

# AGES AND STAGES

## PARENTING PURPOSEFULLY

A basic principle of family life is to act within a framework of values toward each of its members. Members come together in love and support to teach each other, serve each other, and live through life's joys and sorrows.

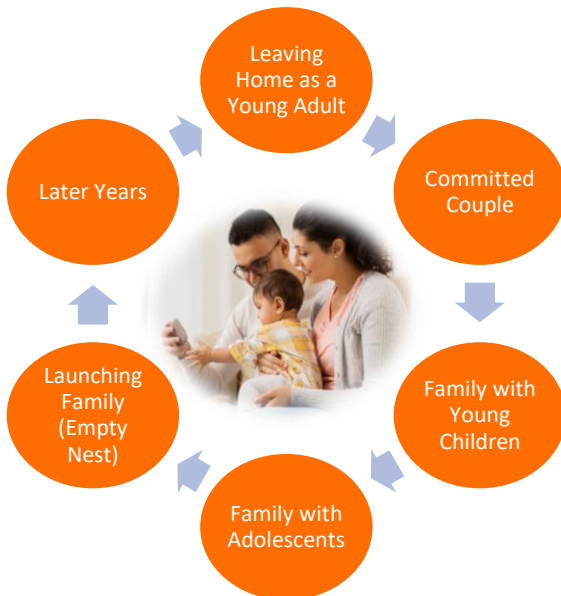
If you've ever ridden a roller coaster, you've experienced the greatest metaphor of life. It includes ups and downs, twists and turns, and times you comfortably coast the straight path. The exhilaration of the climb is matched with the fear of the fall and praying that it will all be over soon. It turns out that riding a roller coaster is great training for dealing with the highs and lows of family life.

As families move through life and adapt to change, they can face many difficult challenges that allow it and its members to grow and become stronger.



## THE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE

### What are some of the challenges we face at each stage?



**Committed Couple.** Setting boundaries with extended family, expectations around household responsibilities, leisure time, and finances.

**Family with Young Children.** Realigning household and financial responsibilities, balancing roles as parents, a couple, and individuals.

**Family with Adolescents.** Adjusting to teenagers' need for freedom and independence, establishing boundaries, managing communication between parents and between parents and teens.

**Empty Nest.** Realigning relationships with adult children and as a couple. Filling the space that children once occupied, and recommitting as a couple.

**Later Years.** Establishing boundaries as grandparents. May require assistance from adult children. Changing roles as decisions are made around career and retirement.

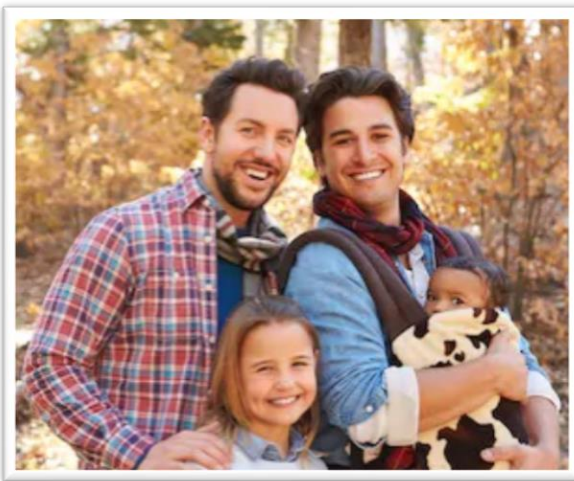
**Leaving Home.** Establishing an identity outside of the family of origin. Developing intimate relationships, work identity, and financial independence.

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Change is a difficult process. Each stage of family life has its own set of challenges, and even positive change can be stressful. What if we just accepted that life won't always run smoothly, and committed to enjoying the climb, anticipating the falls, and finding peace in the pauses? Having a solid foundation can build a family's resilience to adversity and the ability to recognize it as a catalyst for family growth. Family culture can act as a protective fence to ensure that the challenges you face encourage growth and resiliency rather than separation and fear.

## BUILDING YOUR FAMILY CULTURE



Building a family culture, a unique identity, can make the members of a family more confident in who they are and what they value, and foster a sense of safety and belonging.

- **What words would you use to describe your family?**
- **What does your family value?**
- **What vision do you have for your family in the future?**

These questions can be answered by being aware of the values, traditions, and routines that define your family. Like anything in life, you can be active or passive in the process. Creating a family culture with intention will foster an environment of love and support to carry you through the twists and turns of life, doing your best to enjoy the ride.

**Values.** Our lives are driven by our choices. Our choices are driven by our values. They are the standards by which we behave, and the internal beliefs and judgments about what is important in life. Any time we need to make a decision or assess a situation, we draw on our values to point us in the right direction. Family values are shared values. They bond parents and children, and encourage and inspire members to live their lives with a common vision. Your family's shared values will determine punishments, rewards, and make you accountable to stand strong against anything that might come against your family's identity, safety, and well-being.

**What are the core values of your family?** It may be kindness, honesty, faith, education, hard work, adventure, a political viewpoint, or quality time together. Be real and honest about what everyone feels is important for your family wellness and don't be concerned with whether others may approve or disapprove. The activity or language isn't as important as identifying what it is that gives your family its unique identity. You draw on these family values when dealing with difficult family conflicts and circumstances in a healthy way that will respect all members.

- *If your family values honesty, how will you deal with a teenager who has been lying about their social activities?*
- *If your family values faith, how will you deal with the child who refuses to join the family for church on Sunday?*

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**Traditions.** In a fast-paced, ever-changing world, traditions keep us rooted and grounded, a constant in our life that we can depend on. There are family traditions that are passed down through generations, and new ones that are created along the way. It takes intention to build and maintain family traditions. Cherished family memories that are built on habits and traditions are the backdrop to the stability and security of a family during difficult times. They are the “ties that bind.” Consider how you feel when you think back to something that you loved as a child. Traditions can build bridges, strengthen family ties, and ultimately create a family story that is handed down through generations.

### *What are some of your family traditions?*

- Friday night movie and popcorn
- Annual trip to the cottage
- Family handshake
- Daddy daughter dates
- Bedtime stories
- Dessert Sunday



**Mission Statement.** Creating a family mission statement is like having a compass directing family members through decision-making and conflict resolution, and acting as a point of reference toward success. A family mission statement is a unified expression of shared values and traditions. Once you have identified what your family values are and the traditions that foster family wellness, start a conversation that allows everyone to have a say, and incorporate active listening and positive engagement through the creative process. Create a family mission statement that expresses what your family is all about, gives members a sense of purpose, and creates a unique identity. A mission statement will act as a verbal symbol of where you want to lead your family over a lifetime.

### *What defines your family culture?*

- We approach our lives with kindness and live each day with gratitude, even when it's hard.
- The Robinsons are strong and help those when they are weak.
- Classen, Classen is our clan! If we can't do it, no one can!
- We are always honest and do the right thing, even when no one else is around to see it.
- We love each other, help each other, and believe in each other. ALWAYS.



As your family moves through various life stages, it is important to recognize that values, traditions, and missions need to be re-evaluated. Establishing a family culture provides a tool to redefine family through the transitions that are experienced. Not adjusting to change can often result in feeling stuck, not knowing how to move forward, and thinking of the past, which can lead to deep feelings of loss and mourning. While a short period of these feelings is ok, recreating your vision of family through the stages can also be exciting and offer a sense of adventure for what might lie ahead.

Sources: <https://drgracechenlmft.com/tag/family-life-cycle/>  
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