

Program title: Thrive Tactic: Thrive for Families in EFMP Podcast

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.

I returned yesterday from Hill Air Force Base. This is a base just north of Salt Lake City. I met with a number of military parents and, like all parents, military or not, they're busy, they're stressed and they're always trying to figure out the challenges of parenting.

With that, we want to talk about an online parent-education program, and we offer it to busy parents, and it includes a section which is dedicated for families who have special needs. It's called "Thrive," and we're going to get into that, but with our guest.

Terri Rudy is with the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State University. Terri, welcome to the podcast.

Terri Rudy:

Thank you. Thanks for having me here.

Bruce:

It's good to have you with us. Tell us a little bit about yourself and tell us about this clearinghouse.

Terri:

Sure. Like you mentioned, the clearinghouse is at Penn State. We are an applied-research center, and we work primarily alongside professionals who are working with military families to offer them support for what they need. I am the research project manager for the Thrive Initiative, and Thrive is a little bit different than a lot of the things that we work with professionals on, in the sense that this is a program that we collaborated with the Defense Department to develop, and we're continuing to develop it and expand. So, it looks a little bit different in terms of we are directly creating things that are then being distributed to military families as opposed to just working alongside professionals, but Thrive does also provide some support and resources for professionals who are working with military families.

Bruce:

Let's focus on what you provide for military families just real quick, and then we'll unpack. This is online learning, so just give us a quick overview of what that means.

Terri:

Yeah, sure. All of the programs that are available to families are available through the Thrive website, which is located at thrive.psu.edu. Families can go into the website and register for a program. They simply sign up, and they have immediate access to the programming.

Bruce:

OK. The website you just referenced, we'll put that in the program notes so people can just go and click through and check it out. You mentioned that Thrive is specifically designed with the military and for military families. How does it differ from other parent-education programs? Because there's a ton of them online. So specifically, what are people going to get out of Thrive?

Terri:

Yeah, so you're right. Thrive was definitely developed with military families in mind, but I think one thing I want to note is that Thrive is also available for civilian families. That was a directive from DOD to make this programming available for everyone, and I think one of those main things is because it's free. Parenting programs tend to be very costly. This program is actually a free resource that the DOD is providing to military families and civilian families.

And I think noting that it's in the online format, so specifically for military families as they're transitioning from base to base, that online format allows them the ability to take or continue to take a program and not get cut short if they're taking, say, a face-to-face program at an installation. It's something that is always available no matter where they're at.

I think also, too, if families are separated, say a service member is deployed, the parents can take the program at the same time but separately, and talk and discuss those things while they're apart. They can still work on their parenting skills or things that might be going on, and it's a way, too, for the service member to support the at-home parent that's there to go on, learn some potential skills, strategies that might be available to offer some supports while they're absent.

Bruce:

OK. So, a family, because they're going to go and create an account, they can pretty much do it on demand, as needed. They can stop it and start it. They can log on from multiple locations and pick it up from wherever they left off, regardless of where they're moving around.

Terri:

That's correct, yes.

Bruce:

OK. The actual training modules, how do you break it up? Is it by age group?

Terri:

Yeah, so what we decided to do in collaboration with DOD was we take a strengths-based approach. We're meeting the families where they are. What we decided to do was categorize those into developmentally appropriate age groupings. So, we have four core programs.

Our first program that we have is "Take Root." This is the program that's available for parents and caregivers of infants or toddlers, so we're talking about birth through 3 years of age. And then we have "Sprout" as the next program, and that's for parents and caregivers of preschool-age children or that 3- to-5-year-old age range. Then we have "Grow," which is for parents and caregivers of school-age children or children who are 5 to 10 years old. And then, the final program is "Branch Out," which is available for parents and caregivers of middle- or high school-age children. We're talking about that 10- to-18-year-old age range.

The reason why we decided to break it down is because there is so much going on as a child grows and develops. It's really a way to be able to continue to introduce new ideas, concepts, skills, strategies throughout the different stages of a child's life to really help the parents respond to those different and unique challenges as their child grows and develops.

Bruce:

My parents totally figured out parenting, and then I would grow. So, every day was new. Yeah, I provided them a rich education. First of all, I love the names of these various modules, but you do have one for families who have special needs. Can you talk about that, please?

Terri:

Yeah, that's correct. We do. So those four programs that I mentioned, those are our core programs. These are the longer, larger programs. And then in our conversations with some partners, we started to have discussions about some people looking or families looking for information on specific topics. So, we decided to develop these supplemental modules that really build off of what is taught in those four core Thrive programs, but that drills down into an identified topic area.

The first supplemental module that we put together was what is called "Exceptional Families. Embracing Differences. Flourishing Together." And that's our supplemental module for families who have a child with a disability. And this one, it really came out of professionals having concerns that some families were in this wait pattern to receive

their services, and it really came out of COVID where the families weren't able to go get the face-to-face services that they needed for their child.

In this particular program, we have information for how to incorporate activities like physical therapy or occupational therapy. And then it offers strategies for how to incorporate those things into your daily life so that those parents, families that are in this wait pattern, can really feel like they're doing things to support the needs of their child.

