Nearly all programs include this

Compared to controls:

- More knowledge about stepfamily life
- Reductions in unrealistic beliefs about stepfamilies

Subjective reports of:

- Stepfamily experience understanding
- Greater hopes for family
- Improved family satisfaction and harmony



STRENGTHENING AND PROTECTING THE COUPLE RELATIONSHIP

Half of evaluated programs

Valued by stepcouples

Participants perceive couple relationship improvements

Compared to controls:

- Learn skills to protect relationship
- No effects on relationship quality/satisfaction immediately after the program



COUPLE COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS

In over half of programs

Strong predictors of couple health and stability

Compared to controls:

- Improved family communication and conflict

After program, participants perceived:

- Less couple conflict about parenting
- More knowledge about healthy communication
- High satisfaction with these units



PARENTING AND STEPPARENTING

In majority of programs

- Appropriate discipline strategies
- Guidelines for step-parenting

Compared to controls:

- Improved parenting intentions and less over-reactive parenting BUT no effect on other parenting measures
- Improvement in parent-child communication BUT not in ineffective parenting.

Perceived improvement in coparenting, coercive parenting, and parenting efficacy



CO-PARENTING WITH CHILDREN'S OTHER PARENT

In several programs

- Strategies to create coparenting relationship
- Ways to resolve custody and visitation issues

Mixed findings re: effectiveness

- Explicit guidelines and strategies for coparenting may be necessary

Consumer satisfaction high



SUMMARY OF EXISTING RESEARCH EVALUATING STEPFAMILY EDUCATION

Programs are available

Supported by clinical and theoretical evidence

The small body of program evaluation studies provides preliminary support for effectiveness

- Participants report improvement from pre- to post-intervention in important areas



APA GUIDELINES FOR EVIDENCE BASED TREATMENTS (SILVERMAN & HINSHAW, 2008)

Well-Established Treatments:

- ≥ 2 good experiments, conducted in ≥ 2 independent settings and by independent teams, that show the treatment to be:
 - superior to placebo or to another treatment OR
 - equivalent to an established treatment in experiments with sufficient power to detect moderate differences

Probably Efficacious Treatments:

- ≥ 2 good studies showing the treatment is superior to a wait-list control group OR
- ≥ 1 good experiments meeting all Well-Established Treatment Criteria other than evaluation in 2 settings by 2 teams



APA GUIDELINES FOR EVIDENCE BASED TREATMENTS, CONT.

Possibly Efficacious Treatments:

- At least one good study showing the treatment to be efficacious in the absence of conflicting evidence

To learn more:

- <http://www.abct.org/Professionals/?m=mPro&fa=WhatIsEBP>
- <http://www.ebbp.org/>



STEPFAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAM EVALUATION: SUMMARY

Where we stand:

No programs considered even “possibly efficacious” by
APA standards

- Participants generally improve
- But, not clear that participants improve more than controls



STEPFAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAM EVALUATION: SUMMARY

Where we need to go:

Need more well-designed program evaluations

This will increase confidence that programs will help stepfamilies and help identify best practice.

