

Module # 12: Intergenerational and Family Issues

Geriatrics, Palliative Care and Interprofessional Teamwork Curriculum

Module # 12: Intergenerational and Family Issues

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I. Overview

Dealing with the aging process within a family is a complicated matter. As the older adult transitions to a state of dependence, the balance and the functionality of the family is disrupted. Roles must be re-examined and changed while unresolved issues re-emerge. This is a stressful time for all concerned, and those families who do not have a history of cohesiveness and compatibility will not be able to unite to benefit the aging relative. This module examines family systems theory and presents strategies to help families overcome the challenges associated with the complex role of caring for an older adult.

II. Learning Objectives

1. Define family.
2. Recognize culturally supported notions of the role of family with older adult members.
3. Review the stages of the family life cycle and define the family system from a multigenerational context.
4. Complete and analyze a genogram to understand multigenerational relationships and patterns of communication.
5. Understand the components of a family assessment and methods of collecting data within a family meeting.

III. The Family

A. General Definition: Those who consider themselves economically and emotionally related to each other by blood, marriage, or commitment; Those who are tied together through their common biological, legal, cultural, and emotional history and their implied future together; The primary and almost always the most powerful system to which humans belong.

1. Nuclear Family: a married/committed pair with dependent

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children and an independent household, bound to outside kin by voluntary ties of affection or duty

2. Extended Family/Modified Extended Family: all of those related to one another by blood or marriage
3. Support System: a group of individuals who join together to give support and assistance to each other, sometimes for a specific purpose

B. Family Life Cycle Theory

1. Developed after WWII when families were larger and fewer divorces
2. Traditional, idealized
3. Attention now to transitions vs. stages
4. Developmental tasks and needs of each generation are no longer complementary
5. Tension between older adult and adult children
6. Sandwich generation/women in the middle
7. Role of female as the caregiver

IV. Culturally Supported Notions Of Family

A. Adult Children

1. Duty to one's parents
2. Can never do enough
3. Indebted for the gift of life

B. Older Adult

1. Irreplaceable losses
2. Guilt over dependence on children
3. Fear of alienating children if needy

C. Relationship Myths

1. Adult children neglect and abandon older parents
2. Solidarity, support, and affection between parent and child

D. Aging Parents

1. 70% of people enter mid adulthood with 2 living parents (1993)
2. Approximately 50% of older people have daily contact with their children
3. Nearly 80% see an adult child at least once per week
4. More than 75% talk on the phone at least weekly
5. 91% feel close to their mothers
6. 87% feel close to their fathers

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7. Mothers and daughters are especially close
8. Relationships are reciprocal

V. Family Systems Perspective

- Family is an emotional unit
- Change or stress affecting one affects all ¹
- Repeating interaction patterns
- Family interactions and relationships tend to be highly reciprocal and patterned – creating difficulty in reorganization
- Individual symptoms have a function
- Loss of control, loss of continuity, loss of defined roles, loss of significant relationships, and loss of sense of purpose
- Adaptation to changing circumstances (i.e. the physical or cognitive decline of an aging relative) is crucial
- Unresolved issues will resurface
- Joint responsibility for problems
- Creation of a new system with a new organization

VI. Post-Modern Perspective – Family Mutuality ²

- Continued growth in old age, both psychological and relational ³
- Redefinition of dependency in old age as normal
- Acceptance of necessary shift in generational roles; adult-adult vs. role reversal
- Role reversal is not normative
- Despite the elder's decline, remains the parent within the family system ⁴
- Filial Crisis – normative; adults learn to balance love and duty to their parents with autonomy
- Filial Maturity – adult children learn to accept and meet parents' dependency; emotional readiness to relinquish earlier roles
- Maturity involves being depended on and being dependable

