

# Foundations

*A Newsletter for Married Couples*

Summer

## When Families Marry

What would you guess is the most significant element in the way a couple gets along together in marriage. Personality? Background? Prior experience?

### How We Were Shaped

All those would be good answers, and the fact is that they all have one common root – their families of origin. The family you grew up in helped to form your personality. It determined the place(s) you grew up, and many of the experiences you had. And for many if not most of us the determination of who we would be began before we were even born. So when we get married, that long history of creating us meets up with the equally long history of shaping our spouse. We meet as two creations of different artists, ready to exist in intimate union not in a museum but in a home. With mundane tasks, and often with children, the products of our own creation.

### Rules and Values

As mentioned in the beginning, we are shaped by the rules and values of our family. Did they value hard work? Was humor an important element? How did they regard our misdeeds? In some families, a child's bad behavior is a blemish on the family's reputation, while in others, it's a sign that the "little devil" has a sense of adventure.

Where you came in your family also helped determine who you are. If you were first, you may have developed a sense of responsibility. If your spouse was



youngest, they may have like to be the center of attention and are happy to let you do the bulk of the work. Birth order can change the way different siblings see the family, especially if there was a lot of space between them.

### New Way of Looking

Getting a sense of ourselves through an understanding of our family can be a very freeing experience, and can be really helpful in our marriages. Looking back into the family we came from (and not just the immediate family, but grandparents too) can enabled you to make better, more conscious choices about your behaviors and reactions. The trick is to not get stuck in the past, but to use insights from the past in your present

life and marriage.

### Understanding your new family

And even as you are trying to understand the ways your family has formed you, you take on the task of figuring out your spouse's family. And once you feel like you have a handle on THAT, you need to bring together your two pasts and create a common family going forward. The best tools you can have as you mesh your two styles is a sense of tolerance and a sense of humor! Neither style is right or wrong in itself but neither may be right for the two of you. Think of yourselves like *Goldilocks in the Three Bears* story. She kept trying the different chairs and cereals and didn't stop until she found the one that was just right.

# Marriage Between Cultures

What do you do if you are from really different backgrounds? Not just little differences, but major ones. African refugees to this country are meeting and marrying white American partners. Mexicans and Koreans, Filipinos and Pakistanis – whatever your background, once you fall in love it takes work to reconcile your cultures.

David Ludden, in an article in *Psychology Today*, reports on a study of interracial couples that was conducted in Australia. The results indicated that there are indeed differences that can affect the satisfaction in a relationship. The key seems to be going into the marriage with your eyes open to the fact that negotiation will be necessary, and misunderstandings are likely to occur.

Marriages between people of different races and cultures are much more common than they once were. And



interestingly, many people are more accepting of this change. Some even see it as a good for society. And even though there are challenges, it does not mean that you will be less happy than those from the same culture. Like every

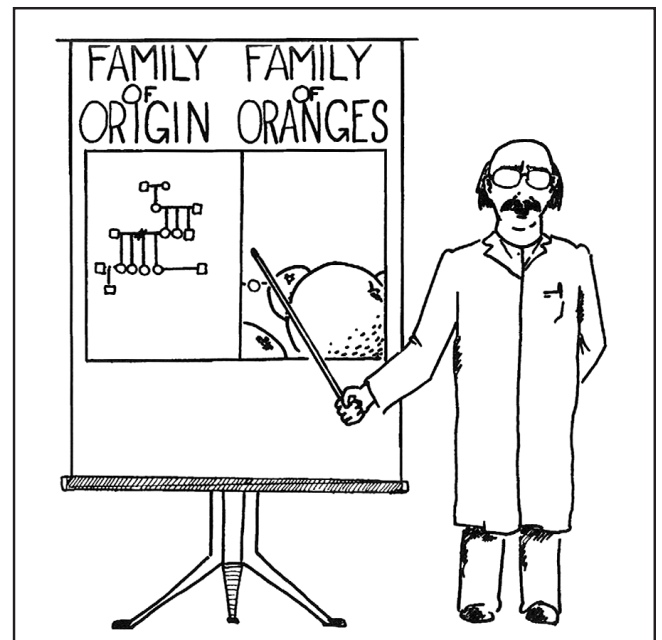
husband and wife, you need to love and respect one another, and find a common ground between your two backgrounds. The same God that made you both wants you to experience the love and joy with each other that marriage can bring.

