Spring 2012

Teaching Effective Strategies of Communication Within Blended Families

Pamela S. Bell
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of
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CAPSTONE PROJECT

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

With a Major in Communications Studies

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University Park, Illinois

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INTRODUCTION

When I set out to work on my Graduate Studies final project, I really had no idea of what I wanted to do. I knew that what ever I came up with had to deal with my major in Communications Studies. I did not want to write an extensive thesis paper and nor did I have enough time in my life to do an internship for a long period of time. What I really wanted to do was something that would encompass most of the material that I had learned during my studies in Communication and I also wanted it to be something that I would feel comfortable in doing and that I would have fun doing it. Later, I had been advised that I could do a project on a topic of my choice, so I decided that I would create this workshop.

After making a choice to do this workshop, I wanted to design it in a manner where I could incorporate what I had learned in school, some of my own personal skills and personal experiences. I decided to conduct a two-day workshop on "Teaching Effective Strategies of Communication Within Blended Families". I had facilitated many seminars and workshops before, but I chose this one because of my personal experience on the subject matter. I have been a stepmother, I have stepparents, and step siblings. Both of my parents remarried and they both have children from their current marriages. I have encountered so many negative issues being part of a step family unit and I understand the various issues that one can be faced with. It is important that we must learn to use effective communication skills.

While many studies that has been done the issues on step-parenting, and blended families. very few of them mentioned research on counseling sessions or workshops where they can come together with a mediator in a group setting and express their various concerns of being part of a step family. What I did learn from my research, was that most of the literature was based on the

issues that they faced as a family unit after the marriage. The studies revealed that most couples do not discuss these issues until after the marriage, which is one of the main reasons that problems may occur.

I thought about the Brady Bunch when I started researching this subject and how well they communicated within their family of eight people. Laughing on the inside, I remembered the original show as well as its' remake of the sitcom, the various situations in which they were able to solve problems by communicating with each other. Mike, the father would always take the time to give a lengthy speech when he wanted the kids to understand his point of views. Although his comments were often long and repetitive, he always used such excellent communication skills when there were conflicts, disputes, or family concerns.

Using this as an example, I thought it would be a good idea to center my project on utilizing good communication skills to bring unity into a few families. The dynamics of blended families are complex and this workshop is just one way that I feel that I can contribute to bringing a little harmony and unity to at least one family in the workshop.

Literature Review

Most of the people that I know personally either belong to stepfamilies or know someone who does. "Stepfamilies are fast becoming the norm in the United States, so much so that Americans born in the 1980s have a 1 in 2 chance of being in a stepfamily either as children or adults " (Bernstein, 1994)". This type of statistical information is suggesting that either there are a lot of single parents marrying for the first time, or that there are a large number of divorces and remarriages. Current research suggests, "that couples that remarry for a second time, approximately 60% of them end in divorce and those that have stepchildren are twice as likely to divorce as those with no stepchildren" (Jacobson, 1990 . In both cases, these numbers represent

large numbers among these particular populations. The statistics alone are indicative that there is definitely a need for increased research on matters that include living in a stepfamily unit. The success of marriage in stepfamilies often depends upon the communication between the parents of the family unit. The "parent can be essential to the success of the stepfamily, as she or he is the only family member with a direct tie, either biological or intimate, to all other members including the child and stepparent" (Kaufman, 1993, p. 312).

Family researchers such as Burghes and De'Anth, has suggested that "in addressing specific issues in stepfamilies, there is an increasing range of different factors which in part may explain some of the difficulties that stepfamilies may be facing (Burghes, 1994;De'Anth, 1996). De'Anth (1996) further suggested that "age, gender, class, family life-cycle state, siblings,

position in the family, relationship with mother and father,

extended family, stepfamily formation and pre-stepfamily events,

(particularly conflict between parents have all been found to be

significant in different ways but there remains unexplained differences.

Family changes that are a result of remarriage, divorce, death of a parent

can often be very stressful for the family and will ultimately cause

socioeconomic stress on the children especially when there is conflict

amongst the parents. Very few of these children experience long-term

negative outcomes (Burghes, 1994, p. 37)"

The parents' main focus is typically surrounded by the demographics such as remarriage and economic factors, parenting stability and attitudes regarding marriage, however, parents "rarely focus on their "inner experiences that could contribute to the success or demise of the stepfamily" (Furstenberg, 1997, p. 58). In order to understand the parent's experience, general

models of stepfamily formation are the most useful starting point. One such model was developed by Papernow, who identifies certain stages within stepfamilies, which were based on a phenomenological study of stepparents. Papernow mentions three of seven stages as it applies to step parenting, The three stages are inclusive of: "the parent's experience begins with unrealistic expectations, changes to divided loyalties (with the parent feeling torn between child and partner), and, if the couple works hard at forming a strong alliance ends in more objectivity and a new family structure" (Papernow, 1988, p. 993).

Much of the existing research mainly encompasses studies that reflect a reader understanding of the complexities regarding certain issues and challenges that blended families may encounter within the family unit. However, there is not much research that is based on communication within the blended families. Few communication researchers have yet studied the blended family and how these groups of people come together to build a family that is unified through harmony and love. Because of the increase in the numbers of blended families in our society, it is important for communication scholars to focus more on the verbal and nonverbal forms of communication in order to expand the understanding of family communication in general, and more specifically, to increase one's knowledge of the role that communication plays in the family functioning of the blended family (Braithwaite, Golish, Soukup, & Turman, 2001). It is further important that we look at the various issues such as conflict resolution, roles, boundaries, discipline, ex-spouse interaction, and even more importantly, the communication skills that are needed in order to establish family unity and loyalty.

Blended family members of theses families must negotiate many complex issues which are challenging to members of these families such as redefining communication boundaries

between the various blended family subsystems (Bray & Hetherington, 1993; Papernow, 1994; Witsett & Land, 1992), managing loyalty conflicts between children and non-custodial parents, adjusting to change, and negotiating new, unfamiliar roles within and outside the family (Anderson & White, 1986; Coleman & Canong, 1995).

In order to deal with those issues that blended families may face, it is important that the parents are able to embrace the communication process, embrace and recognize their personal strengths and weaknesses which may intensify or improve their communication skills, and then join forces to work on them together in order to concentrate on some of more key issues. If one parent has good listening skills or communicates well, this could enhance the possibility to communicate with each other better. Feeling heard and understood helps to develop trust and love between people. For some families, it might be a good idea for couples to seek resources outside of the home to help in strengthening their communication skills and reinforce the relationship between them, which is often challenged in these families by the simultaneous need to build the parental relationship" (Saint-Jacques, Robitaille, Godbout, Parent, & Drapeau, p. 559)".

One of the most contradictory issues within the blended family is the power of the stepparent-stepchild relationship that can place an incredible amount of stress on the married couples' relationship. In cases like this, there is on going competition within the sub-systems of the stepfamily, which causes conflict, confusion, jealously and other difficulties within the newly married couples relationships. Much of the problem exists because the marital dyad is competing against that of the biological parent-child dyad, which intensifies the problems between the between the stepparent and the stepchild. The biological parent has a history of attachment and comfortableness with the stepchild and the stepparent does not. (Dupuis, 2007).