VII. Intergenerational Relationships

A. Caregiving requires re-engagement with most powerful and influential attachment of one's life – the parent. ⁵

B. Intergenerational relationships between parents and adult children are frequently characterized by ambivalence.

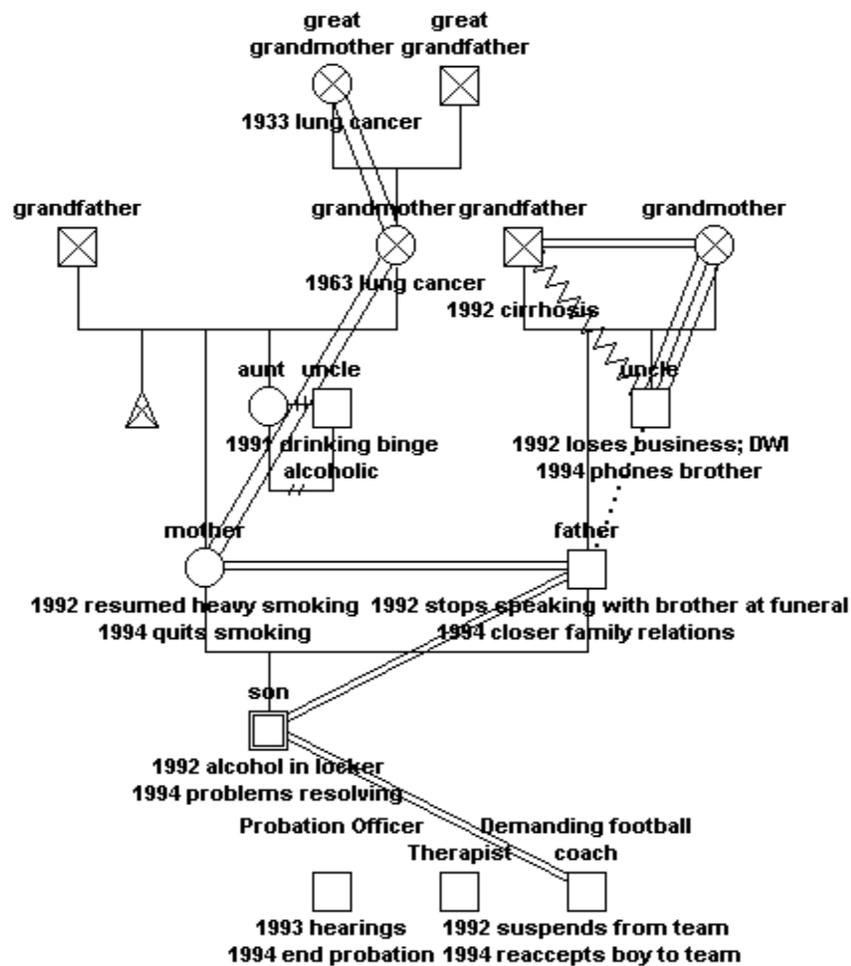
C. Adult child must deal with 2 different sets of parents – the parents we grew up with (idealized/demonized) and the living parent of today. ⁶

D. In order to realistically care for and relate to a parent, the adult child must let go of this mythical parent.

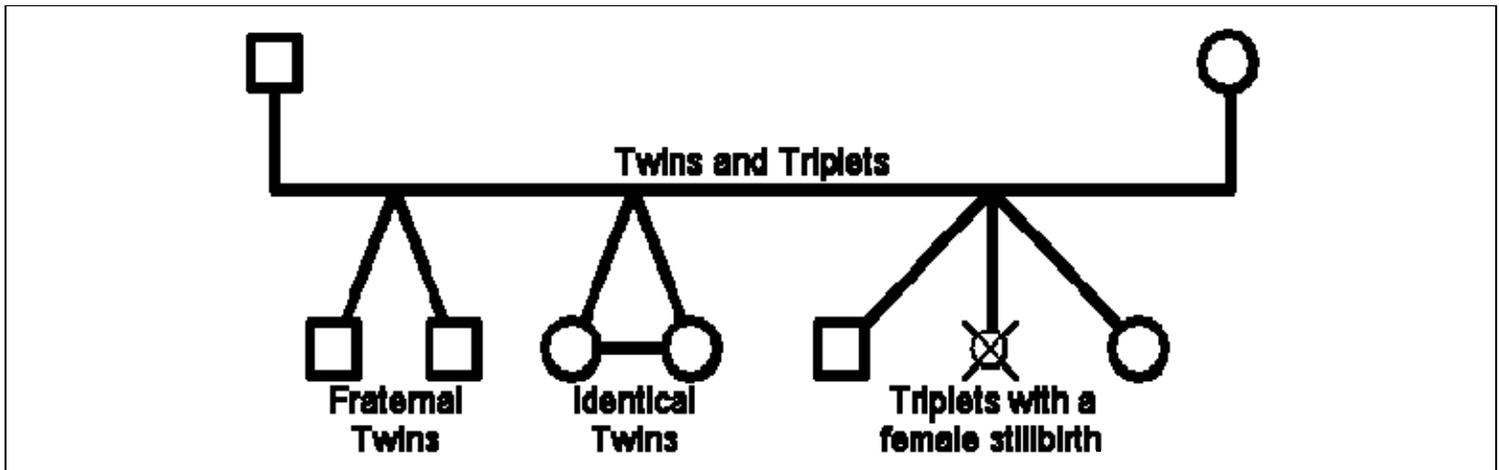
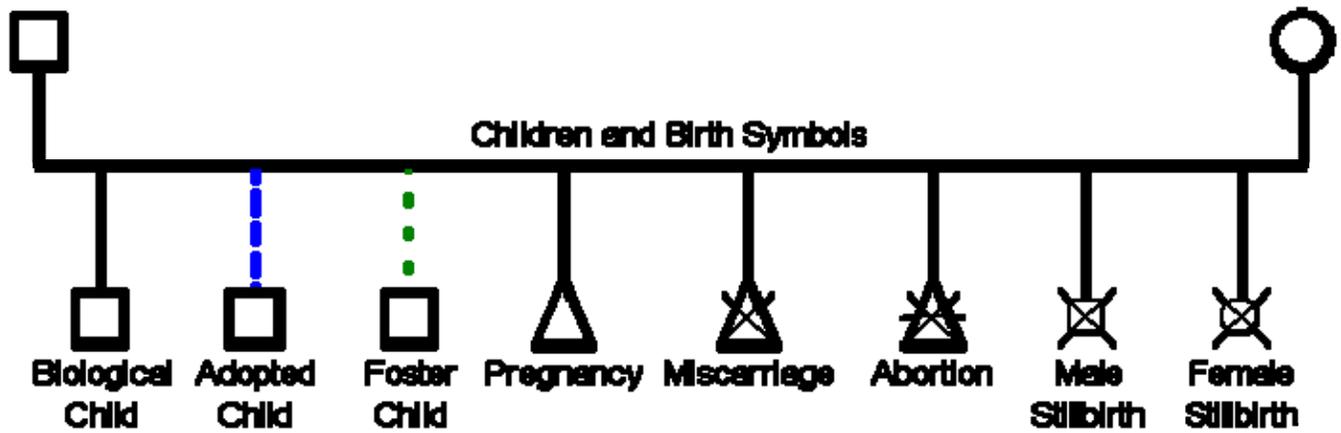
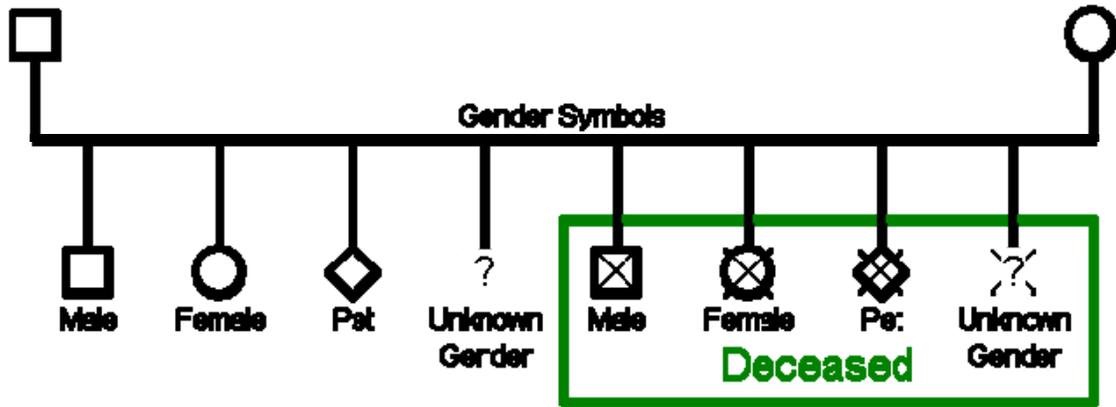
VIII. Genograms ⁷

