

# Family of Origin Systems

## Guidelines for Constructing Genograms

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A family genogram need to be completed for this assignment that covers your childhood through your adolescent years. This genogram should consist of the following: (1) a generational map of your family of origin, (2) a delineation of key family patterns in terms of the relationships, roles, life events, and multigenerational trends that significantly affected you and your family of origin.

### Family Genogram

A genogram is a family map that represents how different family members are biologically and legally related to one another from one generation to the next. Minimally, this family map should depict three generations--you and, if applicable, your siblings; your parents and, if applicable, any step-parents; and any grandparents and/or step-grandparents. In terms of demographic information, you need to minimally include the first names, dates of birth, ethnicity, dates of marriage, dates of death, and, if appropriate, the dates of divorce and/or separation for all of the significant family members you designate. However, you do not have to specify all of the information for less significant family members, like cousins, if you do not wish to do so. The genogram on Freud's family diagrammed by McGoldrick et al. (1999) serves as a good example for making these determinations.

### Family Patterns

Once the structure of the genogram is depicted with its vital statistics about family members, you now need to add information about your family in terms of relationships, roles, critical events, and multigenerational patterns.

**Relationships.** Designation of relationships involves the depiction of the fusion and conflict patterns in the family genogram. While most family relationships involve some degree of fusion and conflict, the designation of these patterns in a genogram should be limited only to those that were persistent and significant problems in your family. Restricting the designation of relationship difficulties in this manner keeps the genogram more focused and prevents it from getting cluttered up with too much detail. To identify these patterns, using the different relationship lines designated by McGoldrick et al. (1999), first start with your parent's relationship and then take a look at their relationship with you and, if applicable, any of your siblings. Next do the same thing for your grandparents' relationships and their relationships with your parents and, if applicable, their siblings. Again, be sure to only highlight those relationships that were persistent and significant problems in your family.

**Childhood Roles.** In addition to patterns of relating, take a look at the different roles you might have played in your family of origin. Roles are the relatively fixed patterns of behavior that you consciously and unconsciously assumed in attempting to

accommodate to the various needs and demands that your family placed on you. Typical positions that children can assume in their family of origin are parental, marital, dependent, rejected, rule breaker, companionate, and delegate roles. These role descriptions were developed by Napier (1988) and are explained in more detail in a class handout called "Family Structure and Role Patterns Questionnaire." For now just describe in your own words any consistent role you believe you played in your family of origin. Examples of such descriptions might be the responsible one, the jester, the trouble maker, the pleaser, the mediator, the wild one, etc.

**Critical Events.** This section involves listing the important transitions, relationship shifts, migrations, losses, and successes that occurred during the developmental period(s) covered by your genogram. These critical events provide the broad historical context to your development and a chronological view of your family history. As such, the delineation of this history should not be strictly limited to just those events that directly involved you. Rather, it should consist of all those critical events that had a major impact on both you and your family as a whole. Because the recording and memory of family events becomes more dispersed over time, it is understandable that you will cite less events at the beginning than at the middle and end of your family history.

**Multigenerational Patterns.** Identify any particular style of functioning (whether adaptive or maladaptive) or the ways of dealing with problems (whether healthy or unhealthy) that seem to be passed down from one generation to the next. Thus, multigenerational patterns could involve any recurring theme ranging from outstanding career successes to persistent career failures, from very stable parental marriages to very unstable parental marriages, from chronic chemical dependency to rigid abstinence from drugs and alcohol, etc. Also be aware that this transmission does not necessarily occur in linear fashion. For instance, alcoholic parents may have children who become teetotalers, and then their children may again become alcoholic. Hence, the multigenerational pattern in this situation is one characterized by an ongoing struggle with alcohol.

## **Family Research**

Obtaining some of the above information may require that you consult with different family members. As long as you can do so without generating or regenerating any family conflict, feel free to draw on and utilize these family resources as much as you can. However, avoid inquiring about these matters if there is a strong likelihood that it will lead to conflict between you and your family members. Also be aware that you are only responsible for portraying you and your family history with the information that is reasonably available to you. So, for example, if there are deceased or otherwise unavailable family members who are the only ones that can provide reliable information about certain key aspects of your family life, it is certainly acceptable that there are some missing data or gaps in your portrayal.