

# Drawing a Genogram Practitioner Briefing

**What is a genogram?** It is a simple tool that can be used to see how a family is made up. It helps practitioners identify who is living in the home with the child/young person and who is in the wider family network. It is a more formal term for a family tree.

**When would you use it?** A genogram can be used when working with children/young people and their families. It can assist practitioners to help provide information about family members and see patterns that maybe contributing to the concerns raised about the child/young person. Family structures can change overtime, and therefore a genogram should be updated accordingly.

**How would you use it?** Children/young people may initially feel uncomfortable engaging in this type of activity. For some focusing on a task which is on paper, where eye contact doesn't need to be maintained can feel safer. Just remember that there is no 'right way' of constructing a genogram with a child/young person.

The four rules to building a genogram are:

1. The male is always at the left of the family and the female is always at the right of the family.
2. In the case of ambiguity, assume a male-female relationship, rather than male-male or female-female relationship.
3. A spouse must always be closer to his/her first partner, then the second partner (if any), third partner, and so on...
4. The oldest child is always at the left of his/her family, the youngest child is always at the right of the family.

Preparation to draw a genogram needs to involve the child/young person. The following questions can be used to help practitioners:

- Ask them how a big piece of paper they will need (A4, A3). Where do they want to start – with themselves, their parents etc.?
- Do they want to include pets, friends etc.?
- Ask the child/young person if they want to draw it out or do they want you to do it?

Whilst squares and circles are traditional shapes used in genograms, allow the child/young person to use their own shapes. If the child doesn't know what to choose, think about having a sheet of different shapes. They can either copy them or cut them out and stick them on to paper.

The family should be involved in drawing their genogram too as this will provide the practitioner an opportunity to observe and explore family relationships, for example how open family members are with each other, do they describe different people/relationships similarly or differently, how much they know about each other and how willing they are to share information. A genogram is the starting point of any assessment and can be reviewed at any stage of the assessment or the intervention with them to consider changing roles and relationships and new ways of behaving.

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

An ecomap allows a practitioner to explore who is important to a child/young person putting them in the centre of the paper and then drawing circles or shapes to represent the people they consider to be important to them. The worker can then explore how the child/young person would feel if any of these people moved from their position, get closer or further away from them. Completing a sociogram allows a practitioner 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.)

For more information and guidance on genograms please access the [Pan Bedfordshire Inter-agency Child Protection Procedures](#)

**Why is it important?** A completed genogram can be used to talk to families about their history, the types of relationships they have with each other and others, and any patterns of behaviour associated with one or other(s) of them. This will enable practitioners to gain an understanding 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 helpful tool if children's services 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 support exploration of the new relationships that may form.

## Children and Young People's Perceptions

**Understanding a child or young person's view of themselves in their family is crucial. It's therefore not essential if they do not 'accurately' outline who's who in their family etc. It's their perception that counts. A useful way of doing this is by checking if there is anyone who the child or young person would like in their genogram, or who used to be there but is no longer. Ask them to think of a special symbol for that person. A sheet of different pictures/symbols which the child/young person can choose may help. This may also aid a discussion about why that particular picture was chosen. In contrast, check if there is anyone in the child or young person's family that they would like to miss out. Ask them to think about a symbol which they can put in the place of the missed person.**

## Assessing Feelings / Script.

From a practitioner's perspective it is useful to understand the child/young person's emotional link to people who may have hurt them or let them down. The following ideas can help generate discussion about how a child or young person feels about someone, who they like/don't like, what they feel angry about and what they do want to happen. Using different faces, ask the child or young person which face they would put next to the people in their family e.g. happy, angry, sad, scared. Explore with the child or young person why they chose that particular face e.g. **"I can see that you put an angry face next to your mum, can you think of an example when your mum was like that with you?"**

Whilst the genogram is being drawn out, have conversations about the family:

- Who would you go to if you were sad, upset?
- In your family, who is the 'good one', who gets into trouble the most?
- What 3 words would you use to describe your mum, dad, brother, sister etc.?

Children and young people hold a set of beliefs about their place in the family history, the present and the future. These incorporate other 'world views' e.g. big boys don't cry, I have grown to be grown up, etc. To get a sense of these views you could suggest a hypothetical question then ask the child or young person to think about what each person in their family might say.

Using bubble thoughts can be a fun way of doing this e.g. **"What do you think mum, dad etc. might say if you came home with a certificate saying you had been good at school?"**

Information about the child or young person's family can be of interest to both them and their parent/carer. Family secrets and things that are not talked about can be raised and explored. A child or young person's understanding of an event can be surprising parents and carers.

