

Building Genograms

A genogram is a family map or history that uses special symbols to describe relationships, major events, and the dynamics of a family over multiple generations. It also provides a visual display of the family and the complexities of family relationships. Mental health professionals often use genograms to identify patterns of mental and physical illnesses such as depression, cancer, genetic disorders, and other issues. I encourage you to use the genogram to also identify family and/or individual strengths and resilience.

Some basics:

- Decide how many generations you would like to represent in your genogram.
- Research your family history. You may want to write down everything you know first. That will also help you see either gaps in information or help you identify questions you are curious about.
- Be mindful of what issues may be difficult for family members to discuss.
- Be prepared to listen to lots of stories. Stories are the best means by which we remember and transfer information.
- You may also be able to find information through web searches or family books.

Design your genogram, and use standard genogram symbols to represent family members and relationships.

Organize the chart based on family interactions beginning with the oldest generation you want to present.

Look for patterns, and these can also include strengths.

You can create your genogram in any way that you would like: hand-drawn, using computer programs such as GenoPro. Try to enjoy the process.

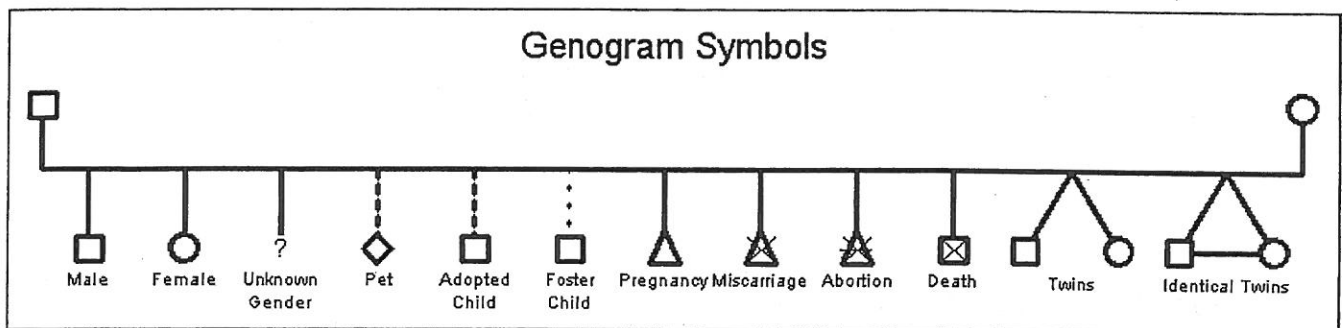
Don't worry if there is missing information- just do the best you can.

Finally, decide what areas you want to study further: one of Bowen's Family Emotional System concepts; an issue related to culture, spirituality, socioeconomic status, and any other issue that you would like to delve further into.

Genogram Symbols

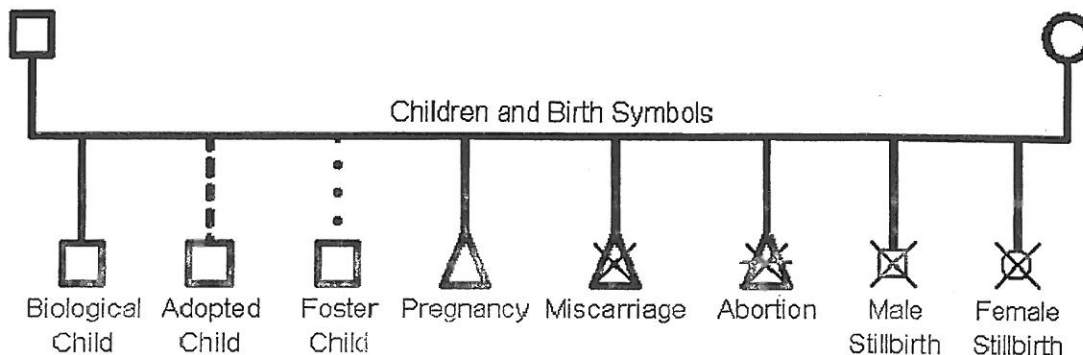
Standard Gender Symbols for a Genogram

In a genogram, males are represented by a square and females by a circle. If you are unsure of the how to place individuals in complex family situations, such as reconstituted families, please visit the rules to build a genogram contained within this guide. GenoPro also has two other *gender symbols*, the diamond for a pet and the question mark for unknown gender.



