



Genograms and Ecomaps Practice Guide

Using a Genogram

A genogram is a way of representing a family tree and relationships within the family.

Genograms must be completed with families at the start of our work, e.g. during first visits. This will help inform practitioners about who is in the wider network around a child who can helpfully be involved in the assessment and planning for the child's safety and wellbeing. Ecomaps and Safety Circles should also be completed with children and parents to help inform this work. (See guidance below on Ecomaps and Safety Circles). To further understand the family regarding their values, background, history, and life script then a Cultural Genogram can also be completed (guidance below).

Completing genograms at the start of our involvement will mean that there will always be a completed genogram should a case move beyond a Social Work Assessment, for example if a child becomes subject to a Child Protection Plan, there is an application to Court, or they become Looked After.

Basic Genograms can be completed in Liquidlogic but to conform to the conventions described below they should be recorded on a Word file saved to a network drive or even drawn freehand. **The genogram must be uploaded to documents under the genogram tab on the Liquidlogic record.**

Completing a genogram can fulfil a number of functions:

- identifying intergenerational patterns within families; which requires further generations and wider relatives to be included within the picture;
- finding out about the family's history and how much of the history individual family members know.

Genogram Conventions

Good practice would be giving the family or individual the choice on what symbols they would like to be represented by. However, the following symbols are used to represent the gender of family members:



Male



Female



Gender
Unknown



Non
binary

If a family member is deceased, this is indicated by placing a cross inside their symbol:



Male



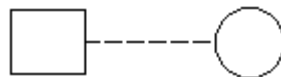
Female

This can be a rather stark representation, acceptable in supervision however, with an individual or family, good practice would be to present their view on how they would like the information to be represented.

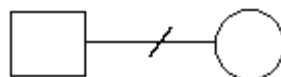
Enduring relationships, such as marriage and cohabitation, are illustrated by a single unbroken line:



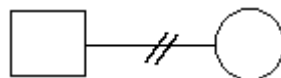
Transitory relationships are illustrated by a single broken:



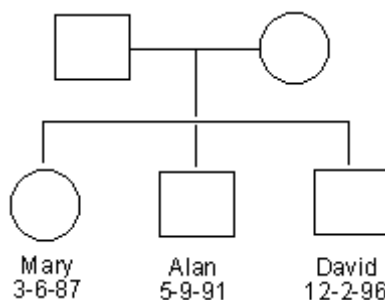
Separation is shown by a single short diagonal line across the relationship line:



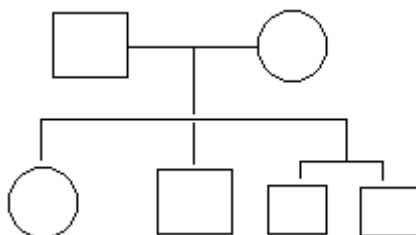
Divorce is shown by two short diagonal lines across the relationship line:



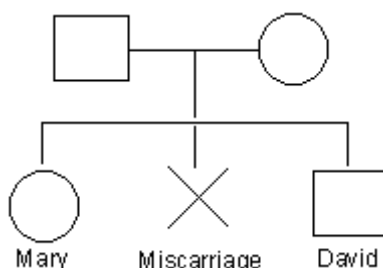
When there are a number of children from a relationship the eldest child is placed on the furthest left, followed by the second eldest and so on, with the youngest child appearing on the right:



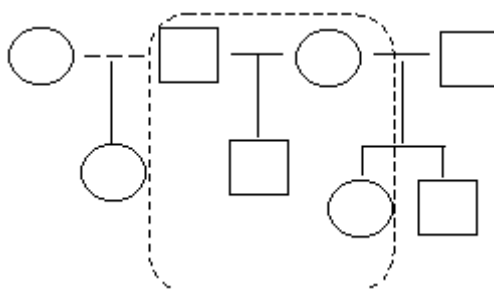
Twins are indicated by two symbols coming from a single 'stalk':



A miscarriage or abortion is indicated by a diagonal cross. In the genogram the miscarriage or abortion should be placed in the diagram in the same order as other children. So, for example if a couple had a daughter, Mary, followed by a miscarriage, followed by a son David, their genogram would look like this:



The family members who are part of the same household are indicated by dotted line which is placed around the household members:



Using a Genogram

Completing a genogram can fulfil a number of functions:

- identifying intergenerational patterns within families;
- finding out about the family's history and how much of the history individual family members know.

