

McGoldrick, M., Gerson, R., & Shellenberger, S. (1999).  
Genograms: Assessment and intervention (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.).  
New York: W.W. Norton

## APPENDIX

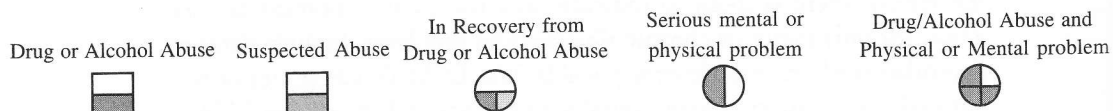
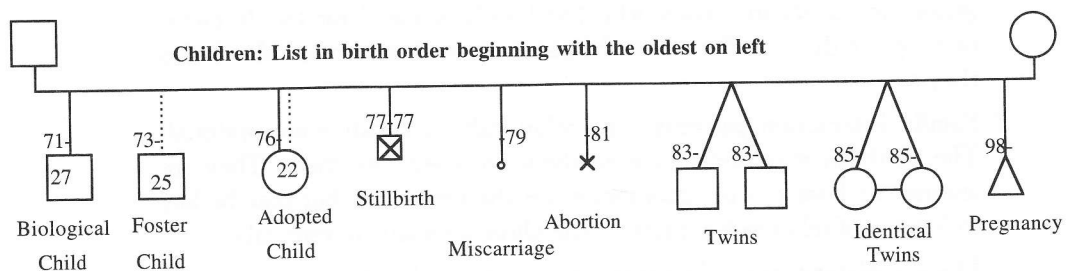
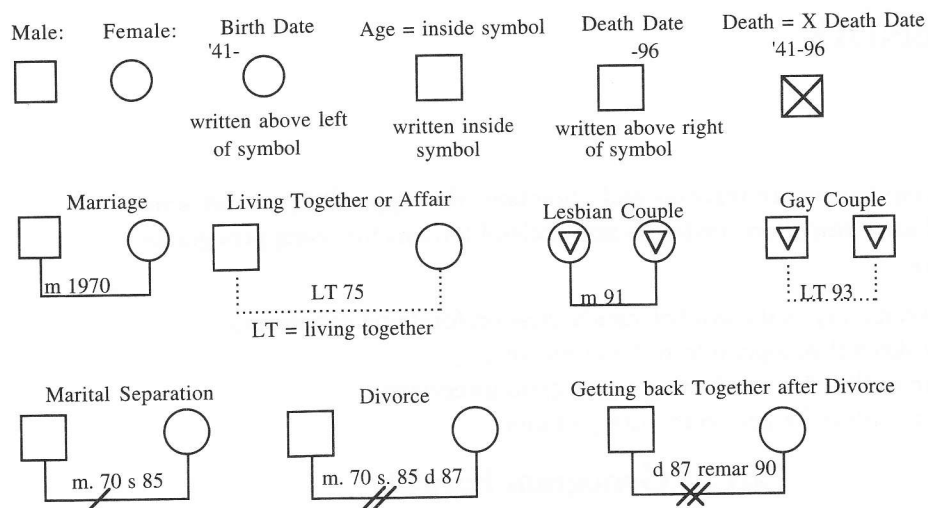
For the convenience of teachers and clinicians, this appendix provides summaries of some important materials and skeletal formats for doing genograms. It includes:

- 1) a summary of the symbol standardization for doing genograms;
- 2) a skeletal genogram form for clinician use;
- 3) an outline for conducting a genogram interview;
- 4) an outline for genogram interpretation.

