

## FIND A STEPFAMILY EXPERT

Updated October 1, 2024

**We are a group of scholars and professionals who study and work with stepfamilies and post-divorce families among our topics of expertise. We list areas of expertise below, short bios, and contact information. Please reach out to experts directly. If you need assistance, contact Dawn O. Braithwaite [dbraithwaite@unl.edu](mailto:dbraithwaite@unl.edu); 402 540-8414.**

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### **Katie L Acosta, PhD, Professor**

**Main expertise: Illuminating the myriad ways LBQ mixed-race families are formed and reformed**

#### **Stepfamily Expertise:**

- Navigating conflict among multiple LBQ parents after a relationship dissolution
- Mothering in a same sex household after a heterosexual relationship dissolution
- Deciding to expand LBQ stepfamilies after a relationship dissolution
- Cultivating social visibility for mixed-race LBQ stepfamilies
- Advocating for LBQ families in family courts during divorce and or custody disputes

#### **Related Topics:**

- Advocating for immigrant and mixed-citizenship status families
- Thriving LBQ stepfamilies despite their legal invisibility
- Understanding the complexities of Interracial relationships among LBQ women
- Experiencing the loss of heterosexual privilege after coming out.

#### **Contact Information:**

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#### **Bio:**

Katie L. Acosta is Professor of Sociology at Georgia State University. She studies how LBQ racially minoritized individuals build community by blending their origin and choice families. She has written two books: *Amigas y Amantes: Sexually Nonconforming Latinas Negotiate Family* and *Queer Stepfamilies: The Path to Social and Legal Recognition*. Additionally, her work appears in the *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, *Gender & Society*, *Family Relations*, *Sexualities*, *Journal of Homosexuality*, *Sexualities Research and Social Policy*.

#### **Sample Publications:**

Acosta, K. L. 2021. *Queer Stepfamilies: The Path to Social and Legal Recognition*. New York University Press, New York.

Acosta, K. L. 2017. "In the Event of Death": Lesbian Families' Plans to Preserve Stepparent-Child Relationships. *Family Relations*. 66 (2):244-257.

Acosta, K. L. 2013. *Amigas y Amantes: How Sexually Nonconforming Latinas Negotiate Family*. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick.

### Sample Media Links:

A Seat at the Table - Career Code Switching

<https://www.pbs.org/video/career-code-switching-wt0vbz/>

Plural Parenting and Permission to be Imperfect 8/2/2021

<https://nyupress.org/blog/2021/08/02/plural-parenting-and-permission-to-be-imperfect/>

Holiday Hurdles: Families navigate COVID fears, tense political times 11/18/2020

<https://www.ajc.com/life/holiday-hurdles-families-navigate-covid-fears-tense-political-times/RJYS3BC67FE3JMY7MGK4XZ4LTU/>

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### **Dawn O. Braithwaite, PhD, Willa Cather Professor**

**Main expertise: Communicating to form, live in, and change family relationships**

#### Stepfamily Expertise:

- Communicating to handle challenges of stepfamily life
- Turning points to create different stepfamily types
- Communicating with stepparents and stepchildren
- Celebrating and handling family routines and rituals in stepfamilies
- Navigating privacy and communication in stepfamilies

#### Related Topics:

- Communicating to navigate family change, challenge, resilience
- Navigating family rituals (routines and traditions)
- Experiencing chosen/voluntary families
- Understanding the role of family kinkeepers (keeping families together)

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#### Bio:

Dawn O. Braithwaite is a Willa Cather Professor of Communication Emerita at University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She studies how people in close and family relationships communicate during times of family and relationship transition and stress, especially in post-breakup, stepfamily and chosen family relationships. She writes the blog, "Communication Matters" for *Psychology Today*: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/communication-matters>. The author of 160 articles, chapters and seven books, Braithwaite is a Past President and Distinguished Scholar of the National Communication Association.

**Sample Publications:**

Braithwaite, D. O., Schrodtt, P., Warner, C., & Galvin, K. M. (2025). *Family communication: Cohesion and change* (11<sup>th</sup> ed.). Routledge.