Genogram Symbols for Children's Links and Pregnancy Terminations

In a standard genogram, there are three different types of children: biological/natural child, adopted child and foster child. A triangle is used to represent a pregnancy, a miscarriage or an abortion. In the case of a miscarriage, there is a diagonal cross drawn on top of the triangle to indicate death. Abortions have a similar display to miscarriages, only they have an additional horizontal line. A still birth is displayed by the gender symbol; the diagonal cross remains the same size, but the gender symbol is twice as small.

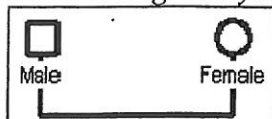


Rules To Build A Genogram

Although there is general agreement on the basic genogram structure and symbols, there are some variations from one author to another. Some authors do reuse the same symbol for different situations while others have ignored such special cases. GenoPro did a meticulous research to determine what symbols and rules are best to create coherent genograms.

If you understand the following rules, you will be able create the most complex genogram without any problem... and others will be able to understand your work.

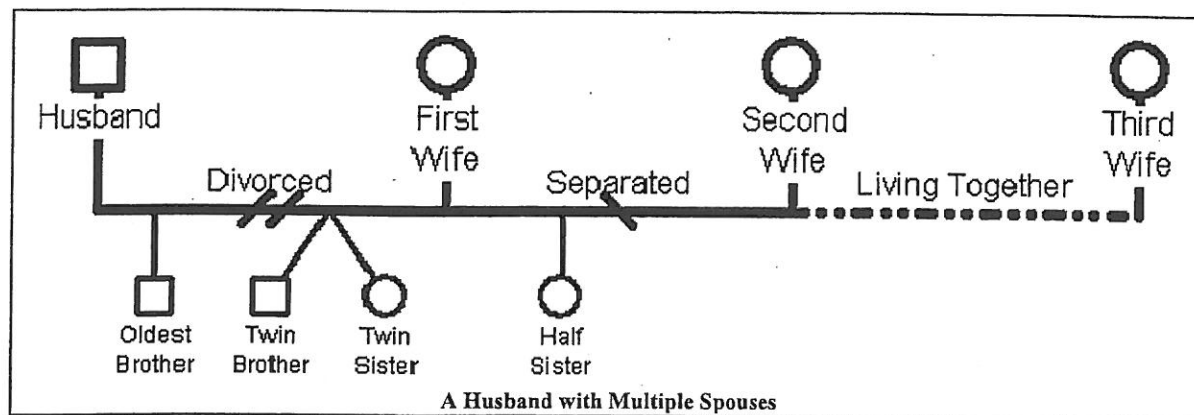
Basic Genogram Symbols



The male is noted by a square and the female by a circle. A family is shown by a horizontal line connecting the two.

The children are placed below the family line from the oldest to the youngest, left to right. Although this may sound obvious, it will be very important to remember these rules when the situation becomes a bit more complex.

The following case is a husband with three spouses. The husband had three children with the first wife, and then divorced. The husband married the second wife, had one child and separated. The husband currently lives with another woman. As you can see, the oldest child is at the left, and the youngest child, "Half Sister", is at the right of her family, as she is the only child of the husband and the second wife.



