

# Tracing Family Traits Using a Genogram

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## What is a Genogram?

The genogram is a pictorial graph of the structure and characteristics of a family across three or more generations. The genogram will not replace traditional Pedigree Charts and Family Group Records for use in genealogical research, but it can provide a way to look beneath the surface of names, dates, and places so that genealogists can recognize family characteristics and patterns.

The genogram “illustrates graphically that relationships are ongoing, that families have histories, and that the family history influences each family member’s present as well as his/her future” (Bahr, 1990). Characteristics carried from one generation to another are also called *generational transmissions*, and can be illustrated on a genogram with symbols. These transmissions can be genetic, such as inherited diseases or physical characteristics, or they can come from environmental or social influences, such as traditions from a family’s cultural heritage, religion, or communication patterns, and beliefs about the world.




Genograms have been used for assessing families in clinical settings such as marriage therapy, health care, and social work (McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985; Nelson-Anderson & Waters, 1998). Genograms have also been applied in education and religious counseling (Bahr, 1990). A greater interest in genetic and medical histories has prompted the use of genograms in organizing and illustrating genealogical data (Krasner-Khait, 2000). Genograms can also be used for the purpose of engendering a sense of identity and kinship, to promote an interest in genealogical research (Doxey, 1993).

## Benefits of Making a Genogram

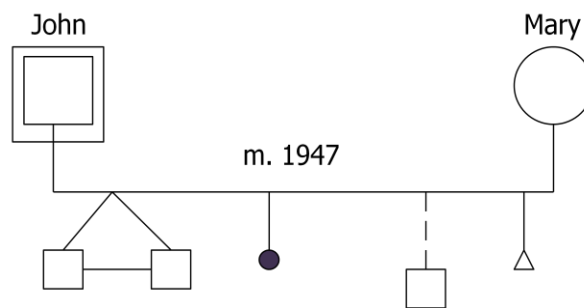
By seeing family patterns on a genogram, individuals may realize their personal identity more fully by seeing themselves as part of a greater family network, and by observing family values passed down over the generations. As we learn more about family members, we begin to appreciate the role our ancestors played in our lives, and that we have a responsibility to them do the same for our children, thus forging a link between past and future generations.

## Making a Genogram

The genogram should show at least three generations (i.e., self and siblings, parents and their siblings, and grandparents). If you have children and grandchildren, you may include them on the chart as well.

1. Gather the needed information such as *names* of all persons to be included in your genogram, including the *birth order* and *gender* of each child in each family, *marital status* of couples, and any other pertinent information, such as *dates of birth, marriage, divorce, death*, etc.
2. Use standardized symbols:
  - a. Use squares to represent males:  and circles for females: 
  - b. Use double lines around the square or circle to indicate yourself, the index person.
  - c. Names, dates for birth and/or death should be written above or below the symbol.
  - d. Place an X inside the figures of those who are deceased: 

3. Marital relationships are shown by connecting lines that go down and across between the partners. The husband is on the left and the wife on the right. Divorce is indicated with two slashes (/) in the horizontal marriage line. The dates for marriage and divorce, if applicable, should be written above the marriage line.
4. Vertical lines are drawn below marriage lines for the children of the marriage, with the oldest child on the left and the youngest child on the right.
5. Special Circumstances:
  - a. Diverging lines connect twins to parents. Identical twins are connected by a bar between the children.
  - b. Miscarriages are noted with a small filled-in circle.
  - c. Dotted lines connect adopted children.
  - d. Pregnancies are illustrated by a triangle.



## Generational Transmissions

Generational Transmissions are family or individual characteristics, beliefs, cultural values, genetic traits, or life-styles handed down from one generation to the next. Indicate **three to five** generational transmissions on your genogram chart with symbols, lines, or drawings. Suggestions about what can be traced through the generations are below, but you can use other characteristics as well. Make a legend or key showing the significance of each of the symbols you use.

### POSSIBLE TRAITS TO TRACK ON YOUR GENOGRAM

#### Socioeconomic Characteristics

Occupation  
Education level  
Community service

#### Genetic/Physical Characteristics

Hair/eye color  
Baldness, eyesight, etc.  
Disease tendencies

#### Religious Values

Church affiliation  
Church volunteer service

#### Genetic/Environmental Factors

Artistic, Musical, Literary abilities  
Personality traits: frugality, friendliness, etc.

#### Cultural Background

Country of origin, languages spoken  
Cultural arts, practices, and traditions  
Naming patterns

#### Family Values

Family closeness  
Desire for learning or education

## Computer Programs

Genogram computer programs and web-sites are available. Most programs have been developed to be used for therapists and other clinicians.

Genogram and Ecomap Software	<a href="http://www.smartdraw.com/specials/genogram.htm">http://www.smartdraw.com/specials/genogram.htm</a>
Genopro	<a href="http://www.genopro.com/genogram/">http://www.genopro.com/genogram/</a>
Family Health Portrait	<a href="https://familyhistory.hhs.gov/fhh-web/home.action">https://familyhistory.hhs.gov/fhh-web/home.action</a>
WinGeno	<a href="http://www.wingeno.org/">http://www.wingeno.org/</a>
Genogram Analytics	<a href="http://www.genogramanalytics.com/index.html">http://www.genogramanalytics.com/index.html</a>

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