

One Minute Guides - Genograms June 2018

What is a genogram?

Completing a genogram or family tree with a family allows a worker to engage with family members about who is who in their family and to get a sense of the different family relationships.

A genogram should cover at least three generations - children, parents, grandparents and should include the dates of birth of the family members, rather than ages so as to stand the test of time. They can be drawn using the symbols below:



Male



Female



Gender unknown
(eg pregnancy)



Death

Unions:



Enduring relationship
(marriage or cohabitation)



Separation



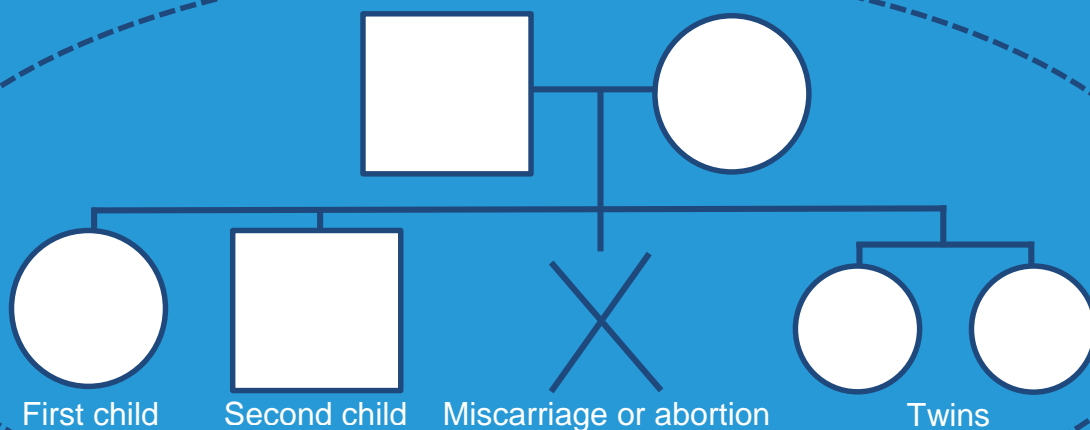
Transitory relationship



Divorce

Example:

A dotted line should be drawn around the people who currently live in the same house