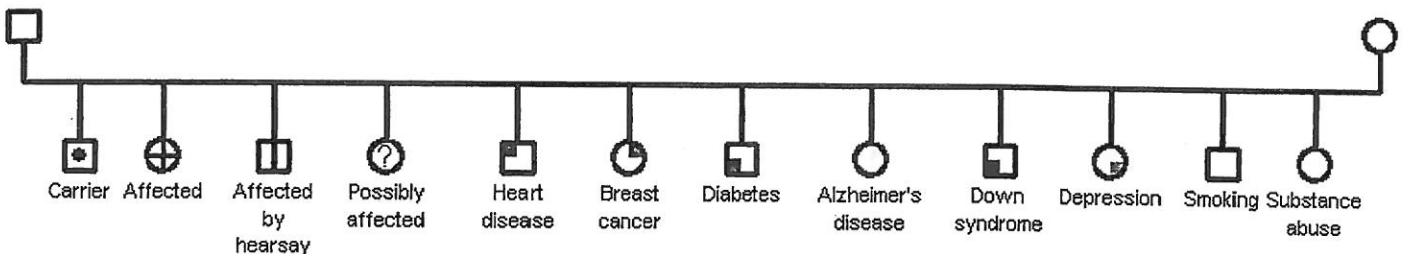
Documenting Medical Information

Drawing Medical Pedigrees

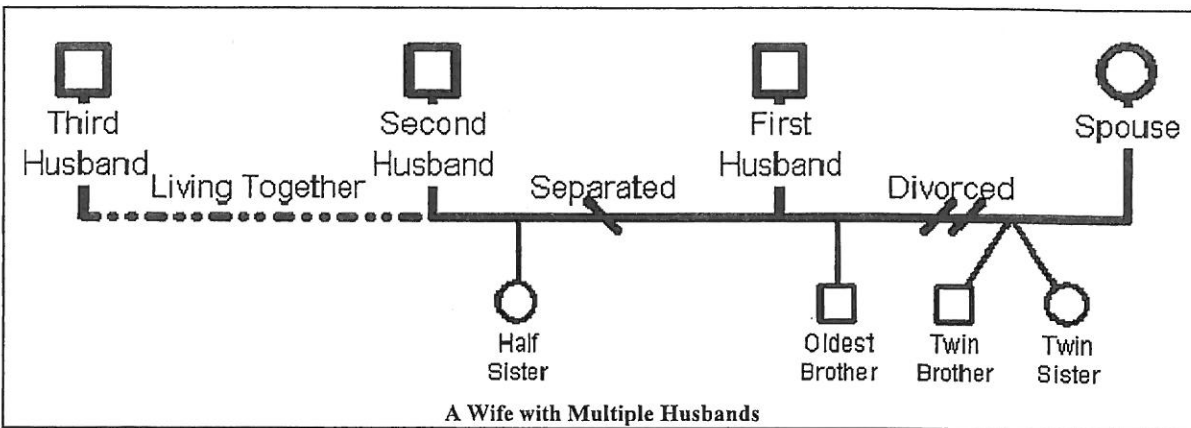
To document medical information in your genogram, you must first determine which genetic diseases you wish to include. Options include: heart disease, cancer, diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, thyroid disease, certain birth defects, alcoholism, depression and schizophrenia. Remember that you can always add more diseases later or change the symbols to reflect your current needs.

The next step is to create a legend so that genograms can be read and interpreted systematically like an electrocardiogram. Right-click on the document and select New Legend – Common genogram symbols. This will insert a new legend that you can work with to create your customized legend.

Medical Genogram Symbols



Reversing the scenario where the wife had multiple husbands, we get the genogram depicted on page 9.



The second scenario is the same as the first one, except the female spouse had three husbands. She had three children with her first husband and divorced. The wife married another man, had one child with him and now lives with someone else. Please notice the oldest child is always at the left most position of the family of his biological parents. In this scenario, the "Oldest Brother" is older than the twins and the half sister, however the half-sister must be placed under the family of her biological parents. Since the second marriage is after the first marriage, it follows that the half sister is younger than the children from the first marriage. The half sister therefore appears to the left, although she is not the oldest child. If you are confused, please read this paragraph again.

In summary, here are the three rules to build a genogram:

1. The male parent is always at the left of the family and the female parent is always at the right of the family.
2. In the case of ambiguity, assume a male-female relationship, rather than male-male or female-female relationship.
3. A spouse must always be closer to his/her first partner, then the second partner (if any), third partner, and so on...
4. The oldest child is always at the left his family, the youngest child is always at the right his family.

To simplify your genealogy layout, it is acceptable to swap the husband and wife as long as there is only a single family involved. There is no ambiguity to have the wife at the left position, as long as each spouse has had only one partner. The four rules are there to remove ambiguity.