Contrary to this, most couples that marry first and then have children are often able to share their view on solving problems and getting to know each other. These couples have a change to spend time together and learn about their partners' family dynamics, family rituals and family values. In fact, these couples seem more equipped with the tools that can lead to a healthy and happy family after they have children. Remarried couples, instead of beginning a fresh life together, often enter the relationship and at least one of them already is raising at least one child. Couples that are newly remarried normally do not take the time to talk during the dating period to plan for living in a stepfamily. It is rare that they establish ground rules in starting a new family or talk about role expectations, visitation of non-custodial biological parents or financial statuses. "As such, the couple misses out on a period of time in which to create shared meaning by solidifying their commitment and working out their differences" (Dupuis, 2007). "Many remarried couples with children find that they are thrust into a system where different sets of already established role relationships clash and must be renegotiated and where previously undefined step-relationships must be dealt with immediately" (Tracy, 2000, p. 96).

For some families there is almost always some sort of competition between the biological parent-child relationship and the marital relationship in which the biological parent often wins or takes sides. This type of conflict causes stress on the couple and causes them to feel like they being pulled apart from each other. Another issue of competition is the amount of time that the biological parent spends with the biological child. This also places stress on the relationship for couple. On the other hand, conflict could result in resentment of the closeness of either relationship. In most cases "this can create the triangulation of the child between the remarried couple, for the child may serve as a buffer against the couple's distress created by the lack of

shared meaning. In other words, conflict between the stepparent and stepchild may redirect issues away from the remarried system" (Dupuis, 2007, p. 100).

Besides practicing effective communication skills, parenting classes can be helpful to move the couple along in the communication process that will help them develop communication between the parent and child relationships as well as provide the couple with skills on how to practice parenting. "Recent meta-analytic studies have demonstrated that brief, skills-based educational programs for couples increase couple satisfaction; improve communication skills; reduce negative conflict behaviors, including violence; and may prevent separation and divorce" (Gelatt, Adler-Baeder, & Seeley, 2010, p. 573).

Many stepfamilies encounter stressor that can often lead to separation or divorce. As stated previously, these families should explore options that assist them in remaining married and working out there difference. "Family stress theory provides a useful format for assessing and helping stepfamilies by explaining the remarriage experience in a way that suggests possibilities for intervention within the family and also possibilities for policy changes within a variety of institutions in our society" (Crosble-Burnett, 1989, p. 323).

Many stepchildren have reported mixed attributes regarding the influence of communication and how it affects the role of the stepparent and the patterns within the 6stepfamily. Stepchildren "feel tremendous ambivalence about stepparents, often experiencing the dialectical tensions of wanting both a two-parent authority system and a one-parent authority system in the stepfamily" (Schrodt, Soliz, & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 193). Most stepchildren, especially adolescents, place great emphases and worry about whether or not the stepparent plays an active or inactive role in their lives. They often resent the stepparent and a cause great conflict among the couple and the family unit.

Given the fact that most stepfamilies experience family relationship issues, there seems to be substantial inconsistencies regarding whether or not the stepparent should have an active or inactive role in the lives of their stepchildren. This seems to be a topic that often causes conflicts within almost every stepfamily, however it is often also a topic that is complicated, very controversial and it varies from family to family. Based on the "unpredictability of relationships between the step parent and child and remarried adult relationships in stepfamilies, one may assume that patterns of everyday talk and feelings of relational satisfaction in stepfamily relationships may vary" (Schrodt, Soliz, & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 111).

In most stepfamilies parents are often faced with challenges of role identity and its' relationship to disciplining of the children. "While there is substantial literature on adolescents' within various family systems, much less research has concentrated in the area of discipline from the adolescent's perspective" (Morin, MMolito, & Costlow, 2001, p. 282). Marriage and family therapists are placed with the task of understanding how stepfamilies differ from traditional families so they may tailor their interventions to meet the specific needs of their stepfamily clients. Many stepfamilies are founded based on loss, and can involve, divorce, death, or a severed relationship, and which can result in the possibility of the adults and children being unable to grieve appropriately for their loss. Further, step couple relationships are often faced with loyalty conflicts, where an adult feels pulled between current and former partners, or between one's biological children and the current partner (Visher & Visher, 1979 & 1993). Patterns of interaction observed in new stepfamilies include children testing and rejecting their stepparent, and children feeling disempowered as the stepparent assumes a co-leadership role with the biological parent (Lawton & Sanders, 1994). Stepparents may feel doubly marginalized, by stepchildren who reject their authority and by their partner's co-parenting allegiance with the

former partner (Papernow, 1993). "The conflicting and evolving needs of newly blended family members may present numerous challenges to the step-couple. The inherent developmental challenges of adolescence, combined with the complexities of divorce and remarriage, and intensified by the distress imposed by the lack of cultural understanding of these issues, leaves the adolescent in a stepfamily at risk"(Stoll, Arnaut, Fromme, & Felker-Thayer, 2005, p. 178).

The difficulty that is encountered by both the biological parent and the stepparent is unfortunately a major issue among stepfamily parent/child relationships and also by both biological and stepparents with their adolescent children. "Stepfamilies report higher levels of mother-child disagreements and lower levels of parental supervision than intact biological families. Additionally biological fathers who remarry often face difficult decisions as they respond to demands of both their children and second wives. Some stepmothers are not supportive of the father-child relationship and as a consequence these fathers neglect their children in favor of these new spouses" (Freisthler, Syare, & Harrison-Jay, 2003, p. 86).

Another perspective that emerged more strongly during the 1990s can be described as a cognitive perspective. Fine and Kurdek (1994) proposed a cognitive-developmental model of stepfamily adjustment to guide future research. The authors emphasized that people are information-processing organisms, who attempt to make sense out of their experiences of step family living. They proposed that maladjustment occurs in stepfamilies when members have different perceptions, expectations, and assumptions about stepfamily roles and relationships, which in turn lead to different interpretations and attributions in regard to events that occur within the stepfamily. "Conversely, they argue that stepfamily adjustment is likely to be associated with clear and realistic role expectations, balanced attributions about the causes of family events, and recognition that stepfamilies are different from first marriage families"

(Moore & Cartwright, 2005, p. 111) More recently, Fine, Coleman, and Ganong (1999) proposed a social constructionist approach in their investigation of the stepparent role. They argued that stepfamily members tend to create their own thoughts and characteristics about the roles of being a step- parent based on their own life experiences and on the norms of social constrictions. Some constructions will be adaptive while others will be problematic.