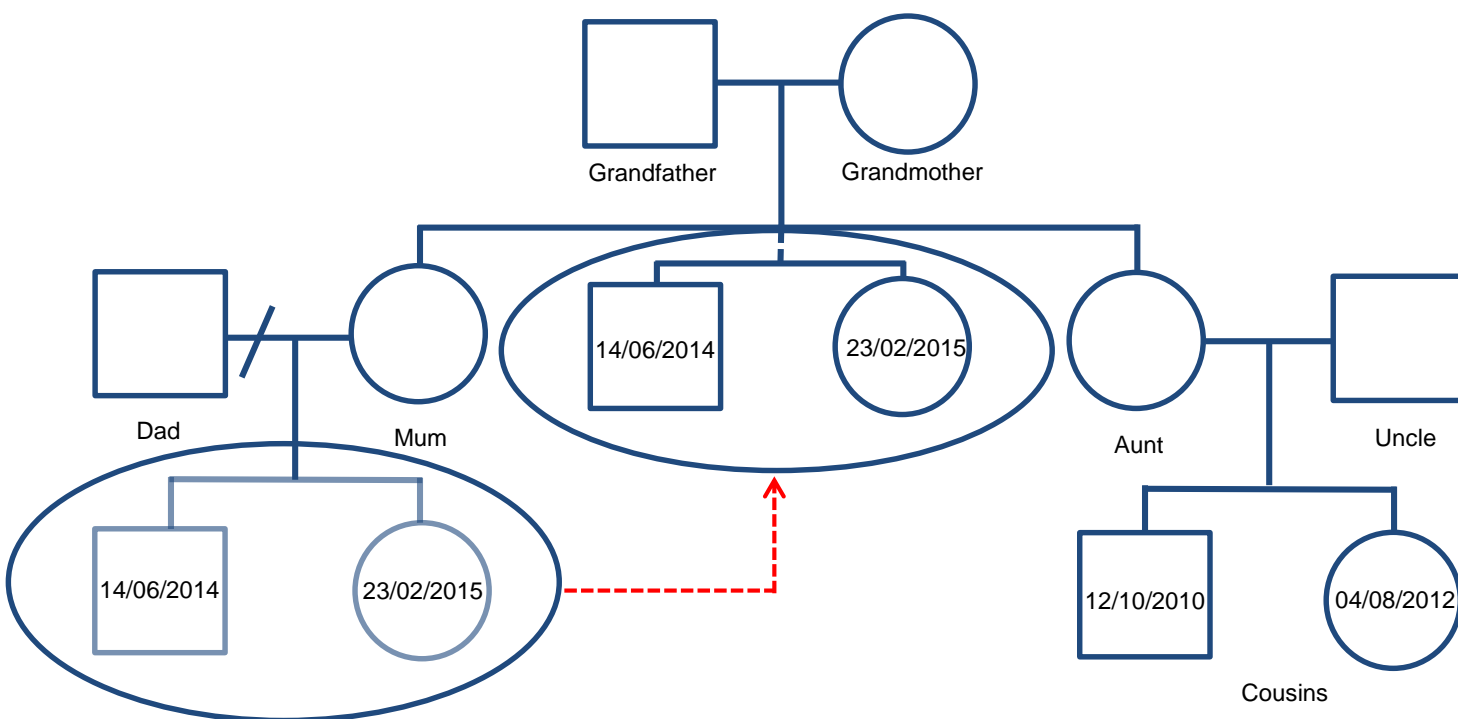


Why is it important?

A completed genogram can be used to talk to families about their history, the nature of relationships they have with each other and others, and any patterns of behaviour associated with one or other(s) of them. This will allow the worker to get a sense of significant events from the family's perspective - and allow them to introduce issues that have been raised as significant events by other people. A completed genogram is a really helpful tool if we are considering children moving from their parent(s) care to the care of a relative in their extended family. Moving the children from their current position in the family tree to the proposed/ new position will allow the worker to explore the new relationships that may form.

Example:

- *Moving two children from their mum's care to their maternal grandparents' care - might mean they are now on the same line as their mum and their mum's sister (their Aunt). What might this do to the children's relationship with their mum and their aunt - are they now all siblings?*



- *The Aunt may have two children herself - How might this change in family dynamics affect them? Will they still be cousins or are they now nieces and nephews?*
- *Might the aunt feel protective of her parents taking over the care of the two children - them having already brought up their children and been expecting to enjoy their retirement and their grandchildren? Will her children be jealous that their cousins are now living with their grandparents?*
- *The two children who are moving to the care of their grandparents actually lose grandparents - as they now become parents - have the family thought about this? How will they manage the loss? Are the great-grandparents able to help out?*

How do we do it?

It is helpful to use a large sheet of paper, coloured pens and pencils and a table (if possible) to work at. The family should be involved in drawing their family tree and this will provide the worker with an opportunity to observe and explore family relationships, for example; how open family members are with each other, whether they describe different people/relationships similarly or differently, how much they know about each other and how willing they are to share the information.

A family tree is the starting point of any assessment with a family and can be reviewed at any stage of the assessment or the intervention with the family so as to consider changing roles and relationships and new ways of behaving.

In any family dynamic there will be emotional responses to any changes that will need to be explored. These issues - redefining roles and boundaries, split/dual loyalties, guilt, anger and embarrassment, and losses - all have implications for the kinship family and the effectiveness of any new care arrangements.

Practitioners who feel proficient at working with families to develop and discuss their family tree might move beyond the family and look, with the child or their family, at relationships in their community - using an ecomap or a sociogram.

An ecomap allows a worker to explore who is important to a child - putting the child in the centre of the paper and then using objects or shapes to represent the people they consider to be important to them. The worker can then explore how the child would feel if any of these people moved from their position - to get closer or further away from the child.

Completing a sociogram allows a worker to see who the child/ family is involved with in the community and the nature of this involvement - whether it is strengthened by joint locations they visit (e.g. a school, church or community centre) or by other relationships who are interlinked (a number of direct or indirect friendships, etc)