**PRACTICE TIP - GENOGRAMS AS A WORKING TOOL**

**Introduction.**

Genograms are a graphic representation of a family tree. They indicate age, gender and nature of relationships within a family. They also allow the practitioner and the family to reflect and analyse on patterns of behaviour within the family, building on strengths and identifying areas of risk and worry.

Providing the details of the family are correctly inputted on Mosaic, Genograms can be manually produced. This is particularly useful when providing reports, chronologies or documents.

However Genograms have a much bigger use when utilised as a working tool with the family, they can become quite therapeutic, and also may act as a medium for disclosure and reflection. – Be prepared should this arise and consider how it will be managed in order to ensure the individual feels contained and safe.

This Practice Tip hopes to provide some insight into the value of genograms in order that they can become embedded into practice.

**Values**

Using Genograms as a participative tool enables the individual to take the lead and be the expert on their family and life.

Using an approach of curiosity demonstrates a genuine desire of interest in the person which works towards facilitating trust and respect in the working relationship.

Genograms help individuals reflect and draw their own conclusions on family connections and patterns. – This can be helpful when analysing insight and capacity for change.

**Method**

There are various methods which can be utilised when undertaking a genogram with a parent. A simple yet effective method is to gather a piece of paper and different colour pens. Explain to the parent that you would like their help to compile a genogram so you can understand who is who in their child’s life and what role if any they have with their child.

It is generally a safe approach to start working from the bottom up, with the children’s names at the bottom of the page and then build up the layers.- This is because this information is known, it is factual and non-contentious, there is little to challenge and it is a means to start the conversation about something safe.

If a parent is reserved about this exercise there are lots of ways to use the genogram to generate conversation. The parent can tell you a little about each child-

* What their birth was like?
* Where they were born?
* How heavy they were?
* The relationship between each sibling
* Who is the most relaxed? Who is the most active? Etc

This facilitates conversation, interest, genuineness, and encourages participation, pride and reflection.

The parental layer of the genogram is the layer to check the details of the biological named parent. Often children call a partner dad, and this then becomes the Father on the record – it is important to check out who is who in order that assessments are factually correct and are based on a clear analysis of risk and strength.

Conversations at this level can reflect upon the nature of the adult relationships, what were the positives? And any events that were a cause for concern.

At this layer you are trying to gather facts and to understand what if any influence this layer of people have on the child, either directly or indirectly. You might ask the parent is there anyone else that the child might have called dad when they were younger? – this refers to previous partners that the child will have had in their lives at different points. These names can be added to the genogram with comments about their involvement, safety and risk to the child – then and now. – The aim at this layer is to assist the parent to reflect on their adult relationships and how these impact on their child both positively and negatively.

Look for –

* Patterns of behaviour
* Similarities/ types in partners
* Timing of relationships
* Episodes when there has been no partner
* Was there a time when things were going well? – if so who was around at that time?
* Was there a time when things were not going so well? – if so who was around at that time?

In addition to information about parents and partners there is the added information on this layer of any siblings that the parent may have, this being aunts and uncles of the children. Again the dynamic of any relationship at this level enables a systemic approach to be applied to the assessment and subsequent experience of the children.

The next above layer refers to the parent’s parent, or any adult that held that role. This refers to the children’s grandparents or anyone who had that role. This is a key layer of a genogram as it enables exploration about the parents experience as a child, -

* Who was around? What were they like?
* What positive memories are available?
* What negative memories are recalled?
* What did they learn that they would take into their parenting?
* What would they not take forward into their parenting?
* Is there Evidence of ACE?

Grandparents can have a valuable role in safety planning with children, however understanding their role as parents is necessary in order to ensure there is a thorough risk assessment and consideration for history and current impact. Be mindful of over Optimism, - not all Grandparents are safe.

Additional extended family members can be added to a genogram for completeness and exploration of systemic behaviours, attitudes, risks and strengths.

Absent or separated parents may have another family, this should be included on the genogram in terms of identity for the child, but also as a flag of potential risk for this or other children.

**Mapping/ Signs on a Genogram**

The table below outlines the usual shapes found in Genograms. The parent should have control over how thigs are mapped and therefore it is important that a key table is attached to the Genogram with clear definitions as to what each symbol or line represents.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| MALE | FEMALE | PREGNANCY | CONNECTION | DEATH |

Colours or different type of lines ie a zig zag, can represent a factor which is evident within the family ie –

* Death, Domestic Abuse, Physical harm, Emotional Harm, Sexual Abuse, etc.
* Relationships – strong, weak, close, distant, harmful etc
* Emotions to the person – safe, secure, distant, afraid, frightened, etc

The individual can take control of this and say how each should be represented and what it means to them. The practitioner can help to extend this by making any links of impact for the child.

**Final Tips**

When undertaking Genograms with families remember it is the process that enables reflection and informs the assessment and not the finished product. A hand written piece of work can sometimes provide clues around feelings, significance and issues to return to with the parent or child.

Genograms with children and Young people can take the same format or be represented in other styles, a family tree, timelines, people places and things. A road map etc – LETS TALK ABOUT has some resources to help with this. ( Located in All Children, Direct Work on Tri.X Document Library )

In your work with a family refer back to the genogram to check no one is missing, or if new information needs to be added and explored – use it as a tool within the intervention, making it a live and evolving document.

When gathering and evaluating the information there are a number of factors to consider which will inform your assessment -

* Strengths and risk in a family
* Intensity and duration of strength and risk
* Life Cycles and patterns of behaviour
* Family Culture and customs
* Resilience in the parent
* What needs to be different

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