PREPARING FOR A WEDDING?

**personalized online zoom sessions available**



Steve and Kathy Beirne, experienced Catholic marriage prep leaders, offer six one-hour sessions. Premarital inventory included. For more information or to register go to [snkpublishers.us/marriagepreparation](http://snkpublishers.us/marriagepreparation)





# Genograms

Genograms are a way you can plot out your family. It's a little like a family tree, but it gives more information. It shows divorces, miscarriages, foster children or adopted children. There are many things you can learn from making a genogram. In one case, a woman learned that the death of her grandmother's first child might have been related to the lack of closeness of the mother to the next child. She might have been afraid that he would die too, so she wasn't as close to him as to her other children.

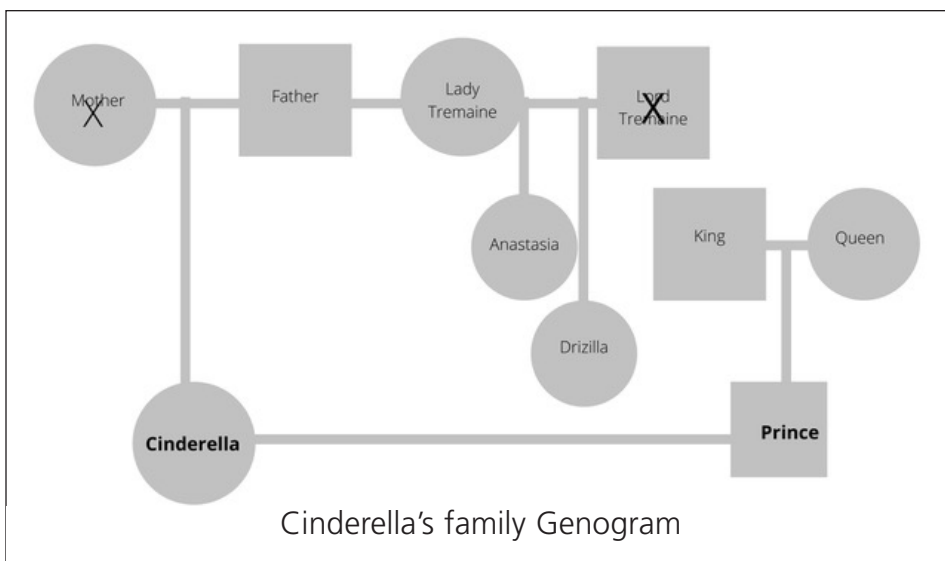
Most genograms start with the grandparent's generation. Who were your mother's parents? Who were your father's? What siblings did they have, and what order did they come in? How about you and your siblings? Have you all married? Do you have children?

Doing a genogram can sometimes help you see yourself in a new way. You may notice that your mother was in a similar place in her family as you are in yours. Whatever information you get from doing a genogram will help you see yourself in the ongoing unfolding of family life.



As you might notice in the Cinderella genogram, circles represent females and squares represent males. An X through a person's symbol indicates that they have died. There are many other symbols. You can learn about other symbols here <http://wellsk.faculty.mjc.edu/genogramdetailed.pdf>

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You may want to try to create a genogram of your own family to see what information you can learn. If your parents are alive, ask them about the family, and if there are members you haven't met or haven't known about. You may be surprised to find out that your great aunt was interested in nature, like you, or that your penchant for baking was inherited from your Grandpa's mother.

Cinderella's family genogram only shows two generations, but hopefully it will give you an idea of how it's done. Give it a try, if you're so inclined. You might find out the things you didn't know you didn't know!