Oliver-Blackburn, B., Braithwaite, D. O. Waldron, V., Hall, R., Hackenburg, L., & Worman, B. (2022). Protector and friend: Turning points and discursive constructions of the stepparent role. *Family Relations*, 71(3), 1266-1285.

Waldron, V. R., Braithwaite, D. O., Oliver, B. M., Kloeber, D., N., & Marsh, J. S. (2018). Discourses of forgiveness and resilience in stepchild-stepparent relationships. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 46, 561-582.

**Sample Media Links:**

Keeping the Peace: Family Communication: <https://www.unl.edu/podcasts/keeping-peace-family-communication/>

Who is in Your Chosen Family? 6 22 22, KQED Forum

<https://www.kqed.org/forum/2010101889596/who-is-in-your-chosen-family>

The Constant Work to Keep a Family Connected has a Name. *New York Times*, 5/8/24,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/08/well/family/kinkeeping-families.html>

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**Scott Browning, Ph.D., ABPP Professor Emeritus, Chestnut Hill College Doctoral Program**

**Main expertise: Training therapists to work clinically with stepfamilies**

**Stepfamily Expertise:**

- Understanding the fundamental differences between stepfamilies and first-time families
- Describing the common interactional patterns that often emerge in these families
- Identifying and addressing the challenges for couples in stepfamilies
- Examining how to address discipline in stepfamilies
- Assisting in the step-grandparent families
- Explaining why standard therapy often failed with stepfamilies

**Contact information:**

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**Bio:** Beginning with a dissertation examining empathy in stepfamilies, Scott was on the Board of the Stepfamily Association of America and National Stepfamily Resource Center. Scott has worked with stepfamilies in therapy and trained numerous doctoral and master's level therapists on the unique needs of stepfamily therapy. Scott received the Distinguished Contribution to Family Psychology Award from the American Psychological Association and received the Pennsylvania Psychological Association award for Distinguished Contribution to Theory and Practice of Family Therapy.

**Sample Publications:**

- Browning, S. & van Eeden Moorefield (2022). Treating interpersonal problems in contemporary families: An inclusive approach to engaging evidence supported practice. American Psychological Association.
- Browning, S. & Artelt, E. (2012). Stepfamily therapy: A ten-step clinical approach. APA Books: Washington, DC.
- Browning, S. & Bray, J. (2009). Treating stepfamilies: A subsystem-based approach. In M. Stanton and J. Bray (Eds.) *Blackwell Handbook of Family Psychology*. London, England: Blackwell Press.

**Sample Media Links:**

Interview with Dr. Scott Browning About *Stepfamily Therapy*  
<https://www.apa.org/pubs/books/interviews/4317274-browning>

Interview with Dr. Dan Gottlieb on Stepfamily Therapy of WHY?  
<https://why.org/episodes/stepfamily-therapy-2/>

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**Lawrence Ganong, PhD**

**Main expertise: Satisfying and effective stepfamily relationships. I look at remarriages and stepfamilies from a resilience perspective.**

**Stepfamily Expertise:**

- What works in developing satisfying and effective stepfamily relationships for:
  - Remarried couples
  - Parents in stepfamilies
  - Stepparents and stepchildren
  - Half- and stepsiblings
  - Grandparents and stepgrandparents
- What works for post-divorce families
- Pathways to stepgrandparenting
- Different ways of being in a blended family/stepfamily

**Contact information:**

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**Bio:**

**Lawrence Ganong, Ph.D.**, is Emeritus Professor of Human Development and Family Science and Nursing at the University of Missouri, USA. He has co-authored over 310 journal articles and chapters and 10 books and has received multiple grants from public and private institutions. Ganong's research program has focused on how post-divorce families, particularly stepfamilies, develop and maintain satisfying and effective relationships. Ganong is a Fellow in the National

Council on Family Relations and the Gerontological Society of America. He has served on the Board of Directors of the National Council on Family Relations, the Council on Contemporary Families, and The Stepfamily Association of America.

**Sample Publications:**

Ganong, L., Coleman, M., & Sanner, C. (2025). *What works in stepfamilies: Creating and maintaining satisfying and effective relationships*. Routledge.