A cognitive perspective has also been present in the clinical literature. Visher and Visher (1988, 1996) explain that most peoples' ideas are based upon a number of unrealistic expectations that they may have observed to be common in stepfamilies. Their ideas along and expectations are often based on instant love between the stepparent and children, being able to be the healer of the distress when their partner has been divorce and all with the expectation of having the ideal family. The prevalence of unrealistic expectations or stepfamily "myths" among adults who remarry, has been supported by Hetherington and Kelly (2002) in their report of the long-term follow-up of the Virginia Longitudinal Study of Divorce and Remarriage. "The reality of stepfamily living can be very different from the expectations held by stepparents that are step parents" (Moore & Cartwright, 2005, p. 111).

The increase in the number of blended families leads us to an increased need to better understand the blended family. Many of these complexities are different from "traditional or nuclear families and are highly communicative in nature"(Braithwaite, Olson, Golish, & Turman, 2001, p. 222).

"The body of existing research has contributed to our understanding of the complexity of blended families by shedding light on some of the unique challenges these families confront" (Braithwaite, Golish, Soukup, & Turman, 2001). In order to increase our knowledge regarding blended families, communication scholars need to research the root of understanding family

communication in order to determine how blended families can manage issues such as setting boundaries, conflict resolution, and role negotiation through communication.

Although the most of the issues listed above are a result of a lack of communication skills, it often results in relationship problems for all members of the family. "Stepfamily couples report avoiding discussion of sensitive topics more than first-marriage couples. In the only observational study of stepfamily communication, the research finds that the stepfamily couples were more negative than first-marriage couples, and there was a similar association between negative communication and low relationship satisfaction in stepfamily and first-marriage couples. This study did not assess partner withdrawal. Negative stepfamily couple

communication might reflect negative family-of-origin experiences,

as in first-marriage couples. Given that negative communication predicts

divorce; there could be an overrepresentation of negative communication

in divorced people who then form a stepfamily. The high breakup rates in

stepfamilies might reflect, at least in part, selection effects leading to high

rates of negative couple communication in stepfamilies. Consistent with this

possibility, in a longitudinal individuals' observed negative communication in

the early stages of their first marriages, and their second. Alternatively,

stepfamily communication might be influenced by the challenges that

couples have to address in stepfamilies". (Halford, Nicholson, & Sanders,

2007, p. 473).

While there is little research that focus directly on factors that rresearch focusing directly on the factors that contribute to successful stepfamily development, research has been conducted to determine what entities make certain couples in stepfamilies', successful. Kelly (1992)

reviewed 20 stepfamilies to find out what made them successful. Several major themes emerged from these interviews: flexibility, respect, patience, communication, and sense of humor. Families were flexible with schedule changes, family responsibilities, and family boundaries. Respect, was another theme that emerged from the interviews. Family members felt it was important for everyone to show respect to each other. Respectful behavior, in contrast, was considered a realistic expectation and one way to establish a loving step relationship. Patience was an equally important characteristic in these families. Patience was an equally important characteristic in these families. They understood that it takes time for families to gain a sense of family identity, to merge into one new family. Clear communication among family members and a means to implement it were central to these families. Another theme identified in the interviews was a sense of humor. Families thought it was important to see the humor in their circumstances, to have fun together, and not take things too seriously (Michaels, 2006, p. 55).

The Step family formation can also lead to meeting new household members, forming new relationships, changes in friendships and networks (Wallerstein, Corbin, & Lewis, 1988). Once married the family needs to adapt to their new routines and activities at home and often they don't realize that they have forgotten about their old friends and others that they use to surround themselves with (Menaghan, Kowaleski-Jones, & Mott, 1997). The same goes for those families that are formed through cohabitation or when children from multiple families are blended into one household (Tilman, 2007). Our society does not have many resources or networks of institutionalized support to help support families adjust to stepfamily life (Cherin, 1978).

In conclusion, this literature review determines that there is a relative correlation between stepfamilies and the contribution of communication skills, difficulties experienced by the

stepfamilies and structural variables that explain long-term marital satisfaction in stepfamily couples. In other words communication is vital to the success of relations within stepfamilies, but it is mainly the spouse's communication skills that provides meaning to their marital satisfaction (Beaudry, Boisvert, Sinard, Parent, & Blais, 2004).

A recent search for studies that showed a comparison of communication in stepfamilies and in first-time marriages, the results of one study revealed when compared, showed significant results that "that stepfamily couples would be more negative than first-time couples, was not supported. In fact, stepfamily couples had much lower rates of negative communication than first-time couples, though they also showed somewhat less positive discussion than first-time couples. It was also found that partners in stepfamily couples would withdraw more from couple discussions, was supported" (Halford, Nicholson, & Sanders, 2005, p. 479).

Communication is also important in when it involves stepfamily reorganization. Reorganization of the stepfamily involves "communicating at points perceived to be critical in the development of the relationships that comprise the step family. The members of stepfamily engage in talk with one another about their relationships. Bateson (1951) first referred to this process as metacommunication or communication about communication.

He described it as involving cues and propositions about codification and relationships between the communicators. These dimensions are closely related because propositions about codification also have relationship and visa versa. As it relates to metacommunications, observing that, in order to regulate relationships, people must be able to communicate about their own communication patterns (Cissna, Cox, & Bochner, 1990, p. 45).

Finally, we have learned that the quality of communication has been identified as the strongest predictor of long-term couple satisfaction for both men and women in a stepfamily. and has been noted that the "stepfamily couples and it has been noted that communication can alleviate or aggravate or can be a harmful cognitive process. Negative interaction models that include aversive behaviors inducing guild, withdrawal, and violence are carried from one union to another. Thus, elements that were distructive are carried from one union to another explains that the inability to communicate effectively could partially explain a greater instability in stepfamilies" (Saint-Jacques, Robitaille, Godbout, Parent, Drapeau, & Guage, The process distinquishing stable from unstable stepfamily couples: A qualitative analysis , 2011, p. 547).

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Goals and Objectives of Workshop

Overall Group Goals and Objectives

GOAL: Provide some essential communications skills and techniques that will

               be useful in promoting family harmony.

Objective: Participants will gain a better understanding of how communication

               techniques and strategies are key components in helping to maintain

               harmony and unity within the family unit.

Creative Problem Solving

Goal: Participants will be able to utilize the problem solving skills in order

               to effectively work through family issues and concerns.

Objectives: Provide participants' with the problem solving skills that are needed

               in order to solve current issues and problems in a creative manner as

               well as, to aid in the growth of the family through the process of

               communication.

Communication Skills: Listening (verbal and nonverbal), Speaking Skills

Goal: To provide lessons that will encourage the client to utilize better

               listening and speaking skills while communicating with each other.

Objectives   The participants will become active listeners through reinforcement

               and listening activities and lessons. Further, participants will be able

               to promote good communication, assist in solving problems, and gain

a clearer understanding of each other and the issues that they are

challenged with.

Conflict Resolution

Goal: Provide techniques, positive solutions and written information on

"conflict resolution" to help participants resolve conflicts.

Objectives: Participants will be able to utilize the skills that are necessary in order

to maintain conflict and confusion.