Further information on genograms can be found on page 29 of [Assessing Children in Need and their Families: Practice Guidance](#) (Department of Health, 2000).

Using the genogram as a tool to assess family relationships is detailed in the Family Assessment: Family Competence, Strengths and Difficulties (Bentovim and Bingley Miller, 2001).

An excellent guide to the genogram can also be found on the [Write Enough](#) website (see appendix 1).

Cultural Genogram

Using a Cultural Genogram

Similar to that of the conventional genogram it is a way of representing the family and relationships from a cultural perspective. It can be used to explore culture in the context of both group supervision and family work. They can be used together, and the cultural genogram can be overlaid onto the genogram to give a comprehensive picture.

The cultural genogram process promotes cultural awareness and understanding by supporting practitioners in knowledge of cultural identities, such as how domestic abuse or child sexual abuse, or other issues may have been a factor generationally within a family. The understanding we have of ourselves and others is shaped by our experiences and history. By considering this, and being curious, we can engage in a more open and meaningful way.

For the purpose of completing a Cultural Genogram we need to understand that culture and ethnicity are both interrelated and distinct and both should be included in this process. In considering this we can first think about the concept of “Social GRRRAACCEEESSS”:

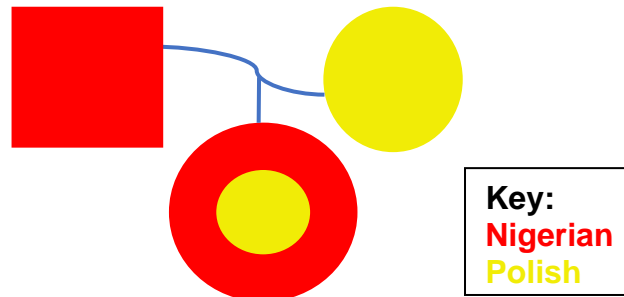
- Gender identity
- Geography
- Race
- Religion
- Age
- Ability
- Appearance
- Class
- Culture
- Caste
- Education
- Ethnicity
- Economics
- Spirituality
- Sexuality
- Sexual orientation

John Burnham and colleagues developed this acronym to represent aspects of difference in beliefs, power and lifestyle, visible and invisible, voiced and unvoiced, to help us understand how our identities are formed. Dividing aspects of someone’s life experience into these sections allows us to explore more fully the influence of particular aspects of life that may have a dominant presence or, alternatively, may be invisible or unnoticed. This list could be given in written form (if appropriate) and start with a question such as, “which word on this list grabs your attention?” “Can you tell me why you think that is?”

Being clear of our own cultural background is vital when preparing to undertake a cultural genogram.

Defining culture of origin

The **culture of origin** refers to the major groups from which an individual is descended. As an example, an individual may have been born and brought up in the United Kingdom, but parents maybe Nigerian and Polish meaning that the **culture of origin** consists of these two groups.



Intercultural marriages represent a blending of cultures, cultural differences within marriage often has a significant influence on the nature of the relationship and on children and therefore we should find a specific symbol to denote intercultural marriage such as:



We should also explore how diverging cultural issues were or are negotiated.

Identifying the major organising principles

Organising principles are the fundamental ideas which shape our perceptions, beliefs, and behaviours through being part of the specific family unit.

As an example:

Within the Jewish culture fear of persecution can be an **organising principle** for an individual or family. Due to historical events, the Jewish community is recognised as the most persecuted community in society.

Every individual and family will also have issues of pride and shame associated with their culture of origin and family background which informs their organising principles.

Pride or shame issues flow through behaviours as either negative or positive, while **organising principles** are already established. They are similar in that both organise the perceptions, beliefs and behaviours of an individual or family.

