

## How to Build a Family Diagram

### **Basic concept: Mapping a family by using symbols and lines.**

Typically, a family diagram is put on a single piece of paper or a large poster board. It makes sense to make a draft copy as you are getting used to working with the symbols and spacing.

#### **Some principles:**

Earlier generations are at the top of the paper.

Present generation is at the bottom.

Father's side of the family is on the left and mother's side on the right.

Individuals of the same generation are shown on the same level.

Dates for birth, death, marriage and divorce are included.

Other symbols are used for designate traits or characteristics.

#### **To build a family diagram, follow this process:**

1. Start by drawing yourself, using double lines to designate that it is you. Record your name, date, place of birth, and your age. You may include your health status, education level, and occupation.
2. Add your parents. Father on the left, mother on the right. Record the information about them that you have. If they are deceased, include date and cause of death.
3. Add your siblings, from left to right, oldest to youngest, keeping yourself in the accurate sibling position. Diagram spouses, children and include any important family issues.
4. Include your spouse and previous partners as appropriate, children and grandchildren.
5. Add your grandparents and other important people, including aunts, cousins, other relatives and any non-relatives who are very important to your family.
6. Add symbols that indicate significant issues such as alcohol or drug abuse; mental, physical or emotional illness; and symbols to indicate closeness, cut-off or tension.

#### **Add to your Family Diagram:**

1. Names, nicknames, family titles for each person
2. Dates of birth, death, severe illness, marriages, separation, divorces, other rites of passage
3. Physical locations, place of birth, and dates of important moves.
4. Types of relationships between members of the extended family.
5. Emotional cut-offs. What was the issue?
6. Ethnicity, occupation, socioeconomic level, education, religious affiliation, etc.
7. Primary and secondary triangles

And excellent resource from which this hand-out is adapted is *A Family Genogram Workbook* by Israel Galindo, Elaine Boomer, and Don Reagan. In addition, computer software is available: [www.genopro.com](http://www.genopro.com); [www.smartdraw.com](http://www.smartdraw.com); and [www.genogram.org](http://www.genogram.org).