FACILITATORS ROLE

My role as a facilitator has taken thorough and careful planning. In order for the workshop to be productive for all participants, I will ensure that the materials will be presented in manner in which the participants will learn and hopefully be able to utilize the workshop to their advantage in the future. My first plan of action was to choose and design a workshop that would be easy and would benefit all those that would be involved. Once I chose to do the workshop on "Teaching effective strategies of communication within blended families" I had to ensure that I selected the right population that could benefit from the workshop. I chose to target married couples or partners that were living in homes where one parent was a stepparent. I also targeted those couples that were currently experiencing problems and issues within their prospective families. My next step was to determine how much time I would need in order to provide them with the strategies that would help them in making changes within their family unit. 1 decided to design a two-day workshop for parents who have stepchildren. I decided to design a two-day workshop from 9:00 am until 4:00 p.m. each day. Next I wrote out the goals and objectives for each topic of discussion as well as au overall goal and objective for the workshop. My next course of action as a facilitator would be to choose a place where I could facilitate the workshop. I figured it would be a good idea for the parents to get away and plan to stay for the workshop in a local convenient hotel with a conference room. A particular hotel was chosen because of the size, availability and the space available for the workshop. Planning my course of topics to be discussed would be my next plan of action in order to execute them through various learning styles (guided learning, lecture, activities, role-play, etc.), I also had to coordinate the time frames for each topic and activity. While designing the process, although this workshop would not be a large group of people, I have learned from past experience that smaller groups can get out of control. As a facilitator, I will need to keep the group from getting out of control due to the fact that the workshop will include various group activities, discussions and facilitator presentations. Keeping the group in control helps to facilitate learning better and helps the participants gain meaningful knowledge from the workshop. It is

workshop flowing. My responsibilities' will also include keeping the participants engaged in the workshop at all times. Prior to facilitating the workshop, it is my responsibility that I made sure that I had researched all of the information that I would need for each topic. Preparing myself mentally is also important. Another responsibility is to provide all the necessary materials and supplies and props needed for the workshop. As a facilitator, I will make sure that I have backup materials, props and written notes in the event that there are equipment failures or a participant introduces material that I have not researched or planned for. I must also make sure that I exercise good listening skills as a facilitator as well as keeping notes for additional comments and being effective in responding to their questions and concerns.

Teaching Effective Communication Strategies Workshops for Blended Families

April 6, 2012
&
April 7, 2012
9:00a.m. -
4:00pm

Pamela S. Bell
Facilitator & Life Coach

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Are you experiencing problems with being a stepparent? Does your new family seem dysfunctional? WE CAN HELP!!!

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We can help you in:

- Dealing with ex-spouses
- Role Identification
- Divided Loyalties
- Dealing with loss
- Establishing family unity and loyalty
- Adjustment issues
- Communication Skills
- Discipline
- Respect
- Listening Skills
- Coping Skills
- Conflict

Don't miss this great experience. It will be a 2 days of fun learning.

View Grid   Zoom In   Zoom Out

Colors

Click on a swatch
to change the color
Click here to see how

Red

Foreground

White

Background

Moss Green

Add Image

How to use images

Add/Edit

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Border

Text Options

Add Text Block

Remove Text Block

Text must be selected before
you can change its font and size
Click here to see how

PDMJ Comunications Specialists, Inc.

Communications Specialist/Life Coach, Facilitator

5940 Lakebluff Drive Unit 5A
Tinley Park, Illinois 60477
708-744-8815
708-744-8816
pambelix2@gmail.com

TEXT: Do not place text outside of dashed blue lines.
PHOTOS: Extend photos that reach edge of card to gray dashed lines. Click here to see how

MATERIALS

WRITING UTENSILS

PAPER

SISSORS

FLIP CHART

COMPUTER WITH PROJECTOR OR SCREEN

MARKERS

HAT

TAPE

POSTER BOARDS

TABLES CHAIRS

EASEL

DAY ONE

TEACHING AFFECTIVE STRATEGIES AMONG BLENDED FAMILIES

APPENDIX

A

Teaching Effective Strategies of Communication Within Blended Families

Presenter: Pamela S. Bell

April 14, 2012

9:00am - 4:00pm

Tinley Park Convention Center

South Tower

Tinley Park, Illinois 60477

Time	Activity
9:00 – 9:30	Registration
9:30 –10:15	Welcome
10:15 -10:45	Let's get acquainted (small group activity)
10:45 –11:00	Break
11:00 -11:30	PowerPoint overview of workshop
11:30 –12:00	Discussion
12:00 –1:00	Lunch
1:00- 1:45	PowerPoint Communication
1:45 -2:00	Energizer Activity
2:00- 2:30	Discussion
2:30- 2:45	Break
2:45: 3:15	PowerPoint Listening Skills
3:15-3:40	Listening Activity
3:40 – 4:00	Wrap up

APPENDIX
B

TEACHING EFECTIVE STRATEGIES OF COMMUNICATION WITHIN BLENDED FAMILIES

Information Form

1. Names: Husband: _____

                           Wife: _____

2. Phone Numbers: Home: _____

                           Cell: _____

3. Please explain what you intend to gain from this workshop

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING. LET'S HAVE SOME FUN

TEACHING EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES OF COMMUNICATION

WITHIN BLENDED FAMILIES

Please list any advantages or benefits of being a stepparent

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Please list any disadvantages or negative issues in being a stepparent

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

If you have more, please feel free to use the back of the form or another sheet of paper.

SIGN IN SHEET

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____
21. _____
22. _____
23. _____
24. _____

APPENDIX
C

LET'S GET AQUAINTED ACTIVITY

This exercise is important because it allows the group to get to know each and it begins the process of communication in the group and the personal process of family communication. The group will be separated into smaller groups in order for them to bond with someone other than a family member.

The facilitator will also take part in this exercise so that the participants can get to know her as well. Once the facilitator has introduced herself, she will then get them to feel comfortable by telling them how excited she is that they are participating in this workshop and how good she feels about the good turn out. Explain that most of what they will be learning the workshop has to do with learning effective communication skills and that working together is vital to its success. Ensure the participants all have some of the same issues and that sharing information with each other is not only helpful, but also vital in learning to deal with their personal issues. This exercise is designed for the participants to get to know each other. Explain to the group that is very important they understand that they will have to be good listeners for this lesson. THERE IS NO WRITING IN THIS EXERCISE.

EXERCISE

A.   The facilitator will pair the participants with someone other than   their significant other.

B.   Have them introduce themselves and to share with their partner a little information about why they came to the workshop, and any other

information that they may want to share with each other that may help get better acquainted.

C.   Next, the facilitator will ask each participant to introduce their partner that they were paired with and tell them to share with the others what they learned about the other person. Everyone will have an opportunity to speak.

During the break, the facilitator will record some of the responses from the participants as they relate to their issues within their blended families. The purpose of the facilitator writing this out on a flip chart is to show them they have a lot in common. Allow the participants to speak only about what they thought about the exercise. Try to deter them from discussing their issues at this time because it will be done at a later time under another lesson.

