

College Guild
PO Box 6448 Brunswick, Maine 04011

Families

Unit 1 of 5: TV Families

Welcome to College Guild's Families Course.

Overview: We'll be talking about being parents, having parents, about step-families, extended families, and many other aspects of what it means to be part of a family. Some of the questions may ask you to put yourself in the place of another gender (for example, asking you how a mother or father would feel in a certain situation). Please answer these questions regardless of your gender - just try to put yourself in their shoes!

* If there are any questions about family, friends, or anything else that you feel uncomfortable answering - just make up fictional characters for these questions *

Guidelines for all College Guild courses:

1. **Answer all the questions that are in bold print, using black or blue ink or dark pencil if possible.** After we receive and review your completed Unit, we will send you feedback from your reader along with your original work and the next Unit. You don't need to return the questions – it saves us both postage.
2. There is no **specific deadline** to complete any Unit, but we would get concerned if we hadn't heard back from you after two months.
3. Remember how often the mail service loses things. **If you don't hear back from us after a month, please write to make sure we received your Unit** and sent out the next one.

Let us know if you need a dictionary, free to students who complete the first unit.

As some of you may know, there is not a handy rulebook for parents to use to help them raise their children. How nice would that be! Instead, each parent uses their own guidelines and treats their child in different ways. We often cannot choose our family members, although sometimes we find 'father-figures' or 'mother-figures' or friends that are like 'sisters' and 'brothers' who become part of our family in the broader definition.

1. **How would you define “family”?**
2. **Explain five ways that children change their parents' lives.**
3. **What do you think are the three most important parts of being a parent and why?**
4. **Are brothers and sisters responsible to love and stay in touch with each other throughout their lives? Explain?**

Friends can often be described as "chosen family". With them, we have the power to choose whom we want to be close to and share our lives with. Friends also often provide an outlet when your family becomes overwhelming or is not there for you.

5. Give three scenarios when a friend acted like a family member to you (remember: if you don't want to talk about your own life, just make these scenarios up!).

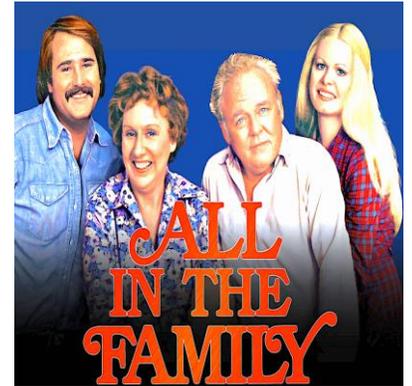
6. Pretend a teenager goes to a friend and says s/he is planning to leave his/her family. Write a fictional scene (including dialogue) between these two characters.

Television Shows

Now we're going to look at families in TV shows in three different eras: the 1970s (*All in the Family*), 1990s (*ER*), and 2010s (*Modern Family*).

All in the Family

Carroll O'Connor played Archie Bunker in a '70s show that changed TV fathers forever. Archie loves his daughter Gloria (married to a man Archie refers to as "Meathead"), but he shouts a lot, calls his wife a ding-bat, overeats, watches too much TV, and is a bigot. The family lives in a row house in a neighborhood where the common entertainment for men is having a few beers with the guys at the local bar. His wife Edith runs around the house, taking care of everyone's needs, always in a good-natured way. She can get ticked off with Archie's mouth and life-style, but she still manages to help everyone. Gloria and her husband "Meathead" grew up in the 1960s, and are the antithesis of Archie, in other words liberal, anti-war, and tuned into equal rights, including those for women. In fact, Gloria is quite verbal about her opinion of Archie's conservative, prejudiced views.



7. Choose one of Archie's behaviors that you dislike, and write him a short letter on how his behavior is hurtful.

8. Name one personality trait you share with Archie, Edith, and Gloria.

9. After reading about Archie's personality, describe your ideal father.

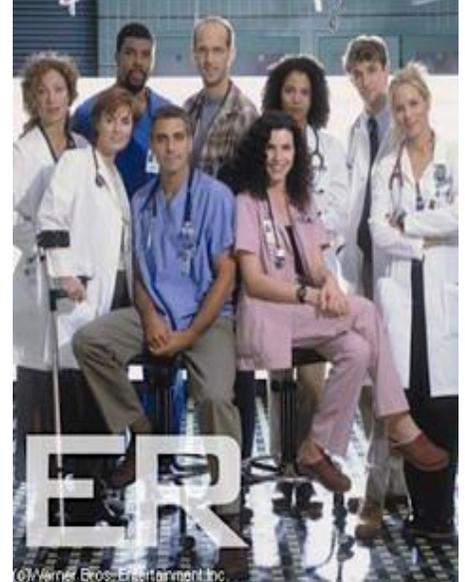
ER

By the 1990s, TV was portraying every kind of father, good and bad. The hit show *ER* has a large cast; below are the situations of three ER doctors:

Peter, an ambitious surgeon, is not married to his son's mother and is stunned when she gets pregnant and decides to have the baby. The boy is born deaf. Peter is generally gruff and impatient with people, not at all the warm type, but he becomes more and more involved with his son, gradually showing increasing love and concern. But Peter and Carla (the boy's mother) each have someone new in their lives. Then the bomb drops when Carla tells Peter he may not be the boy's biological father.

