

# A Simple Guide to Genograms

A genogram or family tree is a useful tool to gather information about a client's family. This visual representation of a family can help you to identify patterns or themes within families that may be influencing or driving the client's current behaviour.

Many clients find they enjoy the opportunity to talk about their family history, and it can work as a good tool to build trust and rapport in a working relationship. However be aware that some clients may find seeing a visual picture of the state of their relationships confronting, particularly if the majority of relationships in their life at present are conflictual or distant. Use this tool sensitively and in cases where you think it will be useful to help promote healthy change and the development of more positive relationships in the client's life.

This process is also used to identify key family members who can be included in recovery plans, particularly those who are seen to be supportive. Also, family members who have displayed resilience in the face of addiction can be identified and acknowledged. (Kina Family and Addictions Trust, 2005)

## General Hints

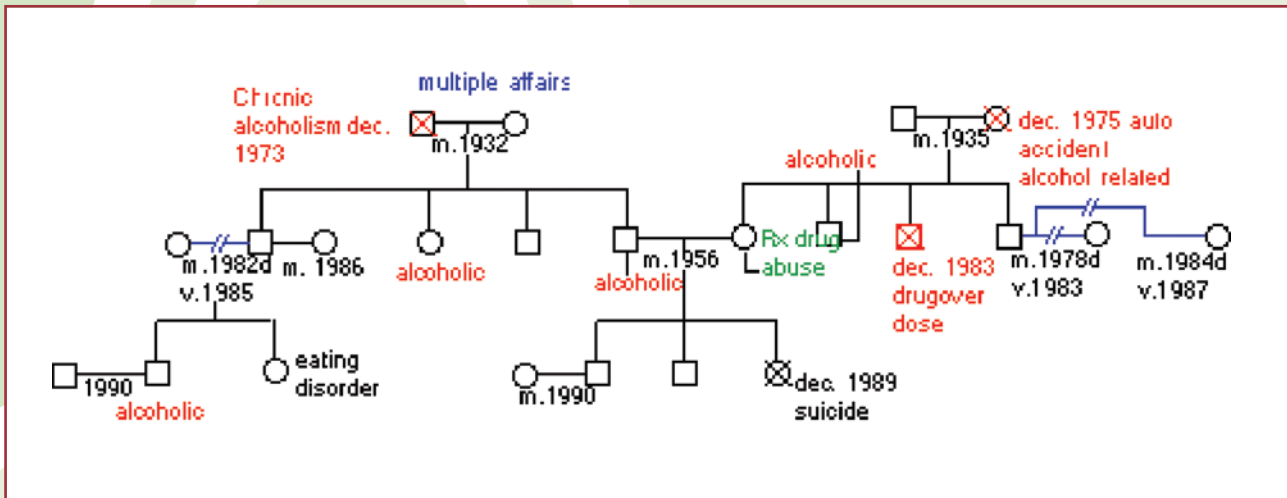
- Use a large piece of paper (A3 or bigger), to give you plenty of room for drawing and recording extra information over time. A whiteboard with printer option is also very useful
- Always put a date on the genogram, and a date next to additional information recorded.
- Ensure the process is relaxed and informal
- It is often useful to keep a genogram in the back of a client's file, to refer to and add to in subsequent sessions.
- Keep this guide beside you and let the young person know that you are learning how to draw genograms - your honesty will be appreciated.

## With the client

- Aim to gather information about three generations: the client's generation, their parent, and their grandparents.
- Include significant others who lived with or cared for the family.
- Start with drawing the family structure, who is in the family, in which generations, how they are connected (birth, marriage, deaths etc).
- You may ask them to tell you a bit about each person.
- As the client tells you about family members and relationships, make a note alongside the name.
- Ask about relationships between family members
  - Who are you closest to?
  - What is/was your relationship like with...?
  - How often do you see...?
  - Where does...live now?
  - Is there any one here that you really don't get along with?
  - Is there anyone else who is very close in the family? Or who really don't get along?
- Ask about characteristics or habits of family members: health issues, drug and alcohol use, physical and mental health, violence, crime/trouble with the law, employment, education. These are then added to the diagram. The effect of this is to emphasise the pervasive impact of addiction and can stimulate a desire to halt the family cycle of drug and alcohol problems (Kina Family and Addictions Trust, 2005). It is important, however, not to assume that there are drug and alcohol and mental health problems within the family history.
- Ask about family values, beliefs and traditions.
- Try to explore patterns and themes.
  - Who are you most like?
  - What is...like? Who else is like them?

**An example genogram:**

Also available on the CD-Rom is: Standard Symbols for Genograms



**Useful Websites:**

Introduction to the genogram - [www.genopro.com/genogram](http://www.genopro.com/genogram)

A brief how to - <http://home.earthlink.net/~bridgman/flyctxt.html>