An example of this could be:

Within a family they may take great pride in their children's educational achievements, whilst being complicit in covering up the child sexual abuse each time one particular relative visits as an issue of shame for the immediate how may feel powerless in preventing it from continuing as such abuse is accepted in other parts of the family.

Further examples of this could include: child brides or forced marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), male circumcision, child criminal exploitation (CCE), so-called honour-based abuse, domestic abuse and drug and alcohol abuse, to highlight just a few.

Creating symbols

The same basic symbols should be used as those we ordinarily use within the more conventional genogram. Additional symbols will need to be selected to show **pride or shame** and **intercultural marriages**. These should be placed directly on the cultural genogram to depict graphically the prevalence of each subject and to highlight their impact on family functioning.

Selecting colours

A different colour should be selected to represent each **culture of origin**. The colours should be used to identify and depict how each group contributes to the cultural identity of each individual or family.

The formation of colours provides a graphic snapshot of the overall cultural composition of the family system and for each individual's unique cultural identity, helping us to give meaning to the family system. For instance, genograms that are dominated by a single colour reveal that the family is characterised by a high degree of cultural similarity. Whereas genograms which are a collage of colours quickly reveal the multiculturalism of the family system.

Cultural framework charts

Establishing cultural framework charts (CFC) is the next step in the **cultural genogram** process. It provides the key for interpreting the genogram. The CFC is necessary for each family to demonstrate their **culture of origin**. It should list major **organising principles** and **pride and shame** issues with their corresponding symbol. This does not need to be complicated; it is good practice to give the individual or family the opportunity to choose the symbols or colours that they feel most comfortable with.

The final step involves mapping at least three generations of the family within the genogram and adding symbols to identify **intercultural marriages**, and colours to illustrate cultural composition for each individual's **cultural identity** and denoting **pride or shame** issues.

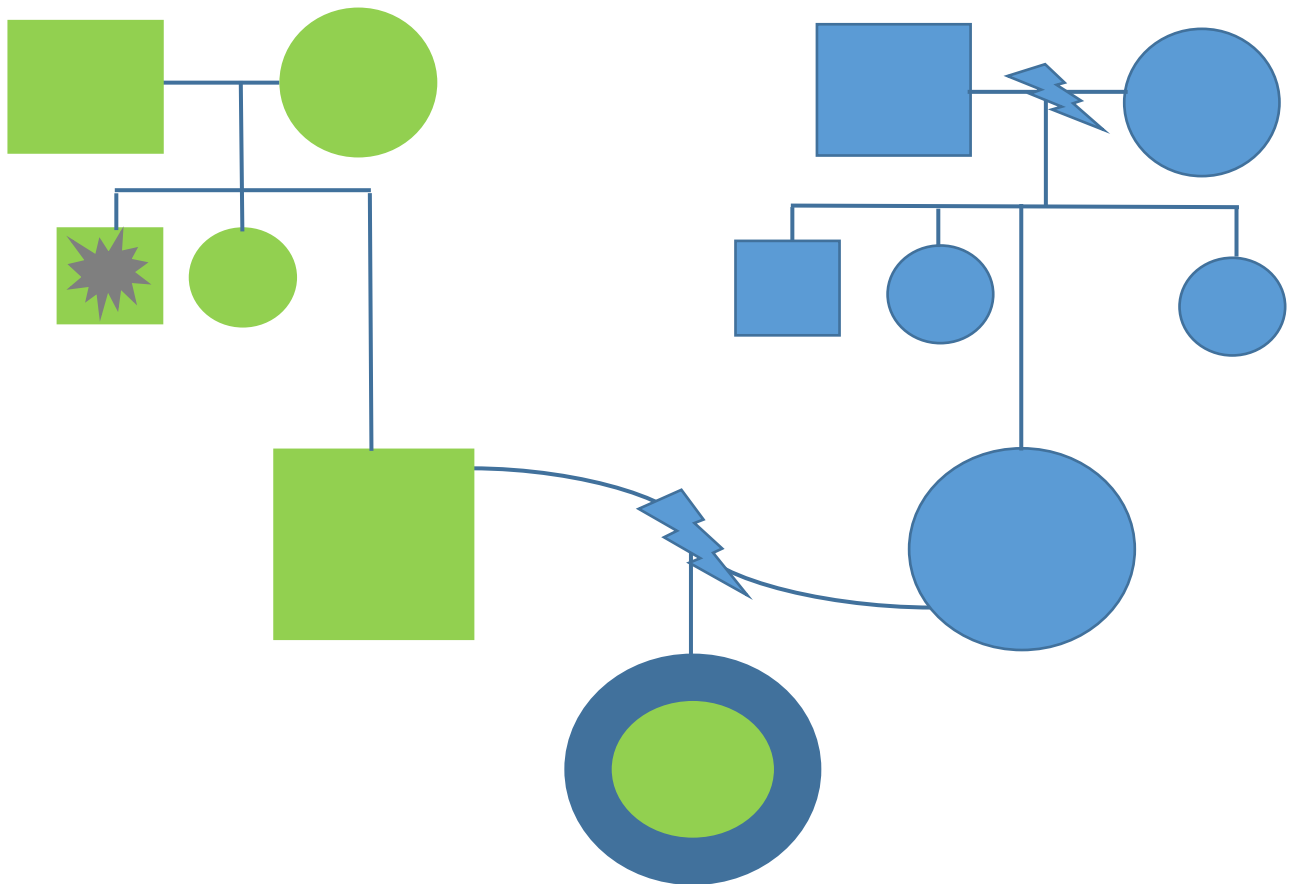
Using our knowledge of the family, our relationship with them, appreciative enquiry skills and open questions we can help to facilitate a dialogue addressing issues such as race, religion, class etc that will help us and the family to understand the complexity of the cultural identity within their family.

