



Genograms:

Understanding and Responding to our Family Background

What is a genogram?

A genogram is a diagram of your family tree which identifies not only who is or was in your family, but also the equality of relationships between family members. It provides a tool for helping families and individuals better understand and respond to the origins and dynamics of family issues.

Why do we use the genogram?

Because the genogram not only includes the various family members but also includes lines which signify the type of relationship among family members, the genogram is a good tool to help identify which needs went unmet, particularly in one's growing up years.


In additions to identifying met and unmet needs, the genogram is also used in providing a structure from which to share one's life story and consequently share the pain that may then be expressed and comforted by others.

How do I draw my genogram? What symbols do I use to represent persons and relationships in the genogram?

1. Draw the important people, identifying who they are and how they were related to you and each other. Draw the genogram as if it was during your childhood, age 12-13 and younger. Represent this through the use of the following symbols.

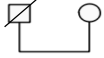
  **Gender:** Squares representing males, circles representing females.

 **Marriage:** A bracket connecting the two spouses.

 **Children:** Draw a short vertical line from the marriage connection with the square or circle at the end of that line. Children are always represented from oldest to youngest, with the oldest on the far left of the marriage connection line.

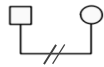


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Death:

Diagonal slash through either the square or circle which represents the person who died. It is often helpful to write out the date and year of death or the child's age when the family member was significant.



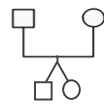
Divorce:

Two diagonal slashes in the middle of their marriage connection line.



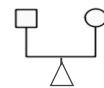
Separation:

One diagonal slash in the middle of their marriage connection line.



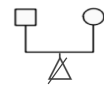
Twins:

A single line which forks into two lines, terminating in their respective gender symbols of the twins.



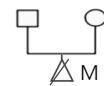
Pregnancy:

A child in utero is represented by a triangle.



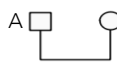
Abortion:

A diagonal line drawn through the triangle.



Miscarriage:

Same as above with an "M" noted on the side.



Alcoholism:

A family member who is an alcoholic or drug addict may be represented by an "A" to the side of that family member's symbol.

Other:

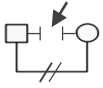
Consider nothing family disasters such as fire, earthquake, or other traumatic experience, such as sexual abuse.

2. Identify the quality of relationships that existed between you and others who were important to you during your childhood (ages 12-13 and younger): you and your parents, you and your siblings, you and other important extended family members.

Also represent the quality of relationships between other people who were important to you, especially if their quality of relationships affected you (Your mother and father's relationship with each other, their relationship with your siblings, their relationship with their parents and in-laws, etc.)



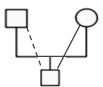
Use the following “lines” as symbols to represent your perspectives:



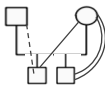
Estranged (Line with a “break in it”): A relationship which has been cut off, broken, or severed, such as two adult siblings who have not spoken to each other for 15 years because of a disagreement over their father’s estate.



Distant (Dashed line): Significantly uninvolved—not much talk, seeing each other or doing things together. While distant relationships may occur with extended family members, they also may happen among family members living under the same roof.



Connected (Single line): There is conversation, being around each other, and even doing things together, but not really deeply knowing each other. Relationship is really somewhat superficial.



Close (Double lines): “Healthy close,” intimate. A relationship in which intimacy needs are consistently met in ways appropriate to this relationship. Within marriage, close means needs are mutually met. Between adults and children, the needs of the child are consistently met by the adult, rather than the child consistently meeting the needs of the adult.



Enmeshed (Triple lines): “Unhealthy close.” The two people involved are too close, and/or the child is used to need the needs of the adult. The child may be used to meet the sexual or intimacy needs of the spouse dissatisfied with the marriage relationship. A parent may attempt to live vicariously through his or her child, such as a parent who pushes a son to excel in a sport or other activity that the child does not really enjoy.



Conflict (Jagged line): A relationship which is characterized by tension and anger. The anger may be openly expressed and obvious, or it may be “covered up” or suppressed.

What additional questions should I reflect upon and answer after I’ve drawn the genogram?

1. Who met your need for **attention**? Consider:

- What was your “world” as a child?



- Who left their world, entered your world in a way meaningful to you? Who really knew you?
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2. Who met your need for **affection**? Consider:

- Who conveyed “I love you” through meaningful, caring, non-sexual touching, hugs, kissing, holding?
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- Who conveyed “I love you” verbally by telling you, “I love you”?
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3. Who met your need for **approval**? Consider:

- Who conveyed to you, “You are my beloved child, in whom I’m well pleased,” and you didn’t have to do anything to earn or deserve this commendation?
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4. Who met your need for **comfort**? Consider:

- When you were hurting, who would you tend to go to?
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- How did this person respond to you and your pain? With true comfort? (i.e. not acts, advice, pep talks, or criticism, but instead, something like: “I really hurt for you; it saddens me that you were hurt like that.”—tender words with heartfelt emotion?)
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After you have reflected upon your answers to these questions, spend some time sharing your responses with your spouse or journey-mate. Be alert to opportunities to “emotionally respond” to each item as your spouse shares their answers with you.