



Changing Families Lesson Plan

Introduction

As classroom teachers and pupil personnel specialists deal with blended and single-parent families, they must address multigenerational family circumstances. Young people need to understand and appreciate the variety among multigenerational family arrangements. In some families, members may be providing the primary care to a dependent grandparent. In others, a grandparent may be the primary caregiver to the youngest generation. This activity provides an overview of general trends in multigenerational families. It may be used with parent-teacher organizations, in-service courses for educators and classroom presentations.

Objectives

Students will:

- understand general trends leading to more generations in families;
- identify ways in which more generations are affecting families;
- discuss how family structure affects family relationships and interactions; and
- diagram a genogram of their own family.

Key Terms

horizontal and vertical families, family dynamics, family constellations, eldercare, genogram

Materials

For drawing family Genogram (Generational Tree Chart)

Procedures

- Introduce and have students read the handout. Encourage student comments with leading questions. Discuss how family structure affects interactions. Use a simple illustration, such as what it is like for families of different sizes, shapes and ages when it is time to get ready in the morning and there is only one bathroom. Who is responsible for whom? What are the conversations like? Who in the family gets first priority? Last priority?
- Illustrate on the chalkboard sample genograms of families with divorced, unmarried and remarried parents.
- Ask students to draw their own family genograms, emphasizing numbers and gender in each generation.
- Invite students to speak with you after class or at another convenient time if they have additional questions or comments regarding the reading.

Extension Activities

- Talk with the school librarian about resources on multigenerational families. Ask if additional audio and print materials might be ordered.
- With student assistants, design a bulletin board that illustrates multigenerational families.
- Hold an after-school discussion with classmates whose grandparents are living with them.
- When counseling students individually, consider intergenerational issues which might influence students attitudes, behaviors and academic performance.

The following discussion highlights changes in contemporary families.

- The number of relationships between generations is increasing. Four- and five-generation families are common, exposing children to longer relationships with older generations than those experienced by their parents or grandparents.
- The number of relationships within generations is decreasing. Since families are having fewer children, sibling relationships - relationships within generations - are less numerous.
- More relationships in families are adult oriented. Parents will know their children as grown adults two, three or four times longer than they will know them as children. Grandparents are seeing the graying of their grandchildren. More parent-child and grandparent-grandchild relationships exist between two adults.
- Adult children will spend more years in parent care than their parents did in child care. Women in the United States currently average more years in parent care than in child care. The level of care ranges from daily care maintenance of feeding and dressing to occasional monitoring and supervision.
- More grandchildren are taking care of their grandparents. Many children, from elementary school to college age, are secondary caregivers to their grandparents after school and on weekends. This creates different roles and expectations among grandchildren and grandparents than are traditionally portrayed.
- More grandparents are taking care of their grandchildren. The 1990 U.S. Census reported that 3 million, or 5 percent of children, have grandparents as their primary caregivers. This trend is across racial and socioeconomic groups and has enormous social and legal ramifications.
- The "sandwich" generation is caught in the middle of dependent parents and dependent children. They have trouble deciding where their primary loyalties and priorities should be -to their parents, spouses or children. More families are wrestling with roles and responsibilities of adult children to their aging parents.
- More people associate death with old age. Members of the current older generation, when they were young, experienced deaths of infants and children due to childhood diseases and of young men due to war. Except for the increase in violent deaths among young people, children today are more likely to experience deaths of older people.

- "Old" is older than it used to be. The term old is generally reserved for the last living generation. With more generations of great-grandparents and even great-great-grandparents, grandparents who are in their 50s or 60s are not perceived by others in the family as being as old as they might have been in earlier times.

Now it is your turn. Draw your own family genogram. The objective is to diagram your family constellation by showing the number, ages and genders of people in your family.