Examples of Questions:

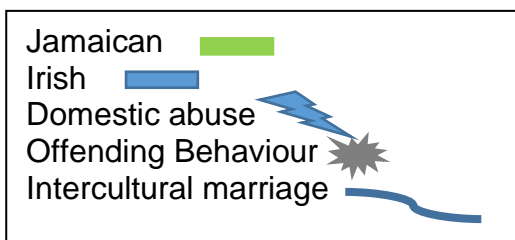
- Can you tell me what family means to you?
- Can you tell me about your family?
- What influences how you parent? Why is that?
- What is the best thing about being part of your family?
- Can you tell me about a time when you had a clear sense of belonging within the family?
- What did you value most about that experience?
- As you think more about it, what is it like to belong to your family?
- Who do you think you most look like?
- Who do you think you are most similar to? Why is that?

- Is race, skin colour and hair type important within your family?
- How are gender roles defined within your family?
- Is religion or spirituality important within your family?
- How is sexual orientation viewed in your family?

This is not an exhaustive list, and with your relationship and knowledge of the family and issues you will be better placed to come up with more appropriate questions.



Key



Cultural Genogram adapted from

 Hardy_and_Laszloff y.1995.pdf

 Hardy & Laszloffy.pdf

Ecomaps

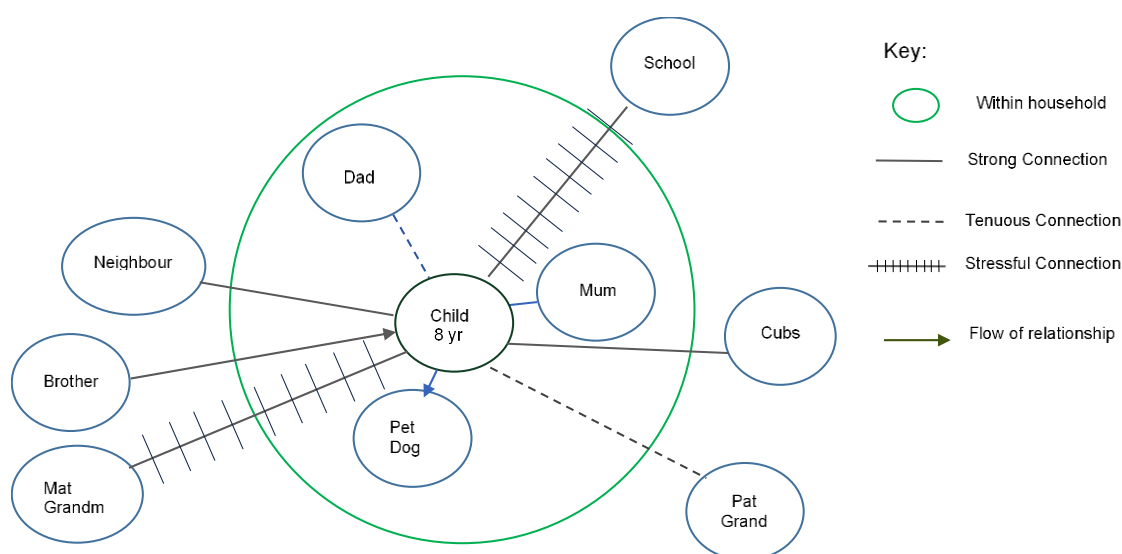
An ecomap demonstrates the connection of social and personal relationships of an individual with their environment illustrating the quality and importance of those connections. Using this can help to identify those who could be involved in the family network.

Using an Ecomap

Where possible a whole family ecomap should be undertaken that captures the interrelationships within the family, including the quality of their relationships as well as their external relationships with other significant people from their community, such as school teacher, health professional, neighbour or friend from a preschool group. It is possible undertake individual Ecomaps too with children and different members of the family to capture a greater understanding of the whole family dynamic.

There are a variety of approaches to making an ecomap. It is helpful to be prepared with a few options so that you can give the family or individual, choice. Often using large pieces of paper and coloured pens is a popular way however, no need to limit yourself to that. You can be creative using children's toys such as Lego characters or even using pebbles from the beach or interesting buttons, whatever is likely to resonate with the individual or family works best. A photograph of the ecomap can be used for the child's record. The quality of your relationship with the individual or family and your ability to engage them in the task will have the most significance.