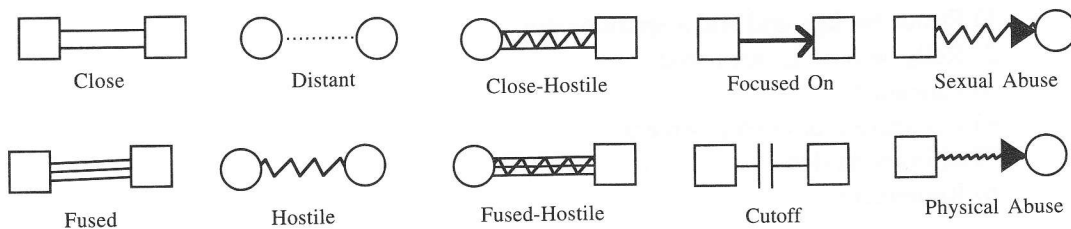
### Part 1: Genogram Format

- A. **Symbols** to describe basic family membership and structure (include on genogram significant others who lived with or cared for family members—place them on the side of the genogram with a notation about who they are).
- B. **Family interaction patterns.** The relationship indicators are optional. The clinician may prefer to note them on a separate sheet. They are among the least precise information on the genogram, but may be key indicators of relationship patterns the clinician wants to remember.
- C. **Medical history.** Since the genogram is meant to be an orienting map of the family, there is room to indicate only the most important factors. Thus, list only major or chronic illnesses and problems. Include dates in parentheses where feasible or applicable. Use DSM-IV categories or recognized abbreviations where available (e.g., cancer: CA; stroke: CVA).
- D. **Other family information** of special importance may also be noted on the genogram:
  - 1) Ethnic background and migration date
  - 2) Religion or religious change
  - 3) Education
  - 4) Occupation or unemployment
  - 5) Military service
  - 6) Retirement

## Standard Symbols for Genograms



## Symbols Denoting Interactional Patterns between People



- 7) Trouble with law
- 8) Physical or sexual abuse or incest
- 9) Obesity
- 10) Alcohol or drug abuse
- 11) Smoking
- 12) Dates when family members left home: LH '74.
- 13) Current location of family members

It is useful to have a space at the bottom of the genogram for notes on other key information: This would include critical events, changes in the family structure since the genogram was made, hypotheses and other notations of major family issues or changes. These notations should always be dated, and should be kept to a minimum, since every extra piece of information on a genogram complicates it and therefore diminishes its readability.

## **Part 2: Outline for a Brief Genogram Interview**

### **I. Start with presenting problem**

- Why are they coming for help now?
- When did the problem begin?
- Who noticed it?
- How does each person view it?
- How has each responded?
- What were relations like prior to the problem?
- Has the problem changed? How?
- What will happen if it continues?

### **II. Move to questions on household context**

- Who lives in the household (name, age, gender)?
- How is each related?
- Where do other members live?
- Were there any similar problems in family before?
- What solutions were tried in the past (therapy, treatment, hospitalization, etc.)?
- What has been happening recently in the family?
- Have there been any recent changes or stressors?

### **III. Gather information on parents' birth families**

- Number of siblings, names, dates of birth
- Place in birth order
- Parents' marriage (and separations, divorces, remarriages)

- Siblings' marriages (separations, divorces, remarriages, children)
- Cause of any deaths in the family

#### **IV. Inquire about other generations**

- Parents' parents (names, dates of birth and death, occupation, health)
- Causes of death
- Their siblings (names, dates and causes of death, occupation, health)

#### **V. Probe ethnic/cultural variables**

- Rituals within culture for handling death (attitude toward dying, body disposal, commemorative ceremonies)
- Beliefs about what happens after death
- Stigma or trauma associated with any death or loss
- Impact of ethnic-cultural variables on handling major life events, family relationships and roles, individual functioning, etc.

#### **VI. Elicit attitudes about gender**

- Impact of gender roles on household situation, on handling major life events, on individual functioning, etc.
- What are the gender rules within the family/culture regarding expressions of grief, funeral arrangements, or commemorative rituals?

#### **VII. Ask about major life events**

- Marriages
- Births
- Deaths, illnesses, disabilities
- Geographic moves
- Job changes
- Traumatic events such as natural disasters, wars

How did family adapt to these changes?

#### **VIII. Inquire about family relationships**

- Cut-offs
- Alliances
- Marital patterns
- Parent-child patterns
- Dominance/submission patterns

#### **IX. Inquire about family roles**

- Caretakers? "Sick" ones? "Problem" ones?
- "Good" ones? "Bad" ones?
- "Successful" ones? "Failures"?
- "Nice" ones? "Cold, distant" ones?

