


DIAGRAMMING THE DRAMA

Diagramming the Drama clarifies the design of your “family web” and suggests a starting place for change. Study the symbols and diagrams of typical family patterns below to help you recognize the design in your own family.

- Clear, fluid boundary between two differentiated individuals or subsystems.
- Blurred boundary between individuals who are seeking oneness and fusion.
- Rigid boundary or distant contact that emotionally cuts off people.
- ===== An alliance between people who are attempting to fuse and act as one.
-  Conflict between people due to family triangles or efforts to dominate.
- Conflict projected by becoming overconcerned with or critical of a third party.

- M F c** Mother, father, and child with appropriate amounts of family influence.
- m f C** Mother, father, and child with too much or too little family influence.
- H W** Husband and wife with equal levels of influence.
- H w** Attempts to become one or fuse through domination and yielding.

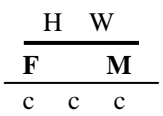
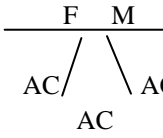
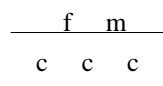
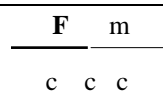
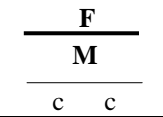
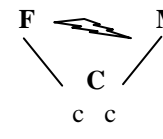


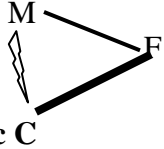
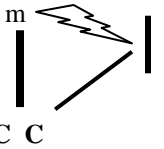
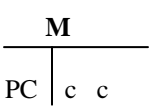
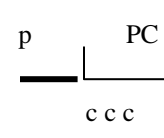
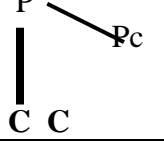
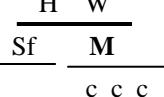
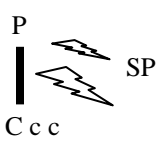
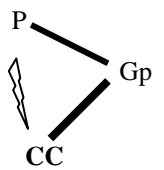
Diagram	Family Patterns: Two-Parent Families
	Healthy Family: Husband and wife have a relationship separate from their role as parents and take turns leading the family. They can express differing viewpoints and can resolve conflicts. Disagreement among family members does not occur in any set pattern.
	Healthy Family with Adult Children: Adult children are self-supporting and have interests, friends, and/or families of their own. There is toleration of differing viewpoints and lifestyles. Parents do not interfere with decisions adult children make about their own lives.
	Fusion: Family members are overinvolved with each other and pretend that individual differences do not exist. They tend to use the pronoun we (“We think . . .”) and assume they know each other’s thoughts.
	Dominant/Yielding: The dominant parent leads and the yielding parent functions as a child. Under stress, the adaptive parent may become physically or emotionally dysfunctional and appear incompetent.
	Go Between: Father is emotionally cut off from the children. Mother acts as the go-between and relays messages.
	Projection: Family problems are centered around concern or exasperation with a child rather than the husband and wife having conflicts over housekeeping, finances, sex, or child rearing. Insignificant behaviors are magnified as objects of concern or criticism. Children who have a preexisting condition (diabetes, hyperactivity, etc.) are often targets for this role.
	Alliances: A child or the children are in an alliance with one parent against the other. Having a buddy relieves stress for one parent. Emotionally cutting off from the family and becoming absorbed in outside interests eases the stress of the other.

Diagram	Family Patterns: After a Divorce or Death
	<p>Healthy Divorce: Adults continue to discuss child-related issues even though they no longer live together. They resolve past conflicts and establish a new life for themselves. Each parent can take the lead when the children are in his or her custody and do not need to assist or interfere when children have visitation. The children maintain a clear connection to each parent.</p>
	<p>Family Ghosts: A child is in an alliance with a departed parent against the one with whom he or she is living. There is a role reversal in which the child draws power from the departed parent and belittles the custodial parent.</p>
	<p>Fusion: After a parent dies or divorces, the remaining parent continues an alliance with the children. She is in a sibling position with them and has difficulty assuming leadership. Any unresolved conflicts with the divorced/deceased spouse intensify the problem and cut off the children from him.</p>
	<p>Healthy Parental Child (PC) System: A single parent may depend on a (significantly) older child to be in charge while she is working. She immediately assumes leadership when she is home. The PC informs the parent of any difficulties that occurred in her absence and she makes independent decisions about consequences.</p>
	<p>Disengaged Parent: The PC senses that the parent is not leading and takes over. Or the parent is so preoccupied that the PC performs essential parental tasks. The parent becomes emotionally cut off from the younger children as the PC assumes more responsibility.</p>
	<p>Triangulation: The above system is very unstable and can develop alliances. The younger children may become further cut off from the parent as the alliance strengthens between the parent and the PC. Or the parent may ally with the younger children against the PC and continually set the PC up for conflicts with the younger children.</p>
	<p>Healthy Stepfamily: In families with older children, the birth parent is a strong family leader so the stepparent can take time to bond. Once he is well integrated into the family, he can take turns leading, especially when the birth parent is not available.</p>
	<p>Triangulation: If the natural parent is weak and the stepparent takes over the lead, conflict with the children is likely. The natural parent will either ally with her new spouse and emotionally cut off from the children, or she will ally with the children and fuel resentment toward the stepparent.</p>
	<p>Three-Generation Families: A health three-generation family functions much like a healthy stepfamily. When the parent has never established her independence, the grandparent may take over, creating a triangle like the one above, or the grandparent may ally with the children, snowballing both emotional cutoff from their mother and parent-child conflicts.</p>

Draw diagrams that represent how your family operated when you were growing up and how your immediate or extended family functions now. Be aware that patterns in extended families with adult children can be very complex, with many triangles. Make your diagram meaningful to you. Technical accuracy is not important.