Ganong, L., & Coleman, M. (2017). *Stepfamily relationships: Development, dynamics, and intervention (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.)*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-7702-1>

Ganong, L., Coleman, M., & Sanner, C. (2023). Stepfamilies as they really are. In V. Rutter, B. Risman, & S. Williams (Eds.), *Families as they really are* (pp. 154-169). Norton.

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**Todd M. Jensen, PhD, MSW, Assistant Professor of Human Development and Family Science**

**Main expertise: Unleashing the potential of stepparent-child relationships to promote child well-being and family functioning**

**Stepfamily Expertise:**

- Promoting high-quality and satisfying stepparent-child relationships
- Leveraging stepparent-child relationships to promote child well-being and family functioning
- Patterns of interaction between stepparents and adolescents
- Adolescent perspectives in stepfamilies
- Identifying complex patterns of stepfamily relationship dynamics

**Related Topics:**

- Promoting family functioning and child well-being during times of change and stress
- Sustainably implementing effective programs and practices in youth- and family-serving systems
- Preventing family maltreatment
- Promoting well-being among military-connected children, youth, and families

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<https://ed.unc.edu/people/todd-jensen/>

<https://www.cpc.unc.edu/people/fellows/todd-jensen/>

**Bio:**

Todd Jensen is an Assistant Professor of Human Development and Family Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He studies connections between stepparent-child relationships, child/youth well-being, and family functioning. Author of nearly 100 articles, he is

a Fellow of the Society for Social Work and Research, Deputy Editor for the Journal of Family Theory & Review, and co-chair of the Diverse Family Structures Focus Group of the National Council on Family Relations.

**Sample Publications:**

Jensen, T. (2022). Stepparent–child relationships and child outcomes: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Family Nursing*, 28(4), 321-340.

Jensen, T., & Howard, M. (2015). Perceived stepparent–child relationship quality: A systematic review of stepchildren's perspectives. *Marriage & Family Review*, 51(2), 99-153.

Jensen, T., & Sanner, C. (2021). A scoping review of research on well-being across diverse family structures: Rethinking approaches for understanding contemporary families. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 13(4), 463-495.

**Sample Media Links:**

The Stepparent's Dilemma – The Atlantic (April 19, 2022)

<https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2022/04/stepparenting-kids-advice-nachodisengage/629600/>

The Myth of the Evil Stepmother – BBC (November 21, 2022)

<https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20221118-the-myth-of-the-evil-stepmother>

Podcast Interview (July 22, 2022)

<https://nachokids.com/nkp164/>

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**Cameron Normand**

**Main expertise: Training coaches to work with stepfamilies**

**Stepfamily Expertise:**

- Navigating high-conflict coparenting situations
- Helping stepparents understand their role
- Helping stepfamilies address challenges around children with special needs
- Communicating between the stepcouple to navigate challenges of stepfamily life
- Understanding the dynamics between the stepparent and child, especially where children struggle with adjustment and loyalty binds

**Contact information:**

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Website: <http://www.stepfamilyolutions.com/>

**Bio:**

Cameron Normand, JD is CEO of Stepfamily Solutions and host of The Stepmom Diaries podcast. Through coaching, courses, and events, she has helped thousands of stepmoms and stepfamilies navigate blended family lives. Cameron has appeared on CBS Los Angeles, CW Austin, The Cut, Business Insider, CNET, Kiplinger, and Today Parenting Team. Cameron spent 23 years working on policy strategy on Capitol Hill, then at two top movie studios. Cameron has led several non-profit boards and was named one of the Washington Business Journal's "Women Who Mean Business."

**Sample Publications:**

Normand, C. (2024). *Most Couples Fight About Money. Keeping Our Finances Separate Improved My Marriage*, CNET.

