TUTORIAL

Introduction

A genogram is a tool that outlines a person’s family over the course of a few generations. Like a family tree, but more detailed, a genogram profiles the roles of family members and the relationships between them. The genogram can be used by counselors, clients, clergy, and helping professionals during counseling sessions or groups to chart out a person’s family. This can make it easier to recall the dynamics presented, and reveal family issues that need to be addressed. If you are using this with a group, print out several copies of the blank genogram and one copy of the other worksheets for every participant.

Symbols

See Genogram Key (1.2) worksheet

The symbols for genograms vary based on the model, and can be very complex, but this tutorial presents a scaled-down version using the system presented in Genograms: Assessment and Intervention by Monica McGoldrick, Randy Gerson, and Sueli Petry. This is the book considered to be the gold standard reference for creating genograms.

The meanings for each symbol are shown in one of the following handouts titled Genogram Key (1.2). A square represents a male family member and a circle represents a female family member. A circle encompassed by a square and a square encompassed by a circle represent transgender family members. Any of these symbols marked with an “X” in the middle mean that the family member is deceased. A solid line connected between a couple means they are married. A dotted line represents an unmarried but committed couple.
A line with one dash in the middle means that that both persons are separated. A line with two dashes in the middle represents a divorced couple. Double lines are used to represent two family members who are emotionally close. This can apply to any set of family members, not just couples, but also siblings, a parent and a child, a grandparent and a grandchild, etc. Three lines mean that the two family members are in an emotionally enmeshed relationship. A jagged line represents a hostile or estranged relationship.

**Practice**

*Use Blank Genogram (1.1) and Genogram Examples (1.3) worksheet*

To practice, create a genogram for a couple fictional television families (as directed below) on your own, then compare them with the outlines provided in worksheet 1.3.

**The Simpsons**

Couple: Homer and Marge (Married); Siblings: Bart, Lisa, and Maggie.

**The Brady Bunch**

Couple: Mike and Carol (Married but both previously married; Mike's previous wife with an unknown name is deceased; Carol is divorced from her previous husband with an unknown name). Siblings: Greg, Peter, Bobby; Step-siblings: Marcia, Jan, and Cindy. Greg and Peter are close, while Marcia and Jan are hostile.

**Your Genogram**

*Use Blank Genogram (1.1) and Genogram Questions (1.4) worksheet*

Now chart out your own family. Answer the questions on worksheet 1.4 one-on-one with a counselor, friend, or support group member. The questions are based on those presented by Peter Scazzero in his book, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*. The questions will apply to non-religious people as well.
Blank Genogram (1:1)
Genogram Key (1.2)

- Male = 
- Female = 
- Transgender = Female to Male = Male to Female = Married = Separated = Committed = Close = Enmeshed = Hostile = Deceased =
Example Genograms (1.3)

THE SIMPSONS

Homer

Bart

Lisa

Maggie

Marge

THE BRADYS

Unknown

Mike

Carol

Unknown

Greg

Peter

Bobby

Marcia

Jan

Cindy

Unknown
Genogram Questions (1.4)
(Peter Scazzero)

1. Describe each family member with two or three adjectives (parents, caretakers, grandparents, siblings, children).

2. Describe your parents’ (caretakers’) and grandparents’ marriages.

3. How was conflict handled in your extended family over two to three generations? Anger? Roles?

4. What were some generational themes (e.g., addictions, affairs, losses, abuse, divorce, depression, mental illness, abortions, children born out of wedlock, etc.)?

5. How well did your family do in talking about feelings?

6. How was sexuality talked or not talked about? What were the implied messages?

7. Were there any family “secrets” (such as a pregnancy out of wedlock, incest, or major financial scandal)?

8. What was considered “success” in your family?

9. Where there traumatic losses in the past or present, such as sudden death, prolonged illnesses, stillbirths or miscarriages, bankruptcy, or divorce?

10. How was money handled? Spirituality? Holidays? Relationships with extended family?

11. How did your family’s background shape you?


13. What kinds of addictions, if any, existed in the family?