

Working with Families:
A Guide for Health and Human Services Professionals

By Patricia Spindel

Instructor's Manual

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Chapter 1: The Changing Structure of Families

Suggested Activities

1. For homework, students should define, in their own words, the term “family” prior to reading this chapter. Next ask students to create a revised definition after reading this chapter. Ask them to bring both definitions to class and compare the two. Do they notice any differences? Discuss as a class.
2. As you discuss the definitions in Activity 1, make sure students can offer a working definition of the following terms:
 - traditional family
 - census family
 - family of choice
 - blended family

Encourage students to keep these definitions in mind as they approach the remaining chapters over the course of the term.

3. Read aloud the quote from page 4: “Most kids who are raised by single parents turn out OK.” Ask students why the author felt it necessary to include this statement. In other words, what are some of the dominant expectations and representations of single-parent households? In what ways are they portrayed as dysfunctional or pathological? Encourage students to reflect critically on these representations while also keeping in mind the very real economic challenges that lone-parent families face.

Suggested Assignments

1. Write a five-page literature review on single-parent families that explores the ways in which these families—especially female-headed families—have been portrayed in recent studies. Your paper should consult a minimum of six scholarly articles. You may wish to use some of the works cited in the References section of this chapter as a starting point.
2. Write a five-page research paper on LGBT adoption in Canada and/or the United States. You may wish to explore changes to the law in recent decades or challenges and discrimination faced by parents and children. Your paper should cite at least five scholarly sources.

Additional Resources

News article:

Canadian Press. (2012, September 19). Census shows new face of the Canadian family. *CBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/census-shows-new-face-of-the-canadian-family-1.1137083>

- News article on data from the 2011 census that shows more diversity in Canadian families

Book chapter:

Handa, A. (2003). The hall of shame: Lies, masks, and respectful femininity. *Of silk saris and mini-skirts: South Asian girls walk the tightrope of culture*. Toronto: Women's Press.

- Discusses “normative behaviour” for daughters of immigrant parents from South Asia and the struggle of hiding one's actions from parents and peers.

Chapter 2: Building on Family Strengths and Promoting Resilience

Suggested Activities

1. At the beginning of class, ask students to spend 10–15 minutes writing a short response essay that defines “resilience” and the factors that promote resilience. Encourage students to share their answers and to select topics or aspects of resilience they would like to discuss further in the remaining class time.
2. Divide students into small groups. Ask each group to discuss emotional regulation and its significance to family resilience. Ask students to define “catastrophizing” and consider how we can avoid this behaviour. What are some occasions in their own life in which they have catastrophized? Have each group share its answers with the rest of the class.
3. Write the following terms on the board: “deficit-based assessment” and “strength-based assessment.” Working as a large group, ask students to brainstorm definitions and examples for each term, writing them up on the board. Next ask students to discuss the benefits of a strength-based approach and its importance to an empowerment practice framework.

Suggested Assignments

1. Select one of the following scenarios and draft a series of practical strategies for promoting family resilience, drawing on the themes in this chapter:
 - An immigrant family whose members are having difficulty adjusting to their new home
 - A single-parent family in which the children are getting into trouble at school
 - A couple who feel they are growing apart and have been arguing frequently about money

The Changing Structure of Families

Chapter 1

Patricia Spindel, *Working with Families*

Overview

- ▶ Changes in Canadian Families
- ▶ The Special Challenges of Military Families
- ▶ Single Parenthood
- ▶ Culturally Diverse Families
- ▶ Same-Sex Parents



Changes in Canadian Families

- ▶ Fewer families are married couples
- ▶ More families with common-law spouses
- ▶ More single-parent families
- ▶ Smaller household sizes
- ▶ More same-sex families
- ▶ More blended or complex families (with stepparents and stepsiblings)
- ▶ Greater cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity, for example in Toronto

The Special Challenges of Military Families

- ▶ About 30,500 Canadian men and women under the age of 40 were deployed in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2008.
- ▶ About 8% suffer the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).
- ▶ The impact on families of PTSD or depression is considerable.

Single Parenthood

- ▶ Single-parent families face particular stresses and difficulties, in addition to those faced by two-parent homes.
- ▶ Many children in single-parent homes do fine, but others face challenges.
- ▶ Single parenthood may be intergenerationally transmitted.
- ▶ Poverty is an important complicating factor.
- ▶ Stress, loneliness, feeling overwhelmed are also particularly difficult for parents with one family.
- ▶ Education and support systems make a difference.

Culturally Diverse Families

Integrating into Canadian society present many challenges for families.

- ▶ Shifts in family roles
- ▶ Economic hardships
- ▶ Racial discrimination
- ▶ Language difficulties
- ▶ Emigration in stages
- ▶ Tensions between generations
- ▶ Tensions between cultural beliefs

Culturally Diverse Families

- ▶ Non-traditional families, open to flexible roles for family members, appear to face a lower degree of conflict.
- ▶ Flexibility and adaptability can help family harmony.



Same-Sex Parents

- ▶ Research has shown no significant differences in children based on the sexual orientation of the parents.
- ▶ Children from same-sex parents may face the repercussions of repercussions.
- ▶ Family type is not an important predictor of adolescent functioning.



Summary

Main Arguments

- ▶ Families in Canada are less likely to be nuclear families
- ▶ Diversity includes number of parents, their sexual orientation, and countries of origin

Overview

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- ▶ Single Parenthood
- ▶ Culturally Diverse Families
- ▶ Same-Sex Parents

