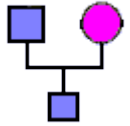


GENTREK: Genograms and the fifth element **of Genealogy, relationships**



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The other 4 elements of Genealogy? Names, dates, places and events.

Have you ever wondered why your family does the things that it does? Ever wonder why certain people in your family are alike? Do you ever wish you could change a family pattern, but have no idea how to start? **Genograms** may help!

Former Host GLF-Kate once related this tale:

"My mother always cut the tail off the chicken . . . because my step-dad didn't want to see it on the table. My brother insisted his wife do it because 'that's the way mom did it' . . . and he didn't know the reason! When Barb, my sister-in-law, asked me about it, I thought I'd die laughing . . . a tradition . . . just because of Mel's not wanting to look at the portion of the chicken that went over the fence last. We had to do that with any kind of fowl that went on Mel's table."

We don't always know the underlying reason for the way things are and have been, do we? Here is a method that may help your analysis of your family and some of the things that make it the special way it is. **Genograms**.

What is a genogram?

A **genogram** (*pronounced: JEN-uh-gram*) chart is a method of graphically describing the relationships between individuals. Primarily used by mental health experts, genogram diagrams can help identify positive and negative influences affecting an individual and determining patterns in the family system.

Genograms can also be used to illustrate medical history. The purpose of diagramming your medical history is to learn what genetic traits may have been passed from one generation to the next. This chart provides a view of your own medical history that's easier to understand than the doctor's forms.

"Genealogists are interested in various facets of the family. When the information is portrayed graphically, as in the genogram, he/she can see traits and patterns that have evolved over generations."

- Norma Chudleigh, Ph. D., Family History Consultant

The differences between a pedigree chart and a genogram chart are primarily their intentions. The pedigree shows the lineage and needs a family group sheet to demonstrate sibling relationships. Genograms combine the two and allow a clearer view of relationships and patterns.

Patterns? What patterns? How about naming conventions, medical conditions, marriage partner age differences/preferences, longevity, and vocations just to name a few.

Genogram Chart

Gathering the Data

How can we chart our family medical history? First, we gather the information. This is best done through interviews. It is more time consuming than asking all of your relatives to fill out a form, but you're more likely to get **all** the answers this way.

Forms bother people in a way that a nice lunch or afternoon chat does not. Even so, to organize our interviews, we should create an interview form so we won't miss any important information.

Expect to find out new things, some surprising and some unpleasant. Just roll with it. Make notes or record the interview (but ask permission to record). Also, ask the people you interview about those who have already died. So often they know something you'd hadn't learned elsewhere.

Write down the person's name, birth date, and (if deceased) death date and cause of death. Calculate the person's age when they died and record it. This will help later if you want to look at average age.

Where can you obtain "cause of death?"

- ~ Death certificates
- ~ Obituaries
- ~ Family notes as to the causes of death
- ~ Hospital records can also be helpful in noting fatal and nonfatal conditions
- ~ In the case of accidents, homicides, or suicide, police and newspaper reports may help
- ~ Especially useful are older, living relatives who can give information about deceased family members
- ~ If you have a death certificate, you may also be able to obtain information from the attending physician's records
- ~ Contact state historical and medical societies to ascertain the existence and location of historical medical records

You can also include their level of education (high school graduate, or not; college, *etc.*) and occupation or occupations. Some jobs can have a significant impact on a person's health; think of the difference between a coal miner and an accountant. Did the person serve in the military? If he or she served during a war they were probably exposed to less than ideal medical conditions. Viet Nam veterans, for example, have a higher susceptibility to Hepatitis C.

With a medical history you should look your ancestor's siblings, too. A genetic condition, such as Huntington's, may not show itself in your direct line but it could appear in your uncle's or great-aunt's lines. Always list the children in birth order (left to right or top to bottom), including miscarriages, infant deaths, *etc.*

Document the person's marital history . . . did Aunt Elspeth have children by different husbands? If so, you need to realize which of her children are affected by common genes. Include the marriage and, if applicable, the date of divorce. Then add any medical information you can learn.

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Look for musical talents, chronic illnesses, heart disease, cancer, smoking, alcohol or drug abuse, athletic abilities, eating disorders, depression or other mental health problems. Things to look for include:

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Alcoholism or drug abuse

Allergies

Arteriosclerosis

Arthritis

Asthma

Cancer (any kind)

Cataracts

Cystic Fibrosis

Diabetes

Down's syndrome

Dwarfism

Emphysema

Epilepsy

Heart disease

Hemophilia

Huntington's disease

Hypertension

Hepatitis

Multiple sclerosis

Muscular dystrophy

Sickle-cell anemia

Stroke

Tay-Sachs

Tuberculosis

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just to name a few. You can use an online medical dictionary to help with terms when reading death certificates or listening to your relatives.

