



Meeting the (Big!) Challenges of “Blended Families”: What Works and What Doesn’t for Couples and Families

Patricia L. Papernow, Ed.D.

9:00 am to 4:30 pm (EST), Saturday, February 5, 2022
Interactive on Zoom

The adults in “blended families” enter their new relationships with such high hopes for a fresh start on loving relationships. But they all too often find themselves caught in toxic conflicts over parenting and discipline, struggling with unhappy, “resistant” children, and feeling deeply confused about the stepparenting role in their new family. They may find themselves sparring over differences about everything from the “appropriate” cost of running shoes to which breakfast cereals have nutritional value, all while grappling with increased tensions with ex-spouses. The aspirational longing captured in the term, “blended families,” often adds layers of shame to dashed hopes.

In fact, stepfamilies are a fundamentally different family form. They create unique and often intense challenges for all involved, including their couple and family therapists. What works (and what doesn’t) to meet these challenges is often quite different from a first-partner family. Few clinicians receive good training in how to be helpful in navigating this terrain. Using a first-time family map as a guide can not only be misleading but all too often destructive.

Whether working with couples, families, adults or children, participants in this workshop will learn to recognize the major challenges all stepfamilies face. They will learn a 3-level framework for meeting those challenges and avoiding some common “wrong turns” in their clinical work. The impacts of stigma and factors such as race, gender and sexual orientation on stepfamily relationships will also be explored. Participants will take away tools for softening conflict, sowing realistic hope, providing evidence-based guidance, and forging connections in their work with blended families.

Dr. Patricia Papernow is an internationally recognized expert on stepfamilies. Her work integrates a wide variety of modalities and theoretical models and is informed by over four decades of clinical practice and a deep understanding of research in this area. The recipient of the award for Distinguished Contribution to Family Psychology from the APA Couple and Family Division, Dr. Papernow is the author of several classic books in the field, including *Surviving and Thriving in Stepfamily Relationships: What Works and What Doesn’t*, and, with Karen Bonnell, *The Stepfamily Handbook: From Dating, to Getting Serious, to Forming a “Blended Family.”* In addition, she has authored numerous articles and book chapters on this topic. Dr. Papernow is a psychologist in private practice in Hudson, MA, and Director of the Institute for Stepfamily Education.

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this program the participants will be able to:

1. Describe the unique challenges “blended families” create for parents, stepparents, children, and ex-spouses.
2. Describe some evidence-based, practical tools for meeting common stepfamily challenges occurring in interpersonal and intrapsychic contexts.
3. Describe what works (and what doesn’t) for successful parenting, stepparenting, and discipline in stepfamilies.
4. Provide examples of practical, evidence-based psychoeducation about what works and what doesn’t to meet common stepfamily challenges.

5. Identify several common “wrong turns” therapists may make in their work with stepfamilies and how to avoid them.
6. Describe how factors such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and stepfamily stigma can impact stepfamilies.

REFERENCES:

Papernow, P.L. (2019). Helping queer stepfamilies meet their challenges. In: M. Murphy & R. Harvey (Eds.). *Handbook of LGBTQ-affirmative couple and family therapy* (2nd edition). New York: Taylor & Francis.

Waldron, V., Braithwaite, D.O., Oliver-Blackburn, B., & Avalos, B. (in press). Paths to positivity: Relational trajectories and interaction in positive stepparent-stepchild dyads. *Journal of Family Communication*.

Bonnell, K.S. and Papernow, P.L. (2019). *The Stepfamily Handbook: From dating, to getting serious, to forming a “blended family.”* Kirkland, WA: CMC Publishing.

Papernow, P.L. (2018). Clinical guidelines for working with stepfamilies: What individual, couple, child, and family therapists need to know. *Family Process*, 57(1), 25-51. DOI: 10.1111/famp.12321.

Papernow, P.L. (2018). Recoupling in mid-life and beyond. From love at last to not so fast. *Family Process*, 57(1), 52-69. DOI: 10.1111/famp.12315.

Papernow, P.L. (2013). *Surviving and Thriving in Stepfamily Relationships: What Works and What Doesn't*. New York: Routledge. [Translated into Japanese and Russian, and soon, Dutch, Hebrew, and Hungarian.]

PARTICIPANTS:

This program is open to all PCFINE Members and other interested mental health professionals and students. It is intended for those with a beginner, intermediate, or advanced level of knowledge and experience.

CANCELLATION POLICY:

Full refund if notice of cancellation received by January 28, 2022.

CONTINUING EDUCATION:

PCFINE is approved by the American Psychological Association to sponsor continuing education for psychologists. PCFINE maintains responsibility for the program and its contents. This program fulfills the requirement for 6 hours of CE credit. Social Workers and Licensed Mental Health Counselors may call (781) 433-0906 or e-mail pcfine1934@gmail.com for CE information. Application for professional continuing education (CE) credits from the New England Association for Family and Systemic Therapy has been submitted.

PCFINE is committed to accessibility and non-discrimination and will conduct all activities in strict conformity with the American Psychological Association’s Ethical Principles for Psychologists. If you believe that a violation of ethics has occurred during this program, or if you have concerns about accessibility for people with disabilities, or any other complaints or questions, please contact Justin Newmark, Ph.D.

There is no commercial support for this program nor are there any relationships between the CE sponsor, presenter, workshop content, research, grants, or other funding that could reasonably be construed as a conflict of interest.

REGISTRATION:

Last day for registration is Thursday, February 3, 2022.

Fees:

PCFINE Members: \$130 early bird registration; \$150 after 1/10/22

Non-members: \$160 early bird registration; \$180 after 1/10/22

Grad Students (w/ID): \$50

***Equity Rate:** \$60

To register, please visit our website at <https://www.pcfine.org/event-4587414>.

*This registration rate is intended for participants who identify as belonging to racial or ethnic groups with historical barriers to access, and/or participants who primarily work with low income individuals or those who have also endured historical barriers to access.