

## FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

What is a relationship? (an interaction between two or more people.)

With whom do you have relationships? (parents, siblings, peers, opposite sex while dating, mate, grandparents, etc.)

During the next few days we will zero in on the relationships you have within your immediate families. The other relationships you experience throughout your life will be discussed at the appropriate time throughout the course.

Relationships are never the same. They change constantly because people change. Our family relationships change according to how we play our family roles, how we communicate and react to stress, and how our different personalities interact.

If we put aside individual differences for a moment and look at family members going through changing relationships, we will see that as each person develops and grows older within the family, the family relationship changes. Even though a parent and child may have the same personality types, the stages of development and the different growth needs they experience will make their personalities different. Their relationship in any given year is affected by the developmental challenges each person is facing.

While the family is going through its cycle, the individual members of the family are also going through various stages of their own life cycles. These individual changes may often bring stress to the family life cycle.

### Family Life Cycle

The family life cycle was developed by Evelyn Duvall, a sociologist. She compiled the average ages at which people complete normal life experiences: marriage, have their first child, have teenagers, have no more children at home and retire. She summarized the information as shown on the following pages:

### Stages and Developmental Tasks in the Family Life Cycle

- Stage 1. Beginning Family:** The married couple establish their home but do not yet have children.  
**Developmental Tasks:** Establishing a satisfying home and marriage relationship and preparing for childbirth.
- Stage 2. Childbearing Family:** From the birth of the first child until that child is 2 1/2 years old.  
**Developmental Tasks:** Adjusting to increased family size; caring for an infant; providing a positive developmental environment.
- Stage 3. Family with Preschoolers:** When the oldest child is between the ages of 2 1/2 and 6.  
**Developmental Tasks:** Satisfying the needs and interests of preschool children; coping with demands on energy and attention with less privacy at home.
- Stage 4. Family with School Children:** When the oldest child is between the ages of 6 and 13.  
**Developmental Tasks:** Promoting educational achievement and fitting in with the community of families with school-age children.
- Stage 5. Family with Teenagers:** When the oldest child is between the ages of 13 and 20.  
**Developmental Tasks:** Allowing and helping children to become more independent; coping with their independence; developing new interests beyond child care.
- Stage 6. Launching Center:** From the time the oldest child leaves the family for independent adult life till the time the last child leaves.

**Developmental Tasks:** Releasing young adults and accepting new ways of relating to them; maintaining a supportive home base; adapting to new living circumstances.

**Stage 7. Empty Nest:** From the time the children are gone till the marital couple retires from employment.

**Developmental Tasks:** Renewing and redefining the marriage relationship; maintaining ties with children and their families; preparing for retirement years.

**Stage 8: Aging Family:** From retirement till the death of the surviving marriage partner.

**Developmental Tasks:** Adjusting to retirement; coping with the death of the marriage partner and life alone.

If more children come into a home, the process repeats itself. Thus, a family can be in several overlapping stages. This requires that the family learns many different developmental tasks and adjustments at the same time. In a family, each person is trying to make it through a specific INDIVIDUAL stage while the family is, as a unit, also going through various stages in the family life cycle.

This information by Duvall reviews a family life cycle. In order to better understand individual growth and development, it would be helpful to review Erik Erikson's stages of personality development (see lesson, Adolescence). Remember that parents are in one stage and their children are in certain other stages depending upon their age.

(Information adapted from "Family Matters" by Smith and Apicelli.)