Documenting Family Relationships

The **family relationship** component is used to describe the union of two individuals. In GenoPro, a union is defined as the combination of two adult individuals joined for the purpose of creating a family unit. This union may be strong, such as marriage or non-existent, such as divorce. GenoPro defines 22 types of unions:

	Marriage
	Separation in fact
	Legal separation
	Divorce
	Nullity
	Widowed
	Engagement
	Engagement and cohabitation
	Engagement and separation
	Legal cohabitation
	Legal cohabitation and separation in fact
	Legal cohabitation and official (legal) separation
	Cohabitation
	Cohabitation and separation
	Non-sentimental cohabitation
	Non-sentimental cohabitation and separation
	Committed (long-term) relationship
	Committed relationship and separation
	Casual relationship or dating (short-term)
	Casual relationship and separation
	Temporary relation / One night stand
	Love Affair
	Love Affair and separation
	Rape / Force relationship
	Other or Unknown









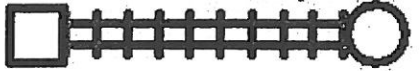


Family Relationships Key

Documenting Emotional Relationships

Family relationships may be used to describe the emotional bond between people involved in a union, but the **emotional relationship** component is used to describe the emotional bond between any two individuals in the genogram (family tree). GenoPro allows you to choose among a wide selection of emotional relationship categories. The selection will be displayed on the genogram with its corresponding color-coded link. With a few clicks, you can easily assess the level of cohesiveness within a family or a group. GenoPro defines 34 types of emotional relationships:

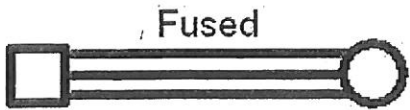
	Plain / Normal
	Indifferent / Apathetic
	Distant / Poor
	Cutoff / Estranged
	Discord / Conflict
	Hate
	Harmony
	Friendship / Close
	Best Friends / Very Close
	Love
	In Love
	Fused
	Distrust
	Hostile
	Distant-Hostile
	Close-Hostile
	Fused-Hostile
	Violence
	Distant-Violence
	Close-Violence
	Fused-Violence
	Abuse
	Physical Abuse
	Emotional Abuse
	Sexual Abuse
	Neglect (abuse)
	Manipulative
	Controlling
	Jealous
	Focused On
	Fan / Admirer
	Limerence
	Never Met
	Other

Each type of emotional relationship is described in the table below. The symbols have been enlarged for better viewing.

<p>Normal / Plain</p> 	<p>Defines a plain normal relationship. This emotional relationship may serve the purpose of highlighting a normal relationship among numerous dysfunctional relationships. It may resemble the identical twins link, but the line for twins is gray. Twins are also connected to each other through a child link that looks like an inverted V. If a plain normal relationship needs to be displayed, then create a non-linear line between the twins.</p>
<p>Indifferent / Apathetic</p> 	<p>Defines an apathetic relationship where one or both individuals are indifferent to the other.</p>
<p>Distant / Poor</p> 	<p>Defines a distant relationship between two individuals. Communication is very limited, usually due to differences in lifestyles.</p>
<p>Cutoff / Estranged</p> 	<p>Defines a cutoff relationship where two individuals have no contact at all, characterized by extreme disengagement and emotional intensity where there had formerly been love, affection, or friendliness.</p>
<p>Discord / Conflict</p> 	<p>Defines a relationship in which at least one of the individuals perceives the relationship to be negative and where both individuals are convinced they are right.</p>
<p>Hate</p> 	<p>Defines a relationship of intense enmity or antipathy in which the individuals wish harm upon each other and take pleasure in each other's misery.</p>
<p>Harmony</p> 	<p>Defines a good relationship between two individuals in which there is mutual respect.</p>
<p>Friendship / Close</p> 	<p>Defines a close relationship (friendship) between two individuals in which they share affection or esteem and engage in mutually helping behaviors.</p>
<p>Best Friends / Very Close</p> 	<p>Defines a relationship of deep friendship, where two individuals share a deeper level of understanding, trust and affection than with most other friends.</p>
<p>Love</p> 	<p>Defines a relationship of strong positive affection between two individuals, arising from kinship or recognition of attractive qualities.</p>
<p>In Love</p> 	<p>Defines a relationship of intimacy, passion and commitment based on sexual instinct.</p>



Defines a relationship of distrust between two individuals where at least one of the individuals lacks confidence in the other's intentions.



Defines a fused relationship between two individuals. Individuals become dependant on one another, and also become inseparable, with little room for their own identities.



Defines a hostile relationship between two individuals where the individuals argue on major issues and feel heightened stress and aggression when they are together.