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Always look at the cause of death and any contributing factors.

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Interpreting the Data

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Don't get too focused on specific problems of one or two family members. The important parts of a genogram are trends and probabilities. Did all of your father's people die of heart disease? When was the average onset? Is there a common pattern there? What's the likelihood that a problem was passed to the next generation?

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5 Steps to Creating a Chart

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First, decide whose medical history you want to diagram. Each medical history genogram is usually limited to three generations. This is for size limitations on the page, readability, and because the probability of a genetic trait occurring reduces with each successive generation.

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Second, draw the individual on the page following the basic rules:

- ~ **Males** are drawn as **squares** (sorry guys) I find most folks like to colour them blue, although it is not required.
- ~ **Females** are drawn as **circles** These, if coloured, are in pink.
- ~ **Triangles** are used when the sex is **unknown** .
- ~ A "**slash**" or "**X**" is drawn through the shape if the person is **deceased**.
- ~ A **horizontal solid line** connecting two people shows a **committed** (*i.e.*, married) connection. It is also used for identical twins.
- ~ A **horizontal solid line** which is broken by **slashes** indicates a **divorce** or **non-committed** relationship
- ~ A **vertical or diagonal solid line** indicates a **biological** connection (son or daughter)
- ~ A **vertical or diagonal dashed line** indicates a **special relationship** such as **adoption**

{PAUSE}We'll return to these five steps in a moment. I want to show you a chart of Genogram Symbols. Take a look and be prepared to answer the three questions found there. Remember to return to this chatroom.

Note: I recommend you COPY the URL that I will place here; don't click on it. (Highlight the URL and use **Ctrl+C**). Then minimize this chat room window. (Click on the minimize symbol in the upper right area. It looks like an underscore symbol.) Finally, paste the URL into your browser textbox with **Ctrl+V**. When you finish looking, simply cancel [X] the diagram window and restore this chatroom window.

Are we ready to take a look?

<http://www.ShoeStringGenealogy.com/genogramsymbols.html>
{return}

OK, I hope we're all back together.

Question 1: What does the "X" symbol represent?

Question 2: Why was the triangle used for the pregnancy?

Question 3: What sex were the identical twins?

Excellent. I knew you could do it.

When creating the chart you should write down the person's medical vitals, *etc.* Leave space to connect this person with others on the chart. Draw the most recent generation near the bottom of the page since previous generations will appear above this generation.

Draw each of the person's siblings on either side of him/her in order of birth from left to right. Keep the shapes on the same level (or slightly below). Write in the basic vitals for each sibling.

Third, draw the second generation (the parents of the group you just finished). The father is drawn to the left of the mother. A straight line is drawn between their shapes to indicate they are the ones who created the children shown already. A vertical line is drawn from the marriage line to each of the children.

Fourth, draw the siblings of each parent.

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Fifth, draw the grandparents above the parents. Add in their siblings also.

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Genograms render an additional dimension to Family Diagrams. They aid in recognizing family patterns – be they naming conventions, causes of death, chronic illnesses, personality traits, or sundry others. In effect, **Genograms help you SEE your family in a new light!**

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Some Online Examples - please don't click on these links, either. Just copy them to Notepad or your log. If we all go in separate directions, only a few of you will see the end of this presentation.

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<http://genogram.freeservers.com/HTML/geno1.html>

A genogram example, illustrating complex triangles and subtle family problems.

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GenoPro - this is the product I use. I feel it is the best value for the price. (Yes, you CAN spend more, but the additional features are unrelated to genealogy.)

You can download the demo version **Free**, but wait until we finish, please.

www.genopro.com/

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GenoGram-Maker Millenium - another excellent one. Again, wait until we finish to visit these sites.

www.genogram.org/

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To see more examples – including those of famous people – visit this site – after we finish: <http://www.multiculturalfamily.org/text/genograms.shtml>

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Finally, some of this presentation was taken from **Genograms: Assessment & Intervention** by Monica McGoldrick, Randy Gerson & Sylvia Shellenberger and **Genograms: The New Tool for Exploring the Personality, Career, & Love Patterns You Inherit** by Emily Marlin. **If your interest expands enough to purchase a detailed explanation, these are highly recommended. But don't pay retail!!** Here's a website that can help: <http://www.fetchbook.info/Genograms.html>

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