APPENDIX
D

Effective Strategies of Communication Within Blended & Stepfamilies

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

Housekeeping Rules

- Eating is permitted, however please throw your trash away.
- There are Restaurants are in the area
- Make sure you return all supplies
- Do not enter any room other than the one designated for this workshop
- Be on time for both days

All About Me

- M.A. in Communication Studies
- Life Coach
- Divorced
- Personal experience in subject matter
- Two children ages 17 & 24
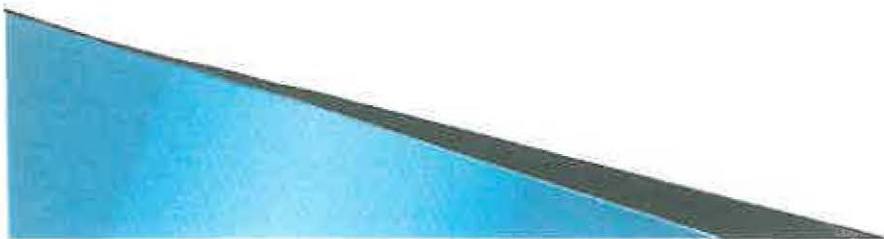
What is a Stepfamily

A family formed by the remarriage of a divorced or widowed parent. It includes the new husband or wife, plus some or all of their children from a previous marriage or relationship.

- Recently the definition is often expanded to include all cohabitating couples, whether married or not. Some people also apply the term to non-custodial relationships, where, "stepparent" can refer to the partner of a parent with whom the child does not live.

ISSUES WITH BLENDED & STEPFAMILIES

- Communication
- What role do I play
- Establishing family unity and loyalty
- Respect
- Adjustment Problems
- Dealing with ex-spouses
- Divided loyalties
- Discipline
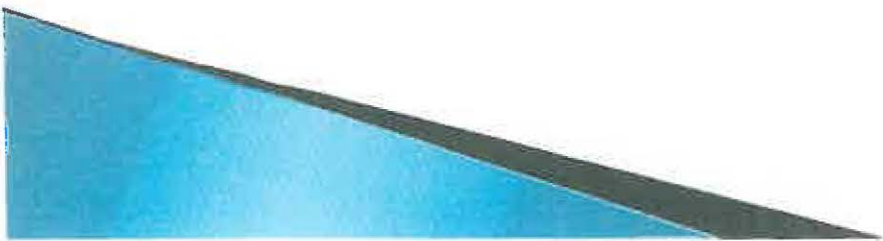
SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES

- Effective listening skills
- Effective speaking skills
- Creative problem solving
- Coping skills

APPENDIX
E

LET'S COMMUNICATE
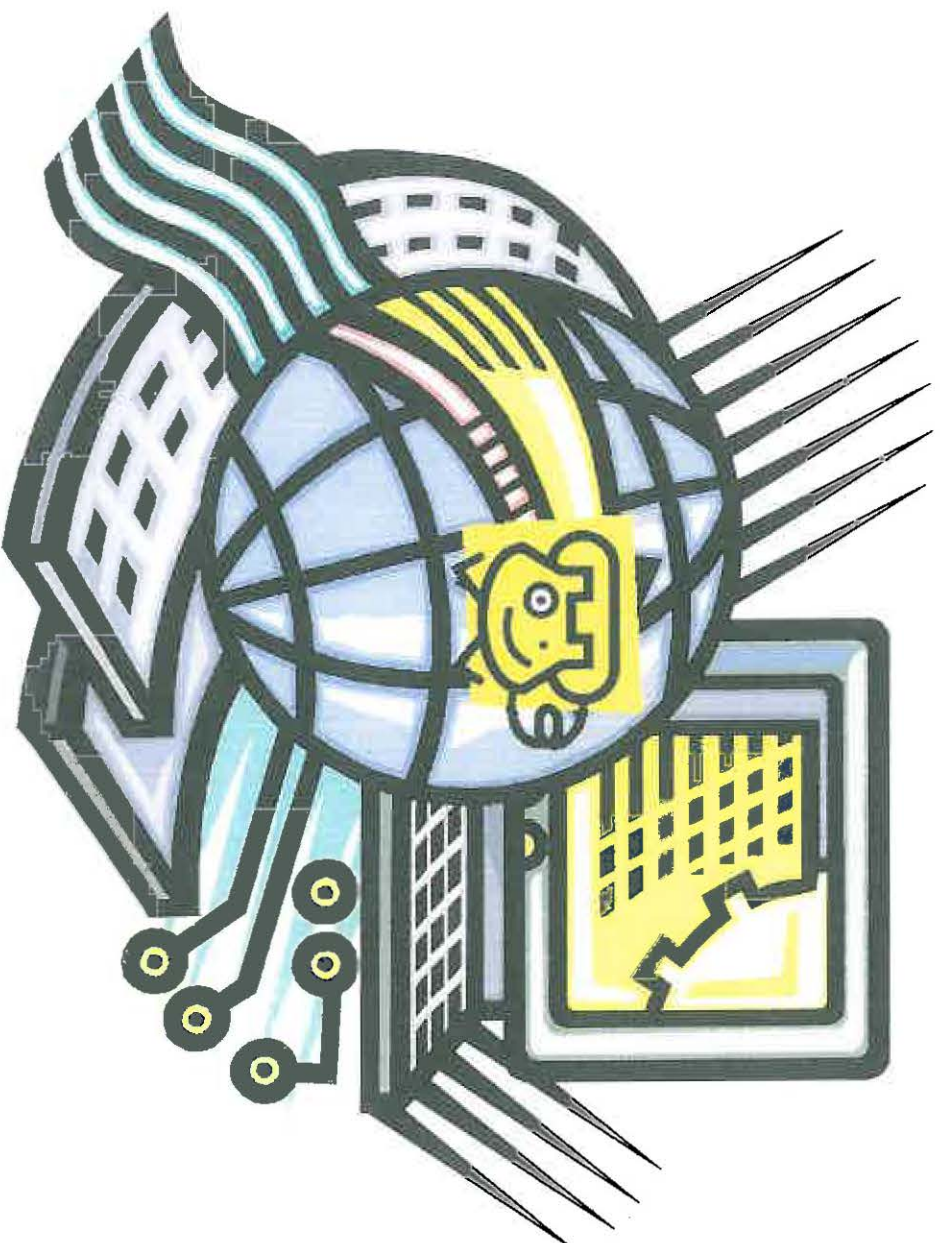
Communication is the basic building block of our relationships

- We have all had experiences where we have felt heard and understood.

- We have had experiences where we have felt misunderstood and even ignored.
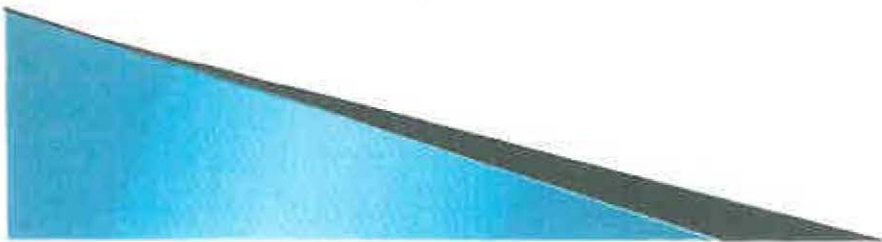
Generally, when we feel heard, we are less angry, stressed, and more open to resolving problems than when we feel misunderstood.