- A. No “right-way” to develop
- B. Part of a comprehensive, SYSTEMIC, clinical assessment
- C. View the larger picture
- D. Developed out of Bowen’s Family System theory

Sample Genogram



GENOGRAM LEGEND



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Marriage	—————
Separation in fact	—————
Legal separation	—————
Divorce	—————
Nullity	—————
Widowed	—————
Engagement	-----
Engagement and cohabitation	-----
Legal cohabitation	-----
Legal cohabitation and separation in fact	-----
Legal cohabitation and official (legal) separation	-----
Legal cohabitation and decease	-----
Cohabitation	-----
Cohabitation and separation	-----
Cohabitation and decease	-----
Non-sentimental cohabitation
Dating / Sporadic relationship
Dating and separation (ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend)
Temporary relation / One night stand
Rape / Force relationship
Other or Unknown

Legend of family relationships

Cutoff / Estranged	- - - - -
Indifferent / Apathetic
Distant / Poor	- - - - -
Plain / Normal	—————
Friendship / Close	-----
Intimacy / Very Close	=====
Fused	=====
Hostile / Conflictual	~~~~~
Distant-Hostile	~~~~~
Close-Hostile	~~~~~
Fused-Hostile	~~~~~
Violence	~~~~~
Distant-Violence	~~~~~
Close-Violence	~~~~~
Fused-Violence	~~~~~
Abuse	~~~~~
Physical Abuse	~~~~~
Sexual Abuse	~~~~~
Emotional Abuse	~~~~~
Neglect (abuse)	----->
Focused On	—————>
Never Met	—————
Other	—————

Legend of emotional relationships

IX. Family Assessment

- A. Precipitating Problem
 1. Each individual's perception
 2. History of problem – why are they seeking help NOW?

- B. Family Relationships
 1. Marital
 2. Parental
 3. Siblings
 4. Other significant players
 5. History of caregiving role

- C. Level of Commitment
 1. Who?
 2. Why?
 3. How much?
 4. Conditional?
 5. Knowledge related to providing assistance
 6. Satisfaction with current plan

- D. Dynamics of Family Meeting
 1. Assess for strengths
 2. Watch the process/pathology
 3. Educate
 4. Facilitate
 5. Integrate

X. Family Interaction Patterns ⁸

- A. Compatible vs. Conflictual – always in agreement or always arguing; resurfacing of old conflicts

- B. Cohesive vs. Fragmented – present as a unit or as individual members

- C. Productive vs. Non-Productive – mobilize to create changes needed or powerless to act

- D. Fragile vs. Stable – family stability or disruption in relationships

- E. Rigid vs. Flexible – exchange and share roles and respond readily to crisis

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