Normand, C. (2021). *3 Must Have Money Conversations Before Becoming A Stepmom*, *Business Insider*

**Sample Media Links:**

<https://www.cbsnews.com/losangeles/video/the-stepmom-summit-for-blended-families/?intcid=CNM-00-10abd1h>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/fresh-take-cameron-normand-of-stepfamily-solutions/id1170073178?i=1000655900087>

<https://stepfamilyolutions.com/news-media/>

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**Bailey M. Oliver Blackburn, PhD, Associate Professor**

**Main expertise: How communication contributes to positive and resilient stepfamily relationships**

**Stepfamily Expertise:**

- Communicating to create and maintain positive stepfamily bonds
- Communicating with stepparents and stepchildren
- Communicating between step and half siblings
- Understanding turning points to foster resilient stepfamily relationships

**Related Topics:**

- Managing conflict within families
- Understanding emotions within families

**Contact information:**

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Website(s): [baileyoliverblackburn.com](http://baileyoliverblackburn.com)

**Bio:**

Bailey Oliver Blackburn, PhD is an associate professor and the graduate coordinator in the Department of Applied Communication at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. She holds a PhD in Human Communication, with a focus in restructured family communication. She is a published researcher, professor, and certified group facilitator in the fields of conflict transformation and family resilience. Her facilitation experience primarily focuses on conflict management, emotional intelligence, and promoting more collaborative work environments.

**Sample Publications:**

- Oliver-Blackburn, B., Braithwaite, D. O. Waldron, V., Hall, R., Hackenburg, L., & Worman, B. (2022). Protector and friend: Turning points and discursive constructions of the stepparent role. *Family Relations*, 71(3), 1266-1285. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12642>
- Oliver-Blackburn, B. M. (2023). Stepchild-Stepparent Relationships and Resilience. In Matthew Powers (Ed.), *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.1453>
- Braithwaite, D. O., & Oliver-Blackburn, B. M. (2024). Intimacy in blended families: Close relationships with parents, siblings, and extended members of the family. In M. Hojjat & A. Moyer (Eds.). *Modern relationships: The evolution of romance, friendship, and family* (pp. 291-308). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197655504.003.0017>

**Sample Media Links:**

- “Blended Families & Current Trends”. Red Rocks Relationship Podcast. Sponsored by Dixie State University, St. George, Utah. <https://redrockrelationships.podbean.com/e/red-rock-relationships-ep-007-blended-families/>
- “How communication is key to building resilience”. Featured article on the Human Performance & Resources by CHAMP website, a website for U.S. military service members and family. <https://hprc-online.blogspot.com/2024/07/how-communication-is-key-to-building.html>
- “Interpersonal Conflict: Do’s and Don’ts”. Red Rocks Relationship Podcast. Sponsored by Dixie State University, St. George, Utah. <https://redrockrelationships.podbean.com/e/red-rock-relationships-season-4-ep-003-dr-b-oliver-blackburn/>

**Patricia L. Papernow**

**Main expertise: What works, and what doesn’t, to form successful stepfamily relationships for stepfamilies of all ages**

**Stepfamily Expertise:**

- Understanding stepfamily routines, expectations, and differences with first-time families
- Describing five challenges stepfamily structure creates for adults and children
- Meeting challenges for children who struggle with loss, loyalty binds, and pace of change
- Forming a viable and positive stepparent role: What works, and doesn’t
- Navigating co-parenting with another parent outside the household
- Meeting challenges for later-life stepfamilies formed after “gray divorce”



- Managing challenges for longtime stepfamilies around elder care and inheritance

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Website: [www.stepfamilyrelationships.com](http://www.stepfamilyrelationships.com)

**Bio:**

Dr. Patricia Papernow is a psychologist working with and writing about stepfamilies for five decades. She integrates clinical practice and research in webinars and workshops concerning meeting challenges of “blended families. She has published dozens of articles and leading books for stepfamilies and helping professionals. Patricia received the Distinguished Contribution to Family Psychology Award from the American Psychological Association and was the 2023 recipient of AFTA’s award for Distinguished Contribution to Theory and Practice of Family Therapy.

**Sample Publications:**

Papernow, P.M. (2013). *Surviving and Thriving in Stepfamily Relationships: What Works and What Doesn’t*. Routledge.

