

The Family Life Cycle

Summary

Individual food choices and nutritional needs within the framework of the Family Life Cycle model.

Materials

- *Uncommon Therapy*
by Jay Haley (1973)
- *The Changing Family Life Cycle: a Framework for Therapy*
second edition, edited by Betty Carter and Monica McGoldrick (1989).
- *Starting Healthy Eating Habits*
by Oregon State University Extension Service. Available online at
www.extension.oregonstate.edu.

Background for Teachers

Good family meal planning must respond to the different nutritional needs of individual members who are at different stages of the Family Life Cycle.

Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, and even William Shakespeare (in *As You Like It*) have written about the developmental stages individuals pass through as their lives move from birth to death. Jay Haley, in 1973, identified a model of similar stages for families. Each of Haley's six stages involves different emotional and physical processes. (Use chart, word strips, or a transparency for a visual.)

The stages of the Family Life Cycle can be described as:

- Leaving home
- Getting married or commitment to a couple relationship
- Parenting the first child
- Living with an adolescent
- Launching the children
- Retirement and old age.

The stages do not occur in exactly the same way in all families. Some families can be in two stages at one time. For example, the same family could be living with an adolescent and launching an older child.

There are many different types of families in the world today. What was once thought of as the typical and traditional North American family, with the father working, the mother at home, and two children, is typical of only about 10% of the families in the United States. Many people are single heads of household. Some parents are divorced, separated, widowed or have never married. Many couples function as dual career families. Sometimes, in one household, several generations of extended family are living together. Often children are raised with the aid of nannies. Many children, known as latchkey children, spend a percentage of the day alone or without any adult present with them in the home. Sometimes adults of the same sex share parenting responsibilities for young children, and often families are blended; that is, two adults marry and combine, in one household, children from both of their previous relationships. Families may also vary by deciding not to have children. That eliminates some stages.

These family types go through the life cycle stages in different timing and sequence. Studies tell us the order is not important, but it is vital to go through the first two stages before entering the third, because parenting of the first child is such a crucial stage for families.

Because we have much more knowledge about families and about nutrition. For that reason this guide uses a family life cycle model that is divided into eight stages instead of six. This allows students and teachers to differentiate the needs of young children as well as younger and older

adolescents. Remember the family life stages are fluid, without rigid boundaries, and that they can encompass the emotional, intellectual, physical, and spiritual aspects of life. All of these things affect food patterns. The stage(s) can result in different needs and different choices. As different food choices are made, adequate nutrition may or may not be supplied, and nutrition decisions for individuals and for the family as a unit can become very complex. Family members need to utilize MyPyramid and RDA and know the basic food nutrients in order to adequately meet individual nutritional needs and sustain good health.

Instructional Procedures

LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

OPTION #1

Following a class discussion of the [FAMILY LIFE CYCLE](#) (see transparency), have each student identify the current stage(s) of his or her own family of origin by writing one page in his/her reflection notebook describing his/her family and telling why it fits the particular stage(s).

Have the students complete a collage of magazine cutouts that presently shows how the student's family fits one or more particular stage of the family life cycle.

OPTION #2

Have the students role play a *Family Portrait Frozen in Time*. To bridge the Family Life Cycle and the Foods and Nutrition course, have groups of students pantomime mealtime in families.

Divide the entire class into groups of different sizes. Within each group each student should wear an assigned number written on an index card. Allow five minutes for the groups to plan their action. No words are allowed during their performances. Each individual acts out how one person behaves at mealtime. For example, eating while watching TV, standing over the sink, etc. Groups take turns performing for three minutes while class members identify the actions portrayed, such as student #1 walking the floor while eating a sandwich, etc. At the end of three minutes the teacher says, "FREEZE". The performing student freezes in place and the class members participate by identifying each student's action. After all groups have performed, have the students write concepts, in sentences, that summarize mealtime in families in the United States.

OPTION #3

Set up learning centers with information on nutritional needs of infants, children, teenagers, adults, and the elderly. Have students work in pairs to research one or more groups and choose a one-day menu of appropriate foods that meet the unique needs of that group. For example, students could work in groups to find menus for a family with a child, a teen, and a pregnant mom; or a family with preschoolers, a mom, a dad, and a grandmother. Teachers could elaborate on choices, discuss implications, and then have students make choices again if changes are advisable. Use the [LEARNING CENTER WORKSHEET](#). *OR Take appropriate questions from current textbooks.*

OPTION #4

Have the students write in their reflection notebooks a paragraph telling about their favorite toddlers, preschoolers or favorite senior citizens. A fun variation is to post around the room pictures of famous senior citizens, movie stars, or appealing young children to respond to.

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