# Exercise

## Traits of a Healthy Family

Many years ago, author Dolores Curran wrote a book called *The Traits of a Healthy Family*. She sent a list of characteristics to teachers, therapists, clergy, health care professionals, and asked them to pick out the 15 qualities they saw in healthy families. She sent out 500 surveys but got back 551. People were so intrigued by the project that they copied the survey and shared it with others! Below is the list of the top 15 as distilled from the responses she got.

The healthy family...

- 1. Communicates and listens.
- 2. Affirms and supports one another.
- 3. Teaches respect for others.
- 4. Develops a sense of trust.
- 5. Has a sense of play and humor.
- 6. Exhibits a send of shared responsibility.
- 7. Teaches a sense of right and wrong.
- 8. Has a strong sense of family in which rituals and traditions abound.
- 9. Has a balance of interaction among members.
- 10. Has a shared spiritual core.
- 11. Respects the privacy of one another.
- 12. Values service to others.
- 13. Fosters family table time and conversation.
- 14. Shares leisure time.
- 15. Admits to and seeks help with problems.

Look over the list and see what things you saw in your family growing up.



Compare your list with your spouse's. Did your families share traits? Did they have different ones from each other? If you are (or will be) raising a family of your own, how would you rank the importance of those traits in your family?

# Spirituality

It doesn't matter whose family it is, there is always conflict in it somewhere. There are no perfect people and there aren't any perfect families on this side of the heavenly gates. But one form of imperfection that is fixable is the rifts that occur in families because one person holds a grudge against another person.

## Forgiving Others

If you are the one who needs to forgive someone – grandparents, or uncles or siblings – think about how that might happen. Forgiving does not mean you need to have an ongoing relationship with a person if they have caused grievous harm. It just means that you get to untie the knot holding you in a position of pain. Many of us, though, hold onto much smaller offenses. And think how freeing it would be for our adult selves to let go of our sense of injury that might stem from years before, maybe even in our childhood.

## Why Forgive

Forgiveness has many advantages. It's good for our physical health. It's good for our emotional and mental health. It helps us let go of the past and live in the present, and it helps us to feel in control of our lives. We now can move forward without the chains that old resentments put on us. Forgiving others in our family often allows us to break the cycle of negative interactions that have existed for generations. We knew a bride whose mother refused to come to her wedding, but she was resigned to it, because her grandmother had refused to attend her mother's wedding! Imagine what a freedom it will be if she can forgive her mother for that offense, and in the years to come is not condemned to repeat that painful family pattern.

## Healing Old Wounds

Our family of origin is a powerful force in our life, but the power we have if we decide to heal old wounds is even greater. We don't have to hate our uncle because our mother does. We don't have to keep alive any of the family feuds that have

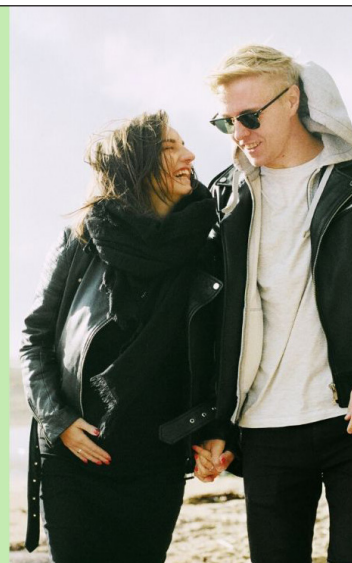


held us in their grip. Saint John Paul II wrote “Two gestures are characteristic of Jesus’ mission: healing and forgiving.” By addressing the grudges or splits in our family, we can mirror both of these actions. Forgiving someone in our family who has hurt us will heal the fabric of the family as well.

*A free relationship tune-up*

IT'S LONG BEEN  
SOMETHING YOU  
WANT - A WAY TO  
TALK TO EACH  
OTHER MORE  
COMFORTABLY

Join us for a 2 hour seminar on 7-11-20 at 6pm via Zoom. Sign up at [snkpublishers.us/tuneup](https://snkpublishers.us/tuneup)  
Limit:10 couples



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