Feeling heard and
and understood also
helps to develop
trust and love
between people.
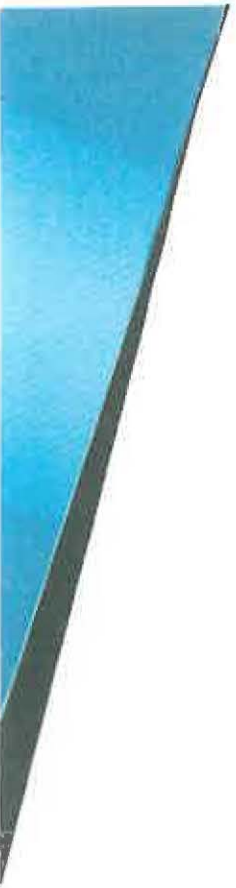
COMMUNICATION IS A TWO WAY PROCESS

In communication the process must have a;

SENDER

RECEIVER

A sender conveys the message and a receiver is to whom the message is sent. In communication the sender is clear and accurately conveys the message she is trying to send. Also, the receiver clearly understands the message. Miscommunication occurs if the sender does not send a clear message and/or the receiver does not understand the message sent by the sender.

MANY THINGS CAN GET IN THE WAY OF GOOD COMMUNICATION

OBSTACLES

- When we assume we know what others are thinking, or that they should know what we are thinking

- When we focus on what we want to say while others are talking, instead of listening to them
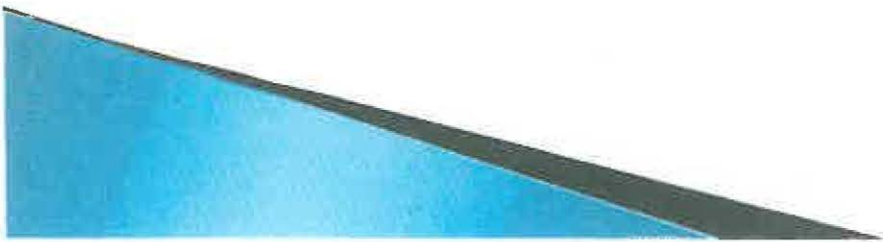
OBSTACLES

- When we bring up other problems and issues unrelated to the topic.
- When we assume we know what is right for others and use our own thoughts to convince them.
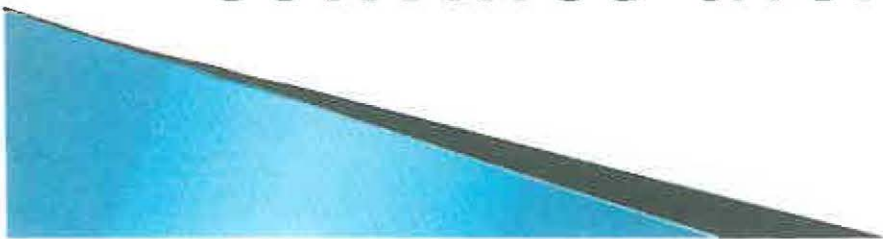
COMMUNICATING TAKES PRACTICE AND EFFORT

- ◆ Communication is not something that comes naturally for most of us.

- ◆ Communication takes constant practice and vigilance.

It is through communication that we convey our thoughts, feeling and connection to each other. Developing good communication for successful relationships, whether parent, child, spouse or sibling relationships.
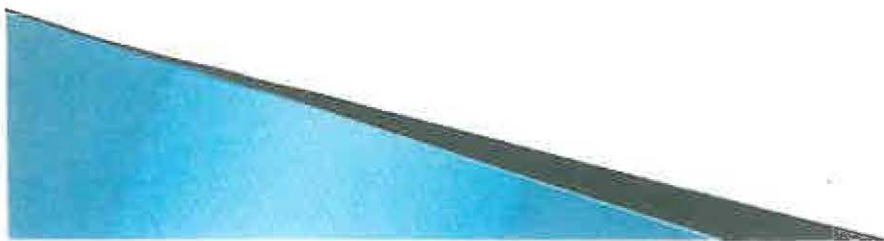
APPENDIX
F

Question Game

Each person writes down a question they want answered in the group. Roll up the questions into a ball. Each person throws her/his question to someone else. Take turns answering the questions. You can have more than one round and ask students to ask questions that increase risk.

This exercise demonstrates that a parent has to take risk in getting to know their children or partners. Not all conversations are negative and this exercise shows them how to communicate effectively even if they are uncomfortable.

APPENDIX
G

ACTIVE LISTENING

Active listening is a way of listening to others that lets them know you are working to understand the message they are sending.

SUGGESTIONS

#1

Make sure that your body language conveys to them that you are interested and listening.

You can make eye contact with them, turn your body toward them or nod as they are speaking to let them know that you are listening. Make sure you don't use paralanguage like ok, uh, and you know,

#2

Reduce any distractions that will keep you from focusing on their message.

Try to stop whatever you are doing that might distract you from their message. Turn off the television, stop reading, or turn off music, You may need to tell them, "I will be better able to listen to you when I am done with dinner in about 15 minutes. One cannot multi-task when trying to listen.

suggestions con't

#3

Listen for the content and the feelings behind the words

Do not just listen to the content of what is being said,. Listen for the feeling that the person is trying to convey to you. Are they expressing joy, sadness, excitement, or anger either through their words or body language?

#4

When the person has finished talking, paraphrase back to them what you heard them saying

What I am hearing from you **is** _____. Again this allows the sender to know that you are actively listening to you.

suggestions con't

#5

Do not offer advice to the person because it shuts down communication

The person first needs to know that you have understood them and that they have sent their message clearly to you.

APPENDIX

H

LISTENING ACTIVITY

Role Play Activity

EXERCISE

1. Have participants sit in pairs facing each other, with someone they don't know.

2. Have one person in the pair (speaker) discuss what they feel about step parenting.

3. Have the other person (listener) observe what the speaker is saying. Have them observe eye contact, posture, facial expressions, etc.

4. After each pair is complete, place them back in their original seats.

5. Ask the group to discuss what they observed they saw, heard and felt. What did they notice about the speaker? How did they react to what was being said?

6. Reemphasize the rules of being a good listener and why listening is important (from PowerPoint).

7. Explain that by practicing these listening skills it will enhance communication in not only their personal relationships but also with their children.

8. Ask participants what they learned from this experience.

When the exercise is over ask the participants to practice utilizing these listen techniques among each other and others after the workshop.