**X. Inquire about family strengths**

- Behaviors that indicate resilience
- Family members' character strengths: loyalty, courage, hope, humor, intelligence, and so forth.
- Family resources: ability to connect with outside resources, money, love, neighborhood community, religious community, work, and so forth

**XI. Include questions on individual functioning**

- Work (job, changes, unemployment, satisfaction)
- School (achievements, problems)
- Medical problems
- Psychiatric problems (depression, anxieties, phobias)
- Addictions (alcohol, drugs)
- Legal problems (arrests, lost professional license, current status of litigation)

## **Part 3: Genogram Interpretation**

### **I. Family Structure and Composition**

#### **A. Marital Configurations**

- 1) Single-parent households due to death or divorce or choice to form a single parent family can be stressful because of the obvious loss issues as well as loneliness, economic stress, child-rearing strain, etc.
- 2) Remarried households, where one or both parents have remarried following a death or divorce, bringing a stepparent into the household. Issues typically involve custody, visitation rights, jealousy, favoritism, loyalty, stepparent conflicts, stepsibling conflicts, etc.

#### **B. Siblings**

- 1) Birth order can have relevance for one's emotional and relational role in the family. For example, the oldest is more likely to be over-responsible, conscientious, and parental; the youngest childlike and carefree. Only children tend to be socially independent, less oriented toward peer relations, more adultlike earlier, more anxious at times, and like an oldest child, often the focus of parents' attention. All children after the oldest have to find some way to carve a niche for themselves.
- 2) Timing of sibling births vis-à-vis what else was happening in the family at the time. For example, was there a birth right after a loss? (Such a situation often indicates an attempt to replace or make up for the loss, etc.)

- 3) Family's expectations or "program" for the child.
- 4) Parental attitudes and biases re gender. Are males given preferred status? Or females? Are there alliances in the family by gender?

## **II. Family Place in the Life Cycle**

In interpreting a genogram, you will also want to look at where individuals and the family as a whole are in the life cycle. Families progress through a series of stages or transitions, including leaving the home of origin, marriage, births, child-rearing, retirement. Upon reaching each milestone, the family must reorganize itself and move on successfully to the next phase. If patterns rigidify at transition points, families can have trouble in adapting to a later phase (Carter & McGoldrick, 1998a).

The clinician should note what life cycle transitions, if any, the family is adapting to, and how they have adapted to life cycle events in the past. When ages and dates do not add up in terms of how that family progressed through various stages, possible difficulties in managing that phase of the life cycle can be explored. For example, if adult children have not left home, one would want to explore any difficulties around beginning a new phase of the life cycle. Or, if a marriage occurred quickly after a loss, this may be a clue about issues of unresolved grief.

## **III. Pattern Repetition Across Generations**

Since family patterns can be transmitted from one generation to the next, be alert in doing a genogram to any cross-generational patterns that reveal themselves in the following areas:

### **A. Patterns of Functioning**

Are there things about how this family functions that you see in previous generations also? These patterns could be adaptive (creativity, resilience, strengths) or maladaptive (battering, child abuse, alcoholism, suicide, etc.)

### **B. Patterns of Relationships**

Look for patterns of closeness, distance, cut-offs, or conflicts repeating over generations. For example, a family might have a pattern of forming relational "triangles" with mother and father allied against a child.

### **C. Patterns Related to Position in Family**

People in similar positions as a previous generation member tend to repeat the same patterns. For example, the only son of a man who spent time in prison during his twenties may pattern himself after his father and end up going to prison during his twenties. Or a person may remarry and form a similar family constellation to the one he or she grew up in (as with the

Rogers family in Genogram 7.1). This factor may influence relationships with others in the same repetitive pattern.

#### IV. Balance in Family Roles and Functioning

In well-functioning families, members' characteristics tend to balance out one another. For example, a gregarious, social partner is balanced out by a more home-oriented spouse; a responsible older sibling is balanced out by an easygoing younger one. The roles and personalities of one provide a complementary fit with the other.

But some genograms show an imbalance in roles, with too many people vying for the same role of "caretaker," for example, or one person being responsible for too much. An alcoholic married to a caretaker, for instance, may seem a complementary fit, but ultimately this situation puts too much of a strain on the caretaker. Families may also show an imbalance in power between husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, darker and lighter skinned family members, or for some other reason depending on class, abilities, parental preferences, family values, etc. When imbalance appears, explore how the family handles it and what the implications would be of changing it to create a more equitable balance in family relationships.