

Family Diagrams



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SSW 201: Family Relationships

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What and how does your diagram illustrate your family and its history?

I chose to create a family genogram, as far as my grandparents. While completing my diagram, I noticed many family members have or had an alcohol addiction and were or still are cigarette smokers. Alcohol appears to be the most prominent addiction in my family. I also noticed a pattern of my grandma having a very close relationship with my mom and aunt, along with my mom and I having a very close relationship. This is interesting, as my mom and her father have had a very hostile relationship most of her life and still do to this day, so they are not close. On that note, my mom and brother have a distant but okay relationship, as do my brother and I. When I asked my grandma about her relationship with her dad, she told me it was a “normal father-daughter relationship, but I would get the belt once in a while when I was a kid,” they were close, but he was strict. My grandpa also died a bit younger, in his 50s, and she was around 30 years old. My grandma and her mother were very close until my great-grandma’s passing. My dad and I also had a distant relationship my whole life; we were never close, even when he passed away, although I still cared for him during his end-of-life. I can see a pattern of male distance and hostility in my family and female closeness. When I look at my genogram and think about the patterns, I feel there is a correlation between the male/female closeness or lack thereof and the (physical) abuse the females in my family have endured by their spouses or fathers. I also see that I have broken a few cycles, such as alcohol abuse, choosing my partners more wisely and creating stronger connections to my children and me, along with their fathers.

How does your diagram impact how you look at your life at the present moment?

Completing my genogram gave me somewhat of an “uh-huh” moment. I thought, it looks chaotic; it is no wonder my life feels so chaotic as well, all the time. Also, it gives me some more

appreciation and understanding about the difficulties my mom has had throughout her life when I was young and to this day. Looking at all the history, I can see why, possibly, some members have developed addictions or mental health issues. What I found to be a significant impact was seeing my children's boxes empty and looking at my family's history; they are susceptible to some addictions, and right now, they are like a blank canvas that will eventually have some colours. It is important that I ensure they have a safe, stable, and supportive environment to grow and learn in, so they do not follow in previous footsteps and their boxes do not include any of the colours in my legend box.

How could family diagrams be a useful tool when working with families?

Family diagrams could be a very useful tool when working with families. However, they can take a bit of time to map out. If it is important to understand family histories of addictions, mental health, and medical issues (such as cancer, ADHD, disabilities, and so on) and to link behaviours that influence these issues, a genogram could be the most beneficial and possibly more simplified but detailed diagram to use. Genograms would be suitable for young adults trying to understand their family's history and how it affects them in the present day, or to use when working with young children to learn about their parent's behaviours. It can be complex, though, so having sufficient time to map it out would be necessary.

The Tree of Life is more personal and profound but would give the most detailed understanding of how and why an individual feels the way they do during a difficult time. Also, to see how they have built resilience, which can positively impact them moving forward. Having clients work out the tree of life diagram could be triggering as they write out traumatic incidences, the loss of loved ones, or past addictions, so caution would need to be used when

vulnerable clients complete it. This diagram would be handy for therapy, especially in trauma-informed therapies, and could give the therapist a lot of information about their client's life in a clear way. In return, the therapist could offer more resources that target what has been noted from their diagrams.

The eco-map would be the quickest way to get information about the client's social support network. This would be helpful for a social worker working in a time-sensitive situation and needing to find out who supports the client in a hurry. This diagram would benefit clients who are children as it can show what structures and supports surround the child.