

Lesson 7 – Case Study – Genograms

Objectives:

Identify how to conduct a genogram and use it in a pastoral counseling setting.

- Explain why genograms are used in a pastoral counseling setting.
- Explain how genograms provide insight that can help us guide people toward health.

Setting: Chaplain is meeting with Steve and Emma, an engaged couple that want to make sure they get their marriage started off on the right foot.

Counselor: How are you today?

Steve: Fine

Emma: Excited, the wedding is getting close. Only a few months until it's here.

Counselor: Yes, it's an exciting time, both with changes and with things that you bring to marriage from the families in which you grew up. In fact, that's what our focus is going to be during this session of premarital counseling. As we discussed last time, today we're going to construct a genogram . You might think of it as a family tree that includes some stories and significant events. We want to look at these relationships and events because when people get married, we don't just start from scratch. We take all the things we have learned by seeing and listening in our family to our new marriage. This way you can have a greater self awareness of why some things are important to you. It will also let you plan those things you want to include in your family from your family of origin. The goal is to look back over three generations. So are you ready to start?

Steve: Sure, it sounds fun.

Emma: Well, I haven't done any research so I don't know if I'll know much.

Counselor: That's OK. There are some advantages to not preparing. Sometimes, what we don't remember can be as significant as what we do recall. OK, Steve we will start with you. What are your parents' names?

Steve: David and Mary.

Counselor: Do you have brothers and sisters?

Steve: Yes, two, I have a brother and sister.

Counselor: Are they younger or older?

Steve: Sister is older. The other one died.

Counselor: I'm sorry. What happened?

Steve: He died in a car accident when he was sixteen. He and a friend were coming back from the movies. They were hit by a drunk driver.

Counselor: That had to be really painful.

Steve: Yea, it is still painful. I don't like to talk or do anything on that day.

Emma: I didn't know that. But it explains that argument we had.

Steve: Yea, I guess I didn't realize it then. It just happens. No one in the family drinks anymore after that accident. It changed a lot of things.

Counselor: That is important. Thanks for sharing and we can talk some more about that later. Can you tell me about your sister?

Steve: Sure, she's great. She's three years older. She's married and has a baby boy. They named him Allen. It was our brother's name.

Counselor: So the accident impacted her, too.

Steve: Oh yeah. But no one really talks about it. We just deal with it in our own way.

Counselor: What is her husband's name?

Steve: Adam. He's a great guy. They have a really nice and peaceful family.

Counselor: It sounds like that's important to you as well. What about your parents?

Steve: My mom's name is Mary, and my dad is David.

Counselor: How old are they?

Steve: My dad is 52 and Mom is 51. They met in high school and have been married for 31 years.

Counselor: That's great.

Steve: Yea, they're good parents. They're very supportive...and they want grandkids.

Counselor: That is interesting. What role does religion play in the family you grew up in?

Steve: We're Catholic. Mom goes to Mass every day.

Counselor: So religion is important to you in your family.

Steve: Yes. But Emma I haven't really talked about it much. We had so much fun just being together.

Emma: That's true. I know he's Catholic but I don't know how religion fits in with us. I was raised Methodist but since college I haven't really been involved. I focused more on community service and justice issues. Religion just seemed outdated. You know, it was too restrictive...the rules and organization and everything.

Counselor: Sounds like something we may want to explore further. Steve what about your grandparents?

Steve: They have been married for 53 years. Their names are Elmer and Janet. There's a funny story about them. Supposedly they got married because Oma was pregnant with my Dad. But no one says anything about it. It is like a big secret that everyone knows but pretends not to know.

Counselor: Sounds like it's a big family secret.

Steve: Yeah, but you wouldn't believe how closely they watched my sister.

Counselor: Interesting, there is a lot more to explore and we still have to learn about Emma's family. But let's stop here for a minute. I want to show you what we have so far. If you look at the sheet you see squares and circles. The squares are the males. The circles are the females. You can see the wedding dates, the X to show deaths. You can see the ages. In the corner you noticed that I wrote down some of the key events and secrets. All this may have implications for the family you and Emma choose to form. Things like rules about alcohol, pregnancy, and religion we can already see will have an impact. But now you will have a greater awareness and be able to make an informed decision rather than just letting emotion drive you one way or another. Any questions?

Steve: No

Emma: This is really interesting

Counselor: Yes, it's amazing how much we know and don't know about our family and its effects on us. Well, this is a good start. Let's take a break and we can come back and start on Emma's family. I will see you in about ten minutes.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) From this short beginning, what issues do you think will be worth exploring to help this couple get off to a good start on their marriage?
- 2) What role do you think family secrets have played in this couple's life?
- 3) For an assignment, do a genogram with someone and discuss what insights it gave the person into their life, struggles, and strengths.