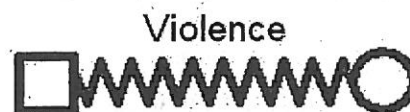
Defines a distant-hostile relationship between two individuals. The two individuals rarely come into contact, but when they are in each other's presence, they argue and are hostile towards one another.



Defines a close-hostile relationship between two individuals. These people often come into contact, but they argue and keep secrets from one another.



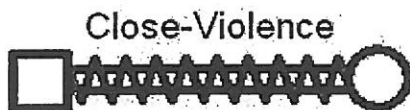
Defines a fused-hostile relationship between two individuals. These individuals are always together and depend on each other, yet they are unable to live without arguing.



Defines a violent relationship between two individuals. The two individuals often come into conflict when they meet which results in extreme actions such as physical force or excessive power.



Defines a relationship in which the two individuals rarely see each other, but when they come together, they argue and engage in violent behavior.



Defines a relationship in which two individuals often come into contact, but they argue and are engaged in violent behavior when they are together.



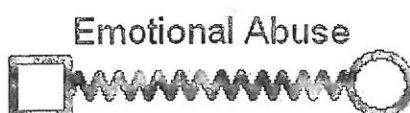
Defines a violent behavior in a fused relationship. Violence takes place to avoid a break in the relationship, especially when intimacy/fusion is difficult or impossible to maintain. Fusion compromises the feelings, identities and self-direction of each, thus creating true instability.



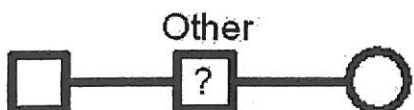
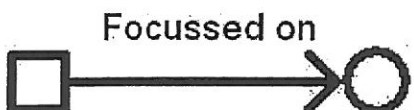
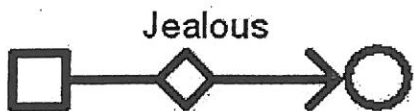
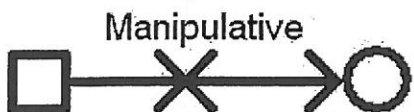
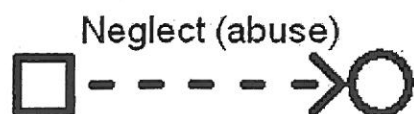
Defines an abusive relationship. This is a generic relationship for situations in which an undetermined type of abuse occurs between two individuals.



Defines a relationship in which one individual physically abuses another. It includes any non-accidental injury to an individual, typically to a child or a woman. This includes hitting, kicking, slapping, shaking, burning, pinching, hair pulling, biting, choking, throwing, shoving, whipping, and paddling.



Defines a relationship in which one individual emotionally abuses another. It includes any attitude or behavior which interferes with mental health or social development. This includes yelling, screaming, name-calling, shaming, negative comparisons to others, telling them they are "bad, no good, worthless" or "a



mistake".

Defines a relationship in which one individual sexually abuses another. It includes any sexual act between an adult and child, or a forced sexual action between two adults. This includes fondling, penetration, intercourse, exploitation, pornography, exhibitionism, child prostitution, group sex, oral sex, or forced observation of sexual acts.

Defines a relationship in which an individual fails to provide for a dependant's physical needs. This includes lack of supervision, inappropriate housing or shelter, inadequate provision of food, inappropriate clothing for season or weather, abandonment, denial of medical care, and inadequate hygiene.

Defines a relationship in which one individual manipulates another individual.

Defines a relationship in which one individual controls another individual.

Defines a relationship in which one individual feels resentment against someone because of that person's rivalry, success, or advantages.

Defines a relationship in which one individual has an unhealthy focus (obsession) on another individual. This may include favoritism and stalking.

Defines a relationship in which one individual is an ardent admirer of another, and has an intense, occasionally overwhelming liking of that person.

Defines a relationship in which one individual has intense feelings of interest towards another individual, with an acute longing for reciprocation.

Defines a relationship in which two individuals have never met. This relationship is used to explicitly confirm that two individuals such as an adopted child and his biological parents have never been in contact. As the creator of the genogram, you may add more details regarding the relationship, such as 'never met physically' but 'met online'.

Defines any emotional relationship that is not defined in the list. Use a comment to elaborate on the details of this particular relationship.