

Military OneSource Podcast — Thriving as a New Parent

Episode transcript

Intro voiceover:

Welcome to the Military OneSource podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department, with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit militaryonesource.mil.

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody.

The Defense Department is committed to the health and well-being of military children and families. That's why the DOD teamed with the Clearing House of Military Family Readiness at Penn State. They've created a free, online parenting education program for busy parents. Thrive programming provides age-appropriate, evidence-informed best parenting guidelines to promote positive parenting, stress management and a healthy lifestyle for children from birth to 18. I'll be talking with Terry Rudy, who's a research project manager for the Thrive Initiative. Terry, welcome to the podcast.

Terry Rudy:

Thank you. Thanks for having me.

Bruce:

It's good to have you with us. You've been with us before. It's great to have you back. Let's just start off and talk a little bit about Thrive. What is the Thrive Initiative? What is it that you do?

Terry:

Thrive is a portfolio of parent education modules. We partnered with the Defense Department's Military Community and Family Policy to develop some programming opportunities for parents that are primarily online resources. These are resources that are in the form of a learning module, so new parents of preschoolers, school-aged children, adolescents and teens. The whole way from 0 to 18. And then we also have some supplemental learning modules that parents or caregivers can participate in that are on identified or specific topics. We also have within Thrive a lot of downloadable resources for parents.

We have some resources like "Breathing to Thrive," so some self-care information for parents. Or we have some external links included for where parents can find other information or resources that they might need. A lot of things are available through

Thrive. Everything is funneled through the Thrive website, which is located at thrive.psu.edu.

Bruce:

Great. So, we'll get that link in the program notes. Terry, this online parent education program, explain this to us because you offer it to the general population, but you have a variation of it specifically for military families.

Terry:

Yeah. So, we partner with the DOD to develop the programming, but one of our directives was to also make it available to all families – civilian and military. In the back of our minds as we're developing these programs, we take into consideration the special challenges that military families might experience. But we also recognize that all families experience similar challenges.

Throughout our programming, we have things like everyday moments or common moments or things that happen to all parents or all families. And with this programming, though, I want to mention, too, it's also evidence informed. You mentioned, hey, we work with really smart people to develop these things. Our programming is evidence informed, and then it takes a strengths-based approach. We're focusing on what families are already doing well. So, regardless if you're military family or a civilian family, we are all doing things that are good and positive. And we want to build on those strengths in our programming.

We're building on what parents or caregivers are already doing well and then helping them to learn additional skills or to maybe put things in different perspective and come at them from a different angle than maybe what you would have thought of. And like I mentioned earlier, everything's available online, so available to military families who may be transitioning or PCSing or as they go from installation to installation. It's something that is always available to them. So, it's not on-the-ground training that's available, and once you PCS, you don't have those resources anymore. It's always available to everyone at any time.

Bruce:

And you mentioned that it's online. There's a lot of parenting education programs available online. So, how does Thrive differ from the other programs?

Terry:

It's really due to that evidence-informed piece. We take a look at programs that have previously been developed that are evidence-based, and we pull all of the components and the things that are good about those programs and we put it together in this package for the Thrive program. We're not reinventing the wheel because there's a lot of good stuff that's already out there. We're repackaging it. We're taking the best of the things that already exist and we're putting together in this package. And within this,

we're also keeping our military families in mind. We're making sure we focus on some of those unique challenges that they might have with this program.

Bruce:

OK. So, for this program, we're talking about it's for military families, but specifically, who's eligible?

Terry:

Yeah. Thrive is available to everyone. Service members, their families and then also civilians. The program is free, so it's free to everyone. There is no cost. Individuals get immediate access when they register or log in to a program through the Thrive website. We're talking about parents, caregivers or anyone who's really helping to care for a child. They can build on the strengths that they have as a caregiver with the Thrive programming that's available. We're even talking about grandparents or an aunt or an uncle who might be helping to care for a child, or even your friends, babysitters, those types of things. Daycare workers who work with children and families, anybody is really eligible to participate in the programming.

Bruce:

That's really interesting. How about brand-new parents?

Terry:

Yeah. For brand-new parents, we have our "Take Root" program, a program that is available for parents and caregivers of children who are infants through those toddler years, so birth to 3. "Take Root" has three age tracks. We recognize with "Take Root" that there is a lot going on in that age span. From birth to 3, there are a lot of developmental milestones that are being hit and they're being hit very quickly.

We decided to break "Take Root" up into three different age tracks. We have 0 to 6 months, 6 to 12 months, and then 1 to 3 years. If a new parent goes on to log in to the "Take Root" program and participate in that, they will take a look at some developmental milestone things to help them make the choice for where they need to go, because it doesn't necessarily relate to the age of your child.

Or, say you're bridging the gap; you're right at 6 months. And it's, should I do the 0 to 6? Should I do the 6 to 12? Where do I fall? And so that's taking a look at where your child is developmentally and where do you want to go. You can choose the particular age track with a little bit of guidance for where you want to go and participate in that program.

Each of the age tracks for "Take Root" take about an hour and a half to complete, and they build on each other. So, if you, say, have a 4-month-old child and you go in and you take 0 to 6 months and you learn some things, when your child hits 6 months or maybe right before they hit 6 months, you want to participate in the 6 to 12 to learn how you can continue to build as your child is growing.

You need to grow, too, and learn, what are the things I need to do differently? Or how do I need to shift? Also with the different age tracks, the way that they're laid out is it's termed in these three different modules where it's through your eyes. So, really thinking and talking about, what is it like for you as a parent, as a new parent? And what are the things you need to consider? You've got to also take care of yourself. Thinking about things like that. Think about yourself.

