

THE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE

Most families experience some level of stress at times of natural transition +or changes in the family. This is normal. At different stages in the family life cycle there are some dramatic changes which occur as a result of new and unanticipated demands of the different members of the family. The stress level felt by the family can be exaggerated because family members aren't sure why they are having such a hard time. It can be helpful to know about some of the different transitions points families go through as they age and progress. With this understanding, it may be easier to navigate through the adjustments that the family has to make until we can find a new family rhythm.

Below is a very cursory description of the main stages of the family life cycle:

We all leave our family homes at some point and begin our journey as independent adults. This is called the launching stage. How we leave often has a large impact on how we manage the launching stage of our own children.



In the next stage, the coupling stage, we find our life partners. In this stage we have to learn to negotiate the balance between what we are as individual adults with accommodating to the needs of our partner and finding ways to be part of a two person unit functioning as one.



In the next stage, the family with young children, we have to learn to make yet a larger accommodation, to be a two person unit but to devote most of our time and energy into providing a nurturing and corrective environment for young children. In this stage parents engage in a lot of negotiation over preferences and dislikes in the parenting styles, which are often heavily influenced by how the adults experienced their own parents' style of discipline, support, and management of emotion.



In the families with adolescents stage, the children begin to assert their autonomy as they connect independently with their peer group and distance themselves from the parents as their primary focus for emotional support and guidance. In this stage, parents often feel as if the children they have devoted much of their adult lives to are gone, particularly if there is a lot of conflict and they feel like the teen is making a lot of poor choices with their newfound freedoms.



Finally, coming full circle, we are back to the launching stage. In this stage parents have to manage the transition from the semi- autonomous teen stage to where the offspring are now living their own independent lives and are self-sufficiently responsible .If parents left home prematurely or in a very conflicted way themselves, this is often a very difficult time. They don't have a positive experience of their own to draw on as to how to navigate the emotional separation from the child without re-experiencing a lot of the unresolved pain of their own launching.

This is a very brief summary of the family life cycle and doesn't begin to touch on the complexity of the tasks, demands, and potential pitfalls that can be encountered in any of these stages. Managing transitions can be challenging for everyone. However, family therapy can be helpful when the conflict between family members becomes too intense for family members to handle on their own. For more information on the Family Life Cycle see the links below. There are also links in our website describing some of the common challenges families experience at the different stages.

<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?hwid=ty6171&#ty6172>

http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_is_the_major_stages_of_the_life_cycle_of_the_family

<http://www.strongbonds.jss.org.au/workers/families/development.html>



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