

## **Growth and Change in Families**

There are many ways in which families can grow and change throughout the course of their life cycles. Until recently, families in the United States have been defined very rigidly following the example of the two-parent, white, middle-class family that contains children. Some models have been developed to explain the change and growth of these families. These types of models are seen as traditional and include those noted by Evelyn Duvall that focus on family development as a series of predictable stages through which all families pass. An example of these models includes a 1931 four-stage model that consists of:

1. married couples just starting out
2. couples with one or more children
3. couples with one or more adult self-supporting children
4. couples growing old

A 1999 model by Carter and McGoldrick called *The Expanded Family Life Cycle* sees family development as a series of six linear stages:

1. Leaving home: single young adults
2. The joining of families through marriage: The new couple
3. Families with young children - adjusting marital life to include child(ren)
4. Families and adolescents - changing family roles and boundaries to accommodate the increased independence of adolescents and increased need for care of older family members.
5. Launching children and moving on - developing adult to adult relationships between parents and children and accepting new family members, such as grandchildren, and the death of elderly family members, such as grandparents.
6. Families in later life – adjusting to the shifting of generational roles

These linear models are fine for some families that consist of a mother, father and children; however the problem is that the emphasis is placed on two parent families that contain children and that remain intact through the entire development cycle of the children (from infancy to adulthood). What are some of the ways in which a family may change if a divorce occurs? Carter and McGoldrick have also developed models of changes that occur in families that are in the process of divorce or remarriage. However,

often time even extended models of changes that families may go through do not take into account individual circumstances that every family must deal with. Some examples of individual circumstances that may exist within families include:

1. Death of a child, parent or other important member in a “non-traditional” family such as an aunt, grandfather or extended or fictive kin
2. Loss of a job by one or the only money earner in the family causing a change in socio-economic status.
3. The overcoming of a major problem or addiction that one family member has been facing (such as alcoholism or an eating disorder) which leads to a change in the entire family dynamic in terms of roles and expectations of members.
4. Couples or families that choose not to have children or individuals that either choose or are forced to raise children alone and the developmental process that they go through based on that choice.

When a family is faced with a problem, there are things that can be done in order to help the family work through their issues. Change within the dynamics and relationships of a family is just as important as change in the structure. Some ways in which the relationships within a family can be changed include:

1. Facilitation of problem solving and communication skills of a family. Help the family to define the problem and what they want to change and accomplish, and work to come up with a solution that is mutually beneficial to all members of the family.
2. Helping the family to engage in rapport talk instead of report talk. Let family members know that it is important for them to really listen to one another to take an interest in what is important to the other members of the family.
3. Developing empathetic relationships between family members. Even if one family member does not agree with the way that another one feels, simply understanding the viewpoint of the other person and respecting the way he or she is feeling is a step toward resolving the problem.
4. Work to develop better parenting skills in families that include children. The bases or foundation of the entire family system are the parents or those that have parental roles within the family. If parenting skills are lacking, it is difficult for children to develop properly and for families to function effectively.

\*resources for this summary include:

-class discussions

-Schrive, Joe M. *Human Behavior and the Social Environment Fourth Edition*.  
Pearson Education Inc. 2004.

-Lamanna, Mary Ann and Agnes Reidmann. *Marriages and Families: Making  
Choices in Diverse Society Eighth Edition*. Wadsworth, Thomson Learning Inc.  
2003.