


## Pastoral Skills Training Family Life Course

### Lesson 7: Genograms

#### Student Guide

Lesson Objectives	
Identify how to conduct a genogram and use it in a pastoral counseling setting. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Explain why genograms are used in a pastoral counseling setting.</li><li>○ Explain how genograms provide insight that can help us guide people toward health.</li></ul>	
Session 1: Presentation Webinar	
Part 1	The Purpose of Genograms
Part 2	Using Genograms
Student Readings	
<i>Clinical Use of the Genogram</i> (McGoldrick and Gerson)	07-Clinical-Use-of-the-Genogram.pdf
Miscellaneous Information on Genograms	07-Genogram-information.pdf
Case Study	07-case-study.pdf
Session 2: Discussion Webinar	
A discussion of the assigned case study	

Genograms  
Lesson 7



RC Family Life  
Chaplain Course  
Phase 1  
USACHCS

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Genograms

Objectives

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- Explain why genograms are used in a pastoral counseling setting.
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Genograms

PART 1:  
The Purpose of Genograms

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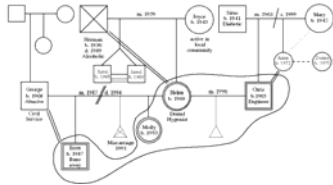


## Genograms



### What Is a Genogram?

- A genogram is a visual display of a family's relationships. While on the surface it looks like a traditional family tree, it goes beyond that genealogical tool by providing details on relationships, individuals, and events.



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## Genograms



### Why Genograms?

- For a clinical record, the genogram provides an efficient summary, allowing a counselor who is unfamiliar with a person to grasp quickly a large amount of information about a family and to have a view of potential problems.
- Typically, the genogram is constructed in the first session and revised as new information becomes available.
- Genograms make it easier for a counselor to keep in mind family members, patterns, and events that may have recurring significance in a family's ongoing care.
- Genograms can help family members see themselves in a new way and are thus an important way of "joining" with families in counseling.

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## Genograms



### Using Genograms

- Scanning the breadth of the current family context allows the counselor to assess the connectedness of the immediate players in the family drama to each other, as well as to the broader system, and to evaluate the family's strengths and vulnerabilities in relation to the overall situation.
- By scanning the family system historically and assessing previous life cycle transitions, one can place present issues in the context of the family's evolutionary patterns. Thus, the genogram usually includes at least three generations of family members, as well as critical events in the family's history, particularly as related to the life cycle.

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 **Genograms** 

### A Family Systems Perspective

- The information on a genogram is best understood from a systemic perspective.
- The concept of system is used to refer to a group of people who interact as a functional whole. Neither people nor their problems exist in a vacuum. Both are inextricably interwoven with broader systems, the most fundamental of which is the family.
- In this framework, "family" consists of the entire kinship network of at least three generations, both as it currently exists and as it has evolved through time.

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 **Genograms** 

### Why Look At Families?

- People are organized within family systems according to generation, age, and sex, to name a few of the most common factors. Where you fit in the family structure can influence your functioning, relational patterns, and the type of family you form for the next generation.
- Families repeat themselves. What happens in one generation will often repeat itself in the next, i.e., the same issues tend to be played out from generation to generation, though the actual behavior may take a variety of forms. (Multigenerational Transmission)

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 **Genograms** 

### Genograms and Families

- On the genogram, we look for patterns of functioning relationships and structure that continue or alternate from one generation to the next.
- The "flow of anxiety" in a family system occurs along both vertical and horizontal dimensions.
- Concurrent events in different parts of the family are not viewed as simply random happenings; rather, they are seen as often interconnected in a systemic way.
- Symptoms tend to cluster around such transitions in the family life cycle, when family members face the task of reorganizing their relations with one another in order to go on to the next phase.

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## Genograms



### Degrees of Fusion

- There are many types of relationship patterns in families. Of particular interest are patterns of relational distance. People may be very close or very distant or somewhere in between. At one extreme are family members who are very distant from or in conflict with each other. The family may actually be in danger of breaking up. At the other extreme is what is called emotional "fusion" or "stuck-togetherness" of individuals in the family system.

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## Genograms



### Triangles in a Family System

- Two-person relationships tend to be unstable. Under stress, two people will draw in a third, stabilizing the system by forming a coalition. The basic unit of an emotional system thus tends to be the triangle.
- As we shall see, genograms can help the counselor identify key triangles in a family system, see how triangular patterns repeat from one generation to the next, and design strategies for changing them.
- The genogram helps the counselor pinpoint the contrasts and idiosyncrasies in families that indicate the type of complementarity or reciprocal balance.

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## Genograms



### Discussion Questions

- How have your family relationships affected your life?
- How can a genogram help you understand the family relationships of a client?

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 **Genograms** 

**PART 2:**  
**Using Genograms**

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 **Genograms** 

**Constructing Genograms**

- Map the family structure: The backbone of a genogram is a graphic depiction of how different family members are biologically and legally related to one another from one generation to the next. Plotting this information is the first step.
- Record family information: The next step requires gathering information on the family members, such as deaths or other events.
- Delineate family relationships: Finally, family relationships are delineated. If a son has been disowned by his parents, for example, that is reflected in the genogram.

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 **Genograms** 

**Reading Genograms**

- This map is a construction of figures representing people and lines delineating their relationships.
- Reading the genogram for patterns of contrast and balance in family structure, roles, functioning, and resources allows the counselor to derive hypotheses about how the family is adapting to imbalances that may be stressing the system.

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 **Genograms** 

**Clinical Uses of the Genogram**

- Counselors can use a genogram in order to:
  - Engage the whole family.
  - Unblock the system.
  - Clarify family patterns.
  - Reframe and detoxify family issues.

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 **Genograms** 

**Engaging the Family**

- Genogram interviewing shows interest in the whole family system.
- The genogram interview often allows the counselor to build rapport with family members around issues of specific concern to the family. Genogram questioning goes to the heart of family experiences: birth, illness, death, and intense relationships.
- Genograms often provide almost instant access to complex, emotionally loaded family material. However, the structure of the genogram interview seems to elicit such information in a relatively non-threatening way.

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 **Genograms** 

**Unblocking the System**

- When a family comes in with a problem, it has often adopted its own rigid, nonsystemic view of the problem and what needs to be changed.
- Calm, nonthreatening "research" questions on key family life experiences can often open up these matters, so that family members can begin to relate to one another in a different way around such issues.
- The genogram interview is especially useful for engaging obsessive, unresponsive, or uninvolved clients.

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## Genograms



### Clarifying Family Patterns

- Clarifying family patterns is at the heart of genogram usage.
- Clarifying family patterns serves an educational function for the family, allowing family members to see their behavior as connected and within the family context.

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## Genograms



### Reframing and Detoxifying Family Issues

- In problematic families, the family's perspective is often rigid or resistant to change or to alternative views of the situation. Genograms are an important tool for reframing behavior, relationship and time connections in the family, and for "detoxifying" and normalizing the family's perception of itself. Suggesting alternative interpretations of the family's experience points the way to new possibilities in the future.

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## Genograms



### Discussion Question

- How might a genogram help an unresponsive family open up or view itself in a different light?

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