Mark is a much more personable, polite doctor who was married for a number of years, he thought successfully. He and his wife had a daughter, Rachel (now a teenager), with whom he was always close. Although his now ex-wife, Jennifer, got custody, the kid is getting out of control. Rachel decides to leave home and comes to Mark, asking to live with him and his new wife, Elizabeth, and their new baby. Mark agrees but has trouble setting limits. Rachel is snotty to her stepmother, which doesn't do much for Elizabeth who is already frazzled, trying to balance returning to work with taking care of a new baby.

Doug is the handsome, playboy type. He has a history of not staying in relationships, but keeps going back to Carol, an ER nurse. They finally decide they'll always love each other and move in together. Then he has work problems and decides to move to another state. He wants Carol to come with him, she wants him to stay, and he goes without her. She then finds out she is pregnant, but doesn't tell him until several months after the twins are born. When he finds out, he wants to be together as family, but won't come back, continuing to ask her to move.



Let's say all these characters are stressed out so each one goes to unload to a close friend. The friend says, "So, what's going on?"

10. What is the response (in one paragraph each) of four of the following: Peter, Carla, Mark, Jennifer, Rachel, Elizabeth, Doug, or Carol?

Modern Family

In 2009, this comedic show surprised some people with its unconventional families. The show follows three families, who are connected through members of the Pritchett family:

The Pritchett-Delgado family consists of Jay Pritchett and his second-wife Gloria Delgado-Pritchett. Jay owns a closet company and is the wealthiest and generally most respected among the three families. He often comes off as strong and judgmental, but has proven to have a soft-side. He is also dry and sarcastic, which makes for some hilarious situations when dealing with his overly emotional wife, Gloria, who emigrated from Colombia. Gloria is a beautiful, powerful, opinionated woman who seems to have a somewhat shady past. She doesn't work now, and Jay's daughter accuses her of being a "gold-digger". Jay and Gloria raise Manny (Gloria's son from a previous marriage), who is intelligent and mature, and they also have a baby of their own.

The Dunphy family depicts a traditional family of two parents and three kids. Claire Dunphy is Jay Pritchett's daughter. Once a wild child, she then went on to have a successful career before she gave it up when she had children. Her husband is Phil, a confident real-estate agent, who has always felt inferior to Jay. Phil plays the role of a goofy, good-natured father while Claire is an intense mother who has to keep everyone in check. Their oldest daughter, Haley, is a stereotypical teenager dealing with boys and popularity while her younger sister, Alex, excels at school and is extremely level-headed. The youngest child is Luke. He has lots of energy and is constantly creating trouble for the family.

The Tucker-Pritchett family is two homosexual men, Mitchell and Cameron. Mitchell is the son of Jay Pritchett, and he consistently feels like his father is harsh towards him. Mitchell, a successful lawyer, is practical and uptight. His personality completely contrasts with his partner Cameron's. Cameron is a flamboyant, sometimes selfish man who acts as a stay at home father for their adopted girl, Lily. She's Vietnamese and can often be quite sarcastic and theatrical for her young age.

modernfamily™



10. Make up a character for the show. Place them in one of the families and talk about their age, job/school life, personality, and whatever else comes to mind.

11. How would your character change that family?

12. Summarize the plot for a new episode of "Modern Family". What happens to each of the three families in it? (You can include your #10 character if you want.)

Story

In the book *Frontiers of Justice, Volume 3: The Crime Zone*, fourteen prisoners write about their lives and all the factors that brought them to prison. You will read work from four of the prisoners throughout the Families Course. In Unit 1, we have excerpts from Russell.

"I grew up in a home that had lost its sense of family values. My mother has been an alcoholic for over 20 years. Our family was poor, and the people around us either drank or used drugs in some form or another. There was minimal parental supervision. I was a boy with the freedom to roam as I desired."

"And I roamed a lot. It was easier than facing the pain at home, pain that instilled in me feelings of worthlessness, guilt and resentment. A child roaming the streets is susceptible to many things and I was exposed to most of them. I became addicted to drugs, quick elixirs to escape the chaotic realities surrounding me. I became victim to a multitude of physical and sexual abuses. Crime became a convenient resource, not only to support my addictions, but to gain my mother's attention. Negative attention was better than none at all. These became the patterns of my life, the things that would lead me into the lonely confines of a cell. I wasn't mature enough to understand what would come about from my actions. I didn't know there were other choices. I'm not making excuses; I'm simply pointing out the way my life evolved."

"It's difficult at times to reflect and contemplate what may have changed my own life as a boy. I grew up with two parents who concealed all their emotions, except anger. I learned that my emotions were my problem, not things to trouble everyone else with. I became a recluse, not trusting my peers or adults. All I'd ever received from either was grief."

"For my life to change as a boy, I believe it would've taken a cooperative community effort on many levels. At least one of my parents would have needed to face the harsh realities of their own dysfunction. School counselors would have needed to act as mediators between myself and peer groups to help