

Genograms

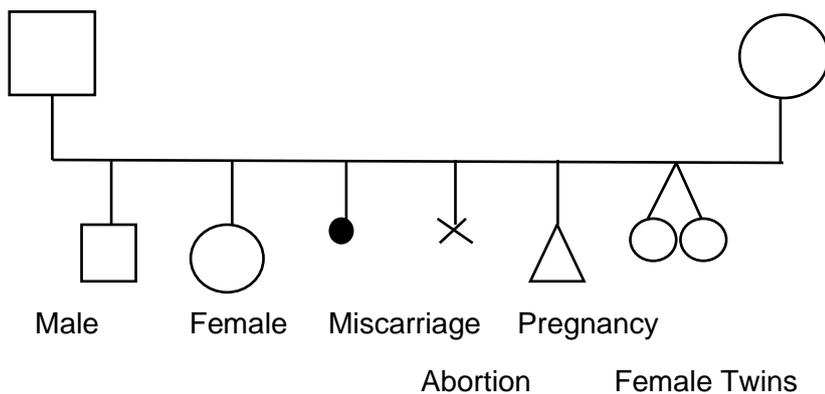
What is it?

A genogram is a tool to capture in pictorial form the family structure, but it is so much more than a 'family tree'. It can be used to organise the mass of information gathered during family assessments. It is helpful in finding patterns in the family system which leads to a more targeted intervention.

Why are they used?

They are a useful, visual tool to use with families which invite a lot of discussion between worker and family. They record family patterns of relationships and functioning over at least three generations. This information is more easily read and less likely to be lost in other written records. A genogram can be an assessment & intervention all wrapped up in one.

Basic Symbols



It doesn't matter if the symbols you/the family use are different to the 'official' versions as long as you do a 'key' anything goes!

- Other things that can be added include:
- Physical/health problems
e.g. diabetes, MS
 - Psychological/mental health
e.g. depression, eating disorder
 - Abuse *e.g. sexual abuse*
 - Substance misuse *e.g. alcoholic*
 - Cultural back ground *e.g. Greek*
 - Occupational group *e.g. Army*
 - Religion *e.g. Catholic*
 - Education *e.g. University*
 - Law/legal/prison *e.g. has served time in prison/criminal record*
 - Location of family members
 - Hobbies/Interests
 - Support networks (think outside of the family network)

How to start a genogram

Often people enjoy an opportunity to talk about their family history and show that they are the expert of their lives. You can do a genogram with one family member or all of them (together or separately). It can work as a good tool to build trust and rapport in a working relationship. A genogram may take several sessions to complete.

Let the client draw the genogram. Start with the subject i.e. the child you are working with. Draw them at the **bottom** and work your way up and out to include all relatives: alive, distant and

deceased. Have at least 3 generations. Try and add dates to key things such as births, deaths, marriages, separations etc. Check who lives with who (draw circles around households). Use colours or codes (letters/numbers/shapes) for any extra's added on – make sure you add them to the key. Once done, scan and upload it and let the family keep the original.

Looking for patterns

You are looking for key life events which either:

1. Changed the dynamics of the family
2. Created other problems
3. Are repeated through various generations

These life events could be traumatic deaths (including 'sudden' ones or those where there has been caring responsibilities); illnesses; mental/psychological problems; addictions; legal problems; social Services/police intervention; work or school achievements.

Ideas of topics to explore

- Look for patterns of behaviour, thoughts, coping strategies, beliefs and morals
- Identify which ones are helpful and which ones are not (and to whom)
- Draw connections and differences between people and over time
- Explore their childhood and how that links to the one they are providing for their children

Examples of Questions to ask:

- Describe your mum and dad's parenting style? If I asked them/your brother/sister what would they say?
- What would your children say about your parenting style?
- What would your mum and dad say about your parenting style?
- Which parts of the way you were parented have you decide to take on yourself as a parent?
- What would you leave in the past?
- If you could go back in time what would you say and to who?
- When you were the same age as your son/daughter how was your relationship with your parents? The same or different and in what ways?
- What do you want to see in the next generation of your family? How might you encourage/prevent this from happening? Do you need support from others to do this?
- Who in your family (past and present) could you ask for advice? What do you think they would say/do?
- If your son/daughter became famous what story would you be proud to read about and which ones would you want to stop going to print?

Questions related to a problem

- When did the problem begin?
- Who noticed it?
- How does each person view it?
- How were the relationships in the family prior to the problem?
- How have these relationships changed?
- What will happen if the problem continues?

Relationship Lines

