

Life Cycle Stages

Documentation Report



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GOALS OF FAMILY THERAPY ACROSS THE LIFECYCLE

Some family therapists argue that all human problems are essentially relational and so family therapy is appropriate in all instances.

1. Family of origin experiences

Tasks

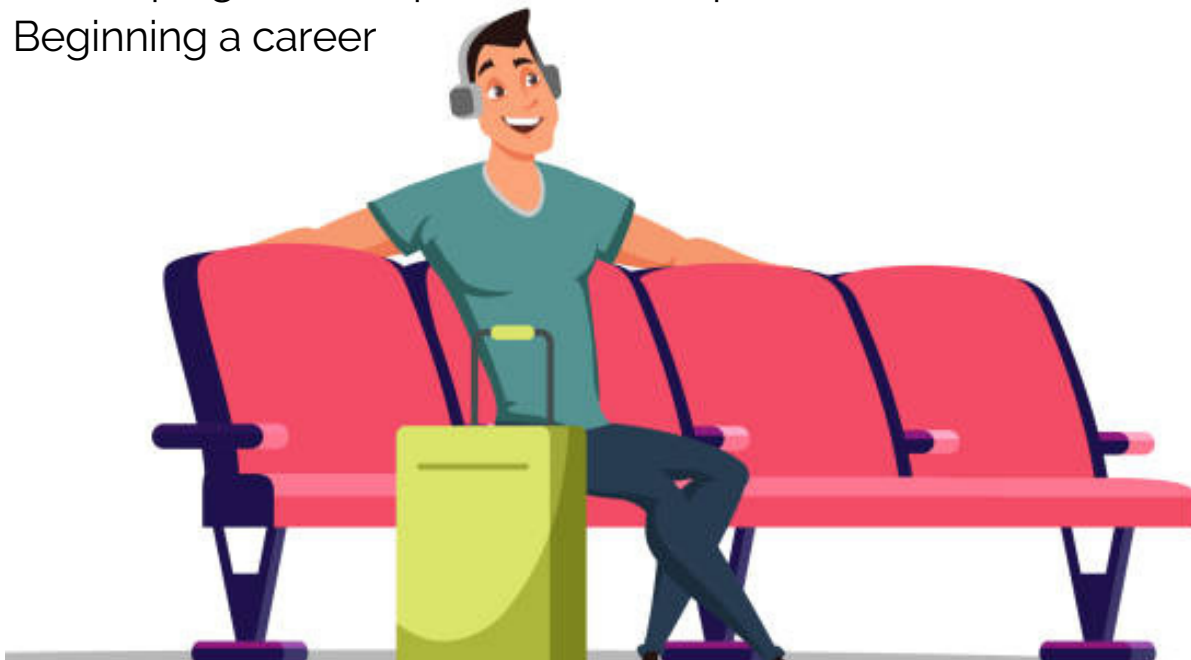
- Maintaining relationships with parents, siblings and peers
- Completing school



2. Leaving home

Tasks

- Differentiation of self from family of origin and developing adult-to-adult relationship with parents
- Developing intimate peer relationships
- Beginning a career



3. Premarriage stage

Tasks

- Selecting partners
- Developing a relationship
- Deciding to marry

The principal tasks are those associated with selecting a partner and deciding to marry or cohabit. In the following discussion, the term marriage is used to cover both traditional marriage or the more modern arrangement of long-term cohabitation.

When partners come together they are effectively bringing two family traditions together, and setting the stage for the integration of these traditions, with their norms and values, rules, roles and routines into a new tradition. Decision making about this process is not always easy, and couples may come to a marital and family therapist to address this complex issue.



4. Childless couple stage



Tasks

- Developing a way to live together based on reality rather than mutual projection
- Realigning relationships with families of origin and peers to include spouses

The following demographic factors are associated with marital satisfaction (Newman & Newman, 2003):

- high level of education
- high socioeconomic status
- similarity of spouses interests, intelligence and personality
- early or late stage of family lifecycle
- sexual compatibility
- for women, later marriage.

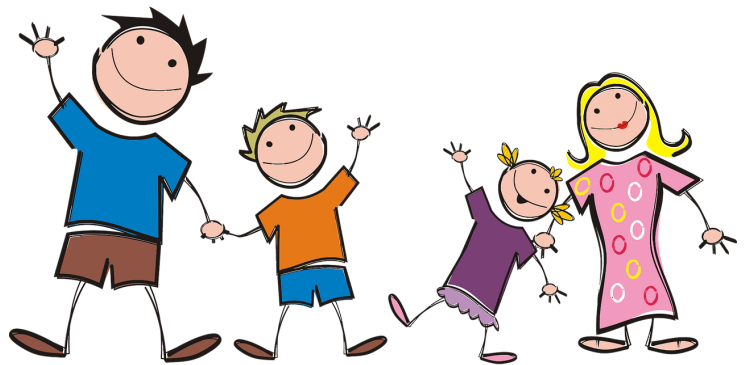
5. Family with young children

Tasks

- Adjusting marital system to make space for children
- Adopting parenting roles
- Realigning relationships with families of origin to include parenting and grandparenting roles
- Children developing peer relationships

The main tasks are for couples to adjust their roles as marital partners to make space for young children; for couples' parents to develop grandparental roles; and for children, as they move into middle childhood, to develop peer relationships. The development of parenting roles involves the couple establishing routines for meeting children's needs for:

- safety
- care
- control
- intellectual stimulation.



6. Family with adolescents



Tasks

- Adjusting parent-child relationships to allow adolescents more autonomy
- Adjusting marital relationships to focus on midlife marital and career issues
- Taking on responsibility of caring for families of origin

In the sixth stage of the family lifecycle model, which is marked by children's entry into adolescence, parent-child relationships require realignment to allow adolescents to develop more autonomy. Concurrently, demands of caring for ageing grandparents may occur. This is an extremely complex and demanding stage of the family lifecycle, particularly for parents.

7. Launching children

Tasks

- Resolving midlife issues
- Negotiating adult-to-adult relationships with children
- Adjusting to living as a couple again
- Adjusting to including in-laws and grandchildren within the family circle
- Dealing with disabilities and death in the family of origin

The seventh stage of the family lifecycle model is concerned with the transition of young adult children out of the parental home. Ideally this transition entails the development of a less hierarchical relationship between parents and children. During this stage, the parents are faced with the task of adjusting to living as a couple again, to dealing with disabilities and death in their families of origin and of adjusting to the expansion of the family if their children marry and procreate. However, the process of midlife re-evaluation, which began in the previous life-cycle stage, takes on a particular prominence as the nest empties.



8. Later life

Tasks

- Coping with physiological decline
- Adjusting to the children taking a more central role in family maintenance
- Making room for the wisdom and experience of the elderly
- Dealing with loss of spouse and peers
- Preparation for death, life review and integration where limited career options are available. In these circumstances some young adults become involved in crime.



In the final stage of the family lifecycle model, the family must cope with the parents' physiological decline, and approaching death, while at the same time developing routines for benefiting from the wisdom and experience of the elderly. A central issue for all family members in this stage as parents move into later life is coping with their approaching death, possible terminal illness and the inevitability of death and ultimately bereavement. Following bereavement or during adjustment to lifethreatening illness, families may be referred for therapy because one or more of their members display adjustment difficulties.

