Constructing a Genogram
Program Transcript

TRACEY PHILLIPS: Hi, I'm Dr. Tracey Phillips. Genograms are like family trees in many ways. They use symbols and lines to represent relationships between parents and children across generations. Typically, however, a family tree only represents basic biological information such as siblings, parent-child relationships, marriages, et cetera. A genogram provides a more sophisticated level of information that may be of use to medical or mental health professionals working with an individual or a family.

Genograms use a broader array of symbols and family trees to represent family relationships-- for example, cohabitation, divorce, or even a love affair; emotional relationships-- for example, estranged, abuse, in love, manipulative; diseases or health risks-- for example, substance abuse, cancer, diabetes, and even social relationships outside of traditional family spheres such as neighbor, mentor, spiritual leader, or co-worker.

Genograms are very useful to human service professionals, because they provide a visual representation of the relationships, emotional bonds, and patterns that exist in an individual or family's past or present. They can be very useful not only to help the professional identify the patterns, but are a great tool to help explain patterns to clients.

For this assignment you will gain experience by completing a genogram and constructing one of you and a non-family member, To give you an idea of what a genogram looks like, here is an example. Somewhere in your genogram you will first have to have a key. The key is there for the reader to be able to understand the relationships that exist within the family members.

In this example, you will see that males are indicated by a square and females are indicated by a circle. If the male is alive, then the square is yellow. If the female is alive, the square is pink. If the male or female are deceased, you will notice that the square and circle are blue.

Also, on the key you will have the nature of the relationship. If the relationship is intact, there will be a solid line. If the relationship is broken, then there will be a dotted line or a broken line, as you can see on this example at the bottom. Inside each circle or square you will be able to see, according to the key, the nature of that person's status.

For example, if the person is alive and well, you will see an A&W as indicated by the key. If the person has or had cancer, it will say, CANC. You can go down the key to see each individual status. So let's go through the example. The client, as you will notice, is in the middle. The client is a 37-year-old female. She is alive and well as indicated by A&W.

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If you go to the left, you will see that the client had a spouse-- a 40-year-old male-- as indicated by the yellow square. The reason you know the client and the spouse are divorced is the broken relationship or the broken line between them. He also was an alcoholic. As you can see under it says, ALC.

They have two children-- a 12-year-old female and an 8-year-old male who are both alive and well. To the right of the client you'll notice that she has two siblings-- a 32-year-old male and a 30-year-old female who are both alive and well. As you move up in your genogram, you'll go back three generations.

In this example, you see the mother and the father of the client. The mother is a 60-year-old female who suffers from mitral valve prolapse. The father is a 66-year-old male who suffers from hypertension. You can also go further up into the grandparents.

And you can see that three of the client's grandparents are deceased-- one a 68-year-old male who died of cancer, an 80-year-old female who died of hypertension, and a 70-year-old male who died of cardiovascular disease. The client has a 77-year-old living grandmother who currently suffers from hypertension and breast cancer.

As you complete your genogram, you will go back three generations. And you will indicate the relationship status within family members as well as whether or not they are alive or deceased and their current physical or emotional state. You'll create your own key to let the reader know what the status of each family member is.

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