

# Family Guide: Understanding Family Dynamics

Ensuring children are given the appropriate environment to develop is an important piece of caregiving. Understanding family dynamics is critical to developing a child's foundational familial environment to be constructive and healthy to promote growth and positive life outcomes.

## Support for Healthy Family Dynamics

### Understanding Different Family Structures

Families come in all shapes and sizes, and one family structure is not placed above another. From nuclear families to single-parent families to stepfamilies, all families have the potential to have supportive family dynamics. However, understanding the basics of one's family structure can be the first step in understanding your family dynamics. Family types classified most often are nuclear, single-parent, extended, childless, step-, and grandparent families.

### Sibling Relationships

Sibling relationships are some of the earliest relationships a child makes in their life, and for that reason, these relationships have an impact on development. A positive sibling relationship makes for a positive impact on development. Through this relationship, a child learns a multitude of things, such as respect, social skills, and socio-emotional development. However, sibling rivalry can be a barrier to these positive developmental effects when it becomes detrimental to the child. As a caregiver, it helps to be aware of favoritism, encourage effort over the outcome, and set clear standards for all children to avoid the sibling relationship becoming harmful to a child's development.



### Parentification

Parentification is a term that is used to describe the process when a child is given the physical and/or psychological responsibilities of a parent or caregiver. When a child goes through parentification, usually the responsibilities build and build, and with that, the child takes more time away from themselves and puts more

into their parental responsibilities. This may cause numerous effects like negative mental health, insecure attachment, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).



## LGBTQ+ Families

Growing acceptance and legal changes have made LGBTQ+ families able to be recognized and supported in today's world. Research finds that these families do not differ from straight, heterosexual parent families.

**Most importantly, LGBTQ+ parents are equally as fit to marry and raise children and deserve to be recognized just as any other family type.**

## Blended Families

Blended families occur when a divorced parent with a child remarries. Sometimes that other adult also has children. These situations are also referred to as stepfamilies. New stepsiblings go through a huge change while the parents are living their new-found happiness. Sometimes these changes can pose challenges, and if not resolved, these can lead to

negative dynamics. Planning, giving the children time, bonding, and maintaining the quality of the marriage are just a few ways to support a blended family. Counseling and therapy can be a great help, too, to help family members navigate this new situation.

## Adoptive and Foster Families

Adoptive parents permanently take in a child who is not biologically theirs, but foster families take in nonbiological children temporarily. Either way, the dynamic of these families is unique in that the child faces grief, sometimes ambiguous when the parent is physically removed, but not psychologically, and sometimes grief from the death or abandonment of caregivers. These families might also be constructed with kinship caregivers, meaning that grandparents or other extended family become the primary caregiver(s). These families are just as capable of healthy family dynamics as biological families.

## National Resources

### The National Family Support Network

([nationalfamilysupportnetwork.org](http://nationalfamilysupportnetwork.org))

### Child Welfare Information Gateway ([childwelfare.org](http://childwelfare.org))

### National Stepfamily Resource Center ([stepfamilies.info](http://stepfamilies.info))

### Center for the Study of Social Policy ([cssp.org](http://cssp.org))

## Local Resources

### Family Resources ([familyresources.org](http://familyresources.org))

### Hello Baby ([helloworldpgh.org](http://helloworldpgh.org))

### PERSAD Center ([persadcenter.org](http://persadcenter.org))

### City of Pittsburgh Gender Equity Commission

([app.pittsburghpa.gov](http://app.pittsburghpa.gov))

### Angels' Place ([angelsplace.org](http://angelsplace.org))

### University of Pittsburgh Youth and Family Research Program ([yfrp.pitt.edu](http://yfrp.pitt.edu))

### PA KinConnector ([kinconnector.org](http://kinconnector.org))

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To learn more, visit: [tryingtogether.org/parenting-resources](http://tryingtogether.org/parenting-resources)

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