The individual or family should be in the middle of the paper and this can be turned into anything that captures the imagination, such as a desert Island, galaxy of planets or a team of a particular sport. The key then is to plot how they feel towards different people by where they position them on the page in relation to themselves. We can use different types of lines to show the nature of the relationship. Sometimes a relationship will vary, the individual or family can use more than one line to show how this is. Similarly, to the Cultural Genogram it is important to use a key.



In this simple example you can see that the subject of the Ecomap is an eight-year-old child. They have a good solid relationship with their Mother. The child feels less close to their Father, illustrated by being placed further away from the child. Their relationship is strained as depicted by the broken line. The child feels very close to the family dog, but feels the dog has less affection for him, showing the flow of the relationship as perceived by the child. The Maternal Grandmother is much further away from the child, demonstrating a much more distant connection and that the connection is stressful, one that the child is not at all comfortable with, as illustrated by the train track style of line. This is a simple example and often families are much more complex in reality, and the Ecomap is likely to look much more complex.

Safety Circles

Susie Essex created the family safety circles as a visual tool to think through in detail with the family, people the parents or carers can involve in a naturally occurring safety network; who can be most useful and who should know what. Based on the African saying 'It takes a village to raise a child'.

Using a Safety Circles

The safety circles should be to support the relationship between professionals and parents or carers to be grounded in a shared understanding of the worries or dangers and is crucial in the creation of the safety goals and plan. Our role is to support the family to think about who can be involved in the plan, how they can be involved **and how much they should know**. Creating a naturally occurring network.

It is not always possible to find people who will be involved in safety plans. The importance of this work is supporting the family doing everything they can to explore the issue from every angle possible with the family. Whether people are found or not we will have much greater insight into the family and how they see and experience their world, with much greater clarity about whether it is possible to build and sustain a safety network around the family.

