



**national  
healthy marriage  
resource center**

# **NHMRC June 2009 Webinar Frequently Asked Questions**

**Recruiting and Serving Stepfamilies**

June 30, 2009

## Recruiting and Serving Stepfamilies

### 1. What curricula do you use when working with stepfamilies? Do these curricula include kids?

We use Smart Steps for both adults and children. It is a six week program. Kids attend with their parents but are instructed in a separate class. However, at the end of each session the adults and kids come together to take part in a family activity.

### 2. How can healthy marriage practitioners serve stepfamilies in the context of larger healthy marriage and fatherhood programs?

The best scenario is to have a separate class for stepfamilies. However, if there can only be one class taught to both stepfamilies and non-stepfamilies, it is important to address universal themes that apply to both family types. These may include communication skills, conflict management skills, etc. For those who are interested, you can then distribute resources that are targeted to specifically help stepfamilies, such as fact sheets and book recommendations.

### 3. How do you document program outcomes?

We perform an extensive evaluation including pre-tests, post-tests, and three- and six-month follow-ups. We also track marital satisfaction over time through qualitative methods by interviewing several families over several years.

### 4. What is your referral system?

We partner with 12 family service agencies. These partners already have relationships with families and therefore have significant influence in terms of suggesting that they attend a class. We also distribute flyers, both through our partner agencies and directly to individuals, and run public service announcements on the television and radio.

### 5. What do we know about the effect of extended family/grandparents on stepfamily outcomes?

Grandparents and extended family can be great sources of support to children while their parents/stepparents are sorting out their adult issues. Grandparents in particular have the ability to be stable, objective individuals who provide love to children and ensure that they feel safe.

### 6. What are the best opportunities for reaching out to parents directly?

Reaching out to parents works best when family service agencies already have contact with the parents. The agencies can then often successfully promote a marriage education class to the parents.

### 7. What are some considerations for deciding which staff and workshop facilitators to hire?

We cannot discriminate based on family history (i.e. whether a facilitator has a personal experience with being in a stepfamily). However, we have found that

the best facilitators are charismatic and energetic, regardless of their family background. We also prefer to have male/female duos teaching the classes, but this as well is not something we can choose.

### 8. Can you provide tips for creating a stepfamilies class in Texas?

There is a list of curricula on Smartmarriages.com. These curricula can be adapted to start a stepfamilies class in any state. Once you decide which curricula and training are right for you and your program, you can begin training facilitators and recruiting participants for the class.

### 9. What aspects of working with stepfamilies still need exploration?

There needs to be more research performed on working with ethnically diverse stepfamilies, who often perceive stepfamily dynamics in unique ways. For instance, there is no word for stepfamilies in Spanish, and the idea of a stepfamily is therefore not as easily understood in certain Spanish-speaking cultures. There also needs to be more research done to determine why more families, and stepfamilies in particular, do not take advantage of marriage education. This research should enable practitioners to recruit families more effectively.

### 10. How would you advise individuals working with stepfamilies to move forward?

It is important to be aware of cultural differences between families, and how different cultures are affected by the stepfamily situation. It is also crucial to be aware of issues specific to stepfamilies and how to address these issues in a class setting. Finally, it may be beneficial to convene an advisory panel on stepfamilies. We did this in the past in order to learn more about domestic violence and Head Start and it was extremely advantageous towards our program. Furthermore, it may not be necessary to spend money to bring in an expert. There are free resources and trainings related to stepfamilies and remarriage education available through the National Extension Marriage and Relationship Education Network ([www.NERMEN.org](http://www.NERMEN.org)), the National Stepfamily Resource Center ([www.stepfamilies.info](http://www.stepfamilies.info)), and the Healthy Marriage Resource Center ([www.healthymarriageinfo.org](http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org)). You can also invite staff in your office or partner organizations to discuss their experiences as being part of a stepfamily or working with stepfamilies.