Papernow, P.M., & Bonsall, K (2018). *The Stepfamily Handbook: From Dating to Getting Serious to Forming a “Blended Family.”* Createspace

**Sample Media Links:**

<https://stepfamilyrelationships.com/watch-videos/>

<https://stepfamilyrelationships.com/listen-to-interviews/>

**Paul Schrodtt, PhD, Philip J. and Cheryl C. Burguières Professor**

**Main expertise: Communicating to manage tension and conflict in family relationships**

**Stepfamily Expertise:**

- Communicating to handle challenges of stepfamily life
- Communicating to cope with stepfamily development and functioning
- Developing healthy and satisfying coparent relationships in stepfamilies
- Communicating with stepparents and stepchildren
- Navigating uncertainty and information management in stepfamilies

**Related Topics:**

- Navigating loyalty divides and feelings of being caught between family members
- Understanding different types of stepfamilies and stepparent-stepchild relationships
- Exploring changes in personal and familial identities
- Understanding stepfamily conflict

**Contact information:**

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**Bio:**

Paul Schrodt is the Philip J. and Cheryl C. Burguières Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Texas Christian University. He studies communication processes that facilitate family relationships, with a particular interest in conflict and stepfamily functioning. He has authored more than 130 journal articles and book chapters, has received the National Communication Association's Bernard J. Brommel Award for Family Communication, and served as the Editor of *Communication Monographs*.

**Sample Publications:**

Braithwaite, D. O., Schrodt, P., Warner, C., & Galvin, K. M. (2025). *Family communication: Cohesion and change* (11<sup>th</sup> ed.). Routledge.

Schrodt, P. (2021). Disagreement in perceptions of stepfamily communication and functioning: Implications for mental health. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 38(1), 393-412. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407520964862>

Schrodt, P., & Afifi, T. D. (2018). Negative disclosures and feeling caught mediate coparental communication and mental health. *Personal Relationships*, 25(4), 480-496. <https://doi.org/10.1111/per.12256>

**Sample Media Links:**

Stepparenting and Communication. *Think*, hosted by KERA.org

<https://think.kera.org/2008/02/20/step-parenting-and-communication/>

Does the Silent Treatment Work? *Live Science*, <https://www.livescience.com/does-silent-treatment-work.html>

How and why to ban the silent treatment from your relationship *The Wall Street Journal* <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-and-why-to-ban-the-silent-treatment-from-your-relationship-1402958807>

**Vincent R. Waldron, Ph.D., Professor of Communication and Relational Ethics**

**Main expertise: Communication that makes family relationships resilient, supportive, forgiving, and just**

**Stepfamily Expertise:**

- Understanding conflict in stepfamilies
- Explaining the roles and contributions of stepfathers
- Tracking how stepparenting relationships change over time
- Analyzing how forgiveness happens in stepfamilies
- Communicating to help stepfamilies be resilient

**Related Topics:**

- Understanding how major life events affect family relationships
- Documenting “memorable messages” that have lasting effects on children
- Describing how families and couples talk about moral commitments and values
- Studying what makes fathers good communicators
- Understanding how family communication changes in middle and old age

**Contact information:**

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**Bio:**

Vince Waldron is Professor of Communication and Relational Ethics at Arizona State University. He studies how people in family and work relationships overcome adversity, practice forgiveness, and sustain good relationships. Recent work focuses on stepfamilies and fathers. Waldron is the author of eight books and over 100 research publications. His work has been supported by over \$3,000,000 in funding from such sources as National Institutes of Health, Del Webb corporation, and the State of Arizona.

**Sample Publications:**

Kelley, D. L., Waldron, V. R., & Kloeber, D. N. (2019). *A Communicative Approach to Conflict, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation: Reimagining our Relationships*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Waldron, V. & Socha, T. (Eds.) (2023). *Communicating Fatherhood: New Directions in Theory, Research, & Education*. Peter Lang Publishers.

Waldron, V. R., Braithwaite, D. O., Oliver, B. M., Kloeber, D., N., & Marsh, J. S. (2018). Discourses of forgiveness and resilience in stepchild-stepparent relationships. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 46, 561-582.

**Sample Media Links:**

Why Gen Z is swiping left. *Arizona Republic*, 2/14/24.

<https://www.azcentral.com/story/entertainment/life/2024/02/14/gen-z-dating-app-burnout/72428202007/>

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