DAY TWO

TEACHING AFFECTIVE STRATEGIES AMONG BLENDED FAMILIES

APPENDIX

I

Teaching Effective Strategies of Communication Within Blended Families

Presenter: Pamela S. Bell

April 15, 2012

9:00am - 3:30pm

Tinley Park Convention Center

South Tower

Tinley Park, Illinois 60477

9:00 – 9:15	**Warm Up Activity**
9:15 – 10:00	**Discussion on Listening Exercise**
10:00 – 10:45	**Family Communication PowerPoint**
10:45- 11:00	**Break**
11:00- 11:30	**Discussion on Family Communication**
11:30- 12:00	**Listening Activity 2**
12:00- 1:00	**Lunch**
1:00 - 1:30	**5 ways to deal with ex-souses**
1:30 - 2:15	**Energizer**
2:15 – 2:30	**Break**
2:30 – 3:00	**Recap and Discussion**
3:00 – 3:30	**Closing activity**
3:30 – 4:00	**Wrap up and Evaluation**

APPENDIX

J

FAMILY COMMUNICATION

With more people there are more opportunities for communication breakdowns and greater chances for conflicts to arise.

- When two people are involved, there is the opportunity for one relationship
- When three people are involved, there is the opportunity for three relationships
- With four, there are six possible relationships
- With five, there are ten possible relationships, and so on.

APPENDIX
K

Listening Game: The most influential experience

Do not provide any explanation on listening before playing the game. The experience of the game should not be influenced by the input. You do not want the effect of the experience to be diluted.

Here's the listening game.1. Divide the group of people in two by counting off into twos. The group should have even-numbered people. If the group is odd-numbered, then ask the last person whose number is 'one' to be the observer. Take all the 'ones' outside the room. (This listening game will work well when you have a co-facilitator.)

2. The co-facilitator steps out of the room with the 'ones', while you stay in the room with the 'twos'

3. Instructions to the 'ones': "Take a few moments and reflect on an incident which had a dramatic influence in your life. It should fit into the category of 'life changing'.

"After a while you'll go back to the room. There you'll find your colleagues sitting in different parts of the room with an empty chair in front of them. You can take the empty chair before anybody you choose.

"Once you are seated begin to tell that person the 'one most influential event' in your life. After you have finished, your partner will summarize what you told her."

4. Room arrangement with the 'twos' during this listening game: Get the twos to spread out in the room (not huddle around one area of the room) and sit on a chair. Other than their own chair they should have an empty chair facing them. Have the 'twos' sit on one of the pair of chairs.

5. Instructions for the 'twos':" After a while the ones will come into the room and each one will occupy one of the empty chairs. So that means each one of you will have one colleague sitting in front of you.

"They will begin to tell you about an experience that they have had in their lives. Your task is to ignore them as unobtrusively as possible. Your body language will involve sitting back, not meeting their eyes, twiddling with something in your hand like pen or a pencil and possibly doodling.

"You'll continue this 'non-listening' behavior until the trainer gives you a signal like knocking on the table with a marker. (Set a signal with the 'twos' that is mutually agreeable to you and them. It should be something audible above the din as well as unobtrusive.)

" As soon as you hear the sound, transform your body language to one of listening. Lean forward; meet the speaker's eyes, stop twiddling and doodling. Once your partner has finished relating her piece, summarize to her what you heard."

Now play this listening game exactly as per your instructions above. You'll find that when the 'ones' walk in there is a momentary hesitation in choosing a partner. Then they briskly walk up and sit down in front of one person.

Some behaviors that you will notice in this listening game.

Some of them start to speak immediately, in spite of the fact their partners are not listening. Out of these some will stop talking on noticing that they are not being heard, while others will plough on. The ones who stop speaking, you'll notice will either look offended or will try and attract the attention of the listeners.

Some of them will just sit down and wait for the listeners to look up and start listening.

There's also a certain tension you'll sense because of the non-listening behavior. The listeners you'll find are squirming in their seats because they have to keep themselves from listening to their partners. They can partially hear the speakers relating 'life changing' experiences, their voices heavy with emotion and they are not expected to listen.

As the listening game reaches this point and you give the prearranged signal, there's a marked change in the emotional content of the room. There's interaction, good listening behavior from the listeners and almost a relieved continuation of the conversation by the speakers.

Some other behaviors you will notice in the room during this listening game: Anger among some of the speakers, so much so that they refuse to speak. Disinterest among the speakers, who are now completing the activity very mechanically. Sometimes there are instances of weeping, as the speakers are very hurt by the listeners' behavior. Consequently the listeners are trying their best to gain control of the situation once again.

Debrief of Listening game:

Before you begin the debrief, ask the listeners and speakers to sit in a row facing each other, the listeners in one row and the speakers in the other.

1. First ask the listeners to respond to the following questions:

How do you feel? What are you learning?

2. You'll hear about all the behavior and feelings that you noticed while the game was in progress.

3. While the speakers want to share too, try and contain them till it's their turn to respond to the debrief questions.

4. Once again you will hear about the observations that you made earlier.

5. You'll also sense amazement and hear sheepish laughter at the discoveries they have made about themselves.

6. They will express learning styles like:

- 'I realize that I have done this with quite a few people and when it happened to me I did not like it at all. I have decided that I will never ignore people again.'

- 'I felt lousy not being able to listen to my partner especially when she was sharing something so important.'

7. Some of the other learning techniques that you need to gently bring home to them are:

- It is not every time people have something earth shattering to share. Yet whatever they do want to share is important to them and so worth listening to.

- It is also insensitive for speakers to go ahead and share whatever they want to even if the listener is not paying attention to them. It would be more fruitful if speakers listen to the body language of the listeners and deal with that first, sensitively of course. They need to take time to find out what's keeping the listener from listening.

- Not listening (either to the verbal message or the non-verbal message) is the malaise that has affected society. This malaise has resulted in competing relationships rather than in collaborative synergistic relationships.

APPENDIX
L

5 WAYS TO DEAL WITH EX-SPOUSES

Manage conversations by staying on matters of parenting

- It is common for the conversations of an "angry associate" and co-parents to gravitate back toward negative personal matters of the past".
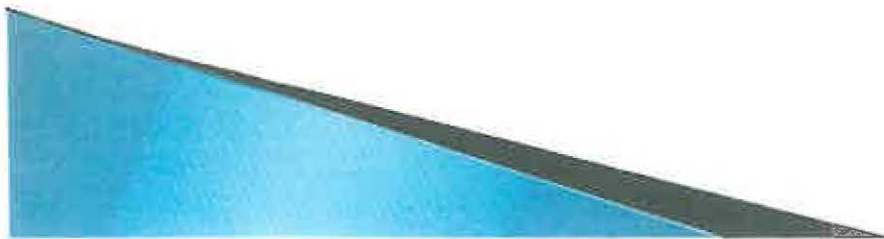
Work hard to respect the other parent and his or her household

▸ For the sake of the the kids, find ways of being respectable even if you honestly can't respect your ex-spouses lifestyle or choices. Do not personally criticize them, but don't make accuses for their behaviors

Keep your "business meetings" impersonal to avoid excessive conflict

Face to face interaction has the most potential for conflict.
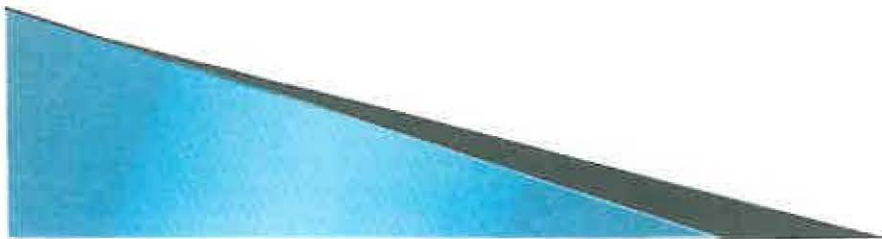
Be sure to notice your own part of the ongoing conflict

▶ When you attempt at trying to change other people, you inadvertently invite hostility or a lack of cooperation in return. Learn to let go of what you cannot change. It will only cause conflict in the home.