And then the second one is through your baby's eyes. Think about it from your baby's perspective. What are the things they're going through? What are they experiencing? And then in that last module, it's let's figure it out together. Let's bring these two pieces together. What am I thinking, feeling? What is my baby, my child, thinking and feeling? And how do we work on those things or those everyday moments like we talked about earlier? If it's something as simple as eating, how do we work on those things together and make sure we're getting on the same page?

Bruce:

Just touch on a little bit, if you would, just a little bit more about the stress management and the healthy lifestyle aspect of parenting with regard to the programs that you offer.

Terry:

Yeah. I think that's a great point. And I think we can probably use the analogy from when you fly. It's that whole put on your oxygen mask first before you put it on your child or those type of things. You have to make sure that you're in a good place yourself so that you can be in a good place for your child or for your family.

I think some parents get concerned that they're being selfish if they're taking time for themselves, but that's very important so that you're in a good mindset so that you can deal with some of the challenges or issues surrounding your child or your family so that you can respond appropriately. We do talk a lot about self-care, a lot about being physically active, take care of yourself physically, nutritionally make sure you're doing what you need, have your circle of support.

We talk a lot about your circle of support in all of the programs that we have. You really need to take a look at who are the people, the things that are available to you or around you that you can reach out to. And that might look different for very different people. Or it might be something that you need to do continually. Say your family deploys, parts of your family deploy and you lose certain people. Maybe you need to have a new person to help fill the gap. Or say your family moves or transitions to a new installation.

Your whole circle of support may change because maybe you had a certain friend network or you had a certain clergymen at a location that you reached out to or people at the school system. Maybe you need to take a look at that as your child grows, as you transition, and make sure you're connecting with people that can really help you to move through. Or it might not be people, it may be certain things. Maybe within your circle of support you see that it's like, I need an hour a day to myself. And this is what I

need so that I can be the best I can be for my family. And recognizing and realizing that that is OK for you to do that.

Bruce:

That's wonderful. Thank you so much. Yeah. So, you also have a Thrive blog and some downloadable parent resources. Why don't you talk about those for us?

Terry:

Yeah. We post regular blog postings on our Thrive website. And we talk maybe sometimes about new literature that's out there, or we talk about some topics that are maybe difficult to talk about.

I remember we did a blog on spanking. Is it OK? Isn't it OK? Or time out, how do I really do it correctly? We try to pull maybe new things or new tidbits of information and relay that out. Sometimes we're taking some information from one of our programs and focusing on something like that and talking through that. Maybe it's something like physical activity guidelines and what's appropriate or right for my 5-year-old? Or what's the difference between what my 5-year-old should be doing and my 13-year-old? So maybe some things like that. We also have a lot of downloadable resources that are available. We, of course, have handouts for all of the programs that we have. But we also have some other resources, more packets of information.

We have one that's a resource that's called "Cooking to Thrive," where we've got recipes and information for how to get your child interested in that, cooking, or doing that as a family activity. We also just developed some mini booster module videos that focus ... they're about 2-to-3-minute videos. They focus on a skill or technique, for example, active listening, and how you can do that. It's a quick snippet of how can I do this? Or what do I need to do better in order to more actively listen to my child to make sure I'm hearing them, understanding them? Those types of things. There is a lot.

We're always adding new stuff to the website, as well. Encourage everyone to continue to check back to the website because there's always something new going up for families or for parents and caregivers.

Bruce:

Well, that's wonderful. What would be the first step? What would a family member, a potential parenter, someone involved in parenting, do as their first step?

Terry:

Yeah. So, if you navigate to the website, a parent will see the four core programs initially that we have. We have a homepage, of course, and you're going to see the four core modules.

So that's "Take Root" that I talked about already. And then we have "Sprout" for preschoolers, "Grow" for school-aged children, for the parents of school-aged children. And then we have "Branch Out" and that's for your adolescents or teens. You're going

to see those four core modules there. And then, once you click on whichever module you'd want to take, for example, for new parents, we would direct them to "Take Root." You would click on there and then you can just click on another button to register for the program.

You only need to enter your name and your email address, and then you have immediate access. And, as you're taking the program, if you need to step away or you only have a certain amount of time to dedicate to it, you can leave and come back and pick up right where you left off.

On the website, you're also going to see the other resources that I mentioned that are available. You'll also see some of the other programming that we have is supplemental modules. We have some identified or specific topics, and these are also learning modules that you can take. For example, our two newest modules are on co-parenting and parental absence. These modules take about two hours to complete, but again, you can come back and pick up where you left off with these modules, just like the core Thrive modules.

Bruce:

Terry, this is wonderful information. So glad to be able to share this. Any final thoughts?

Terry:

Yeah. I think one final thing is, after you take the programs, we do have a Tell Us What You Think form, so you can complete that. We are always interested in hearing what you have to say. Maybe some new resources that you might have, ideas for us, or if there are topics that you really can't find information about. Letting us know these things, we're always welcome to feedback that you have, whether it's from parents, caregivers, our partners, professionals who work with families, whoever it might be. So please feel free to share that information with us.

Bruce:

Thanks so much for joining us today.

Terry:

Thank you.

Bruce:

Terry Rudy is a research project manager for the Thrive Initiative. Great to have you with us. I'm sure that you'll be back.

We want to remind everybody that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We are a website, a call center, we're on social media, and we are a podcast. Subscribe to us wherever you listen to your podcasts because we cover a whole range of topics to help military families thrive at military life.

I'm Bruce Moody. Thanks so much for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.