Human Behavior and the Social Environment  
Matrix cell summary: Family, how the system can change?

To be able to change a family, you have to change its members, starting often with the parents because they are the decision makers. If you try to change the children, but not the parents it will not work so good. This also depends on where the family is at during the changing. If the children are adult maybe it’s not the parents we should focus most on.

There are theories that can help us explain how families change. One of those is The Family Ecology Perspective. This theory explores how a family influences and is influenced by the environment that surrounds it. At the foundation we have the natural physical-biological environment. Climate, plants, animals and so on. After that comes the human built environment, like roads and buildings. After that comes the social-cultural environment that is entirely a human creation and consists of values, language, law and social and economic systems. Current research from this perspective is family policy and neighborhood effects. To be able to change a family, the surroundings also have to change.

The Family Development Perspective is a theory where the family itself is the unit of analysis. Here comes the concept of Family Life Cycle in that means that families change in predictable ways over time. Challenges must be mastered before you can enter another stage. The typical stages are:
1. The addition or subtraction of family members (through birth, death and leaving home).
2. The various stages children go through.
3. Changes in the family’s connections with social institutions. (Retirement from work, or a child’s entry in school.)

There also exists a longer stage model of the same theory.
1. The newly established couple stage.
2. Families of preschooler’s age.
3. Families of primary school children.
4. Families with adolescents.
5. Families in the middle years.
6. Aging families.

Current research from this theory is for example about transition to adulthood.

Family Systems Theory says that the parts of a family make a whole that is larger than the sum of its parts. There is a pressure on changing members to revert to the original behavior within the family system. For change to occur, the whole family as a whole must change. Research from this theory is about family effectiveness and crisis management and family boundaries.
The Interactionist Perspective looks at internal family dynamics, the interaction of family members. These interchanges create a family, that is, family emerges from the relationships and interactions among members. If you change how members interact, you change the family. Current research from this theory is about family rituals and meanings assigned to domestic work.

Crises in a family often mean a big change. Also stress in families is connected to change. Some examples on these factors are divorce, addition or loss of a family member, Ambiguous loss, and conflict over family roles, demoralizing event or daily family hassle. When crises happen, a period of disorganization occurs. That means that the family reorganizes which often means that the function of the family drops. After that period, (1) they may function the same as before, or (2) they may have been so weakened by the crisis that they that function only at a reduced level. They could also (3) been stimulated by the crisis in a way that made them more effective as a family. During the disorganization the family can loose its roles and routines. The members can be unenthusiastic and not do their duties in the family. The family can even stop to function, that is, members don’t go to work or school, no one cooks or cleans. Expressive relationships in the family change, sometimes for the better or the worse. Sexual activity often decline. Sometimes the relationships with friends and extended kin also grows weaker, the family “closes”. When that happen, it’s even harder for the family to get through the crisis. Sometimes a conflict in the family rises just how they want to handle the problem.

There is a lot to consider when it comes to families and how they change. I have mostly talked about theories from a nuclear perspective. I know there exist other forms of families like for example extended families, and to explain how they change is even more complex.