There's also some information in there about understanding services that are available, like IEPs, and how to navigate the IEP process or even looking ahead to what comes after high school for these families, for these children, and how to prepare and plan your child for that.

With this supplemental module and additional supplemental modules, we do recommend that parents and caregivers and families first participate in the age-appropriate Thrive program. So, like I mentioned, we're building off of skills and strategies that are in those four core programs, so we're going to refer back to some of those same things that we're already talking about as we build and present some specific skills or strategies related to what it is that this supplemental module focuses on.

We currently have two other supplemental modules that are available. We have one for grand families, so if you are a grandparent and you're raising an adolescent, there is a supplemental module for you. We also have a module on mental health. It's called "Adolescent Mental Health: Parenting to Wellness." So that is our newest module that has gone live. And then coming soon, we have a module on parental absence, so parenting through family separation, and offering some additional resources and skills and strategies for if you're in that situation.

Bruce:

Well, I appreciate that. One thing we do note is that families are more diverse than ever, and that diversity also gets into the structure of a family. I think it's valuable to have those different structures of modules. So, Terri, I had a question about these actual modules. How long does it take to, say, complete a module?

Terri:

The individual core programs are all different. "Take Root," for example, the program available for parents and caregivers of infants and toddlers, that one actually is divided into three separate age ranges. Because there's so much going on in an infant's life from zero to 3, we actually broke that down to three age-tracks. Each of the age-tracks there takes about an hour and a half.

And the nice thing about that is that parents with new children, they don't need to feel so overwhelmed by watching all of this, like, "Oh, here, I'm going to sit down and watch a module about my child's first three years of life." We can take it in stages, and as the child ages, there are some new skills and strategies for that short period of time. So

those are all about an hour and a half. Parents can come back as their child grows and take those.

“Sprout,” that program is about maybe three hours in length. That one is more scenario-based. We have scenarios where the learner follows four different and diverse families through common parent-child interactions. Each scenario is maybe about five or 10 minutes in length. It really depends on how long it takes the user to complete that particular scenario.

“Grow” is about four hours in length, and “Branch Out” also is about four hours in length, and then these supplemental modules, we are trying to keep those at about two hours in length, because we’re trying to realize that even though you can do it over time, you’re taking this core module and then you’re also taking the supplemental module.

Bruce:

Thrive was developed with help from the military. So as people are going through this program, are they being introduced and connected with various resources that the military offers, or is it more just a generic parenting course?

Terri:

Yeah, so the four core programs, we had to find balances, because the DOD wanted the programming to also be available for civilian families. I mean, keeping in mind that all families have common challenges, regardless of whether you’re military or civilian, but we do pull out specific pieces, or let’s say they’re referenced in side notes, for military families. These are some of the things, or additional considerations. I will say in the supplemental modules, those do that a lot more frequently. We’re really pulling those things out, because that’s where we really start to see a lot of the differences. When we’re talking about things like exceptional families, there’s certain processes that happen in the military that don’t happen in civilian life or vice versa, that we need to pull out those separate pieces. So, it does happen a lot more in the supplemental modules.

Bruce:

Well, Terri, it has been really interesting talking to you today about Thrive. And for parents who are going into the program notes and clicking on the link that takes them into Thrive, what should they expect, and what will they need to do as they’re accessing and signing up for the program?

Terri:

Sure. When you go to the website, you’ll see the links for the program to register for the individual programs. You’ll also see a lot of other resources. We have a lot of resources available specifically for the parent in terms of things like healthy behaviors, like eating healthy. We have a “Cooking to Thrive” resource there. We have some additional resources available. We have blog postings. We have some mini videos where you can

learn really quickly in two to three minutes, learn a specific skill or strategy, like an active-listening technique. You'll see a lot of resources on the Thrive website in addition to going to the program.

And then, once you register for the program, I think you really just need to enter your email address and your name, and then you get access into the program and you can go to the course catalog and choose which program or programs you'd like to take, and then you'll just walk through. You can walk away from the programming at any time. You can come back and pick up right where you left off, and you don't have to complete it over a certain period of time. Once you're in there, you have access to the program for as long as Thrive exists, and hopefully Thrive will exist for a long time.

We are really trying to make it relevant for everyone and continuing to provide additional resources, like we're doing with these supplemental modules, so that we're continuing to give families really some good information that they can come back to as they encounter new or different challenges.

Bruce:

Can you sign up with a personal email, or do you need to sign up for Thrive with a .mil account?

Terri:

No. It can be any email.

Bruce:

Interesting. Good to know. Terri Rudy, thank you so much for joining us today.

Terri:

Thank you.

Bruce:

We appreciate the opportunity to talk about this. Again, we encourage you to go into the program notes and click on Thrive and have a look.

And we also want to remind you that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We're a website, we're a call center, we're all over social media, and now we're a podcast. We hope that you'll subscribe, because we cover a whole range of topics to help military families thrive and navigate military life.

I'm Bruce Moody. Thanks for listening. Goodbye.