Step-parents should continue a "non-threatening" posture to the same-gender ex-spouse.

▸ This helps to alleviate the need of the biological mother to bad-mouth the stepparent or the new marriage in order to keep the loyalties of her children.

APPENDIX
M

PM ENERGIZER

Have participants get into a circle. One person starts with one end of the yarn and passes

it to someone else in the circle after they tell group that they will be commitment to utilizing

the skills learned through the workshop. Afterwards, everyone takes a piece of the yarn to tie

onto his or her wrist as a bracelet.

APPENDIX

N

CLOSING ACTIVITY

ROSES AND THORNS

Everyone in the circle shares a high point and low point from the training with the group.

Affirmation mingle: Have the individuals mingle around in the group, and instruct them to stop in front of someone and share with them one way in which they noticed that person "shine" during the workshop. Keep switching partners so each person gets feedback and support from different members of the group – and so that people get practice giving positive feedback!

APPENDIX

O

AACES for Active Listening

** Attitude**

Show that you are willing to understand. Put aside your own feelings and stereotypes.

** Acknowledge **

Let people know you want to listen. Show interest but not necessarily agreement.

** Clarify**

Ask questions that let the speaker know you are listening, to get more information, and to make sure you understand their story.

** Empathize **

Allow the speaker to know that you understand her/his concerns and feelings. You do not need to agree with them to understand.

** Summarize**

Review important ideas, facts, feeling, and information. Make sure you understand the main issues. Summarizing a person's statements or issues helps them know the listener heard and understood what he or she said.

House Cleaning Checklist

by Vertex42.com

DAILY	WEEKLY	MONTHLY

Kitchen

DAILY
- [ ] Wash dishes
- [ ] Clear and wipe table
- [ ] Wipe countertops and stove
- [ ] Wipe the sink
- [ ] Sweep
- [ ] Wipe up spots on the floor
- [ ] Take out trash

WEEKLY
- [ ] Wipe up spills in fridge
- [ ] Throw out old food
- [ ] Clean outside of appliances
- [ ] Scrub and shine sink
- [ ] Shake or vacuum rugs
- [ ] Mop

MONTHLY
- [ ] Dust blinds and vacuum curtains
- [ ] Wash windows
- [ ] Wipe cupboard doors
- [ ] Clean fridge
- [ ] Clean oven and oven hood
- [ ] Clean small appliances
- [ ] Wash trash can

Bathroom

DAILY
- [ ] Spray shower with shower mist
- [ ] Clean mirror
- [ ] Wipe the sink and counter
- [ ] Clean the toilet bowl
- [ ] Wipe toilet seat and rim

WEEKLY
- [ ] Mop
- [ ] Clean sink/countertop
- [ ] Wipe door/knobs
- [ ] Clean tub
- [ ] Clean outside of toilet
- [ ] Empty trash
- [ ] Shake or vacuum rugs

MONTHLY
- [ ] Clean showerhead
- [ ] Wash windows
- [ ] Wash rugs
- [ ] Wash trash can

Bedrooms

DAILY
- [ ] Make bed
- [ ] Straighten nightstand
- [ ] Put clothes away

WEEKLY
- [ ] Change sheets
- [ ] Dust
- [ ] Vacuum

MONTHLY
- [ ] Straighten shoes
- [ ] Straighten drawers
- [ ] Dust blinds/vacuum curtains
- [ ] Wash windows
- [ ] Vacuum around the edges of room

Living/Family Rooms

DAILY
- [ ] Clean up the clutter
- [ ] Straighten pillows/cushions
- [ ] Straighten coffee/end tables
- [ ] Wipe spots off tables

WEEKLY
- [ ] Dust
- [ ] Vacuum
- [ ] Straighten books, DVD's, etc.

MONTHLY
- [ ] Clean mirrors/dust pictures
- [ ] Clean electronics
- [ ] Dust blinds/vacuum curtains
- [ ] Wash windows
- [ ] Vacuum couch
- [ ] Vacuum around the edges of room

Home Office

DAILY
- [ ] Clean up the clutter
- [ ] sort mail

WEEKLY
- [ ] File Papers
- [ ] Dust
- [ ] Vacuum

MONTHLY
- [ ] Clean mirrors/dust pictures
- [ ] Dust blinds/vacuum curtains
- [ ] Wash windows
- [ ] Vacuum around the edges of room

Laundry / Utility Room

DAILY
- [ ] Laundry - clothes
- [ ] Sweep

WEEKLY
- [ ] Dust shelves
- [ ] Wipe washer/dryer
- [ ] Clean sink/countertops
- [ ] Wash bedding and towels
- [ ] Remove lint from dryer vent

MONTHLY
- [ ] Clean insides of washer/dryer
- [ ] Wash windows
- [ ] Change filters on heating/AC units
- [ ] Mop

Entryway / Porch

DAILY
- [ ] Pick up clutter

WEEKLY
- [ ] Sweep entry and steps

MONTHLY
- [ ] wash windows
- [ ] wash hand rails and door

APPENDIX
P

WORKSHOP EVALUATION FORM

Name of Presenter: _____   Date: _____

Title of Workshop: _____

Overall, how would you rate this workshop?

1. How would you rate the usefulness of the content?
   (1   2   3   4   5)

2. How would you rate the hands-on activities?

   (1   2   3   4   5)

3. How would you rate the presenter's knowledge in the subject?
   (1   2   3   4   5)

4. How would your rate the presenter's style of teaching?
   (1   2   3   4   5)

5. How would you rate the pace of the presentation?

   (Too fast   Too slow   Just right)

6. Was the workshop above or below your current skill level?
   (Above   Below   Just right)

7. What did you like best or find most useful about the presentation?

8. What skills did you learn that may help prepare you for technology integration in the classroom?

9. Were your personal learning goals for the course met?
   If "No," please describe those expectations that were not met.

10. Any other comments?

CrEICIPICJITrE OP COCJIPErETION

[Name]

Jfas mastered tfie course

Communication Strategies

Awarded this   day of   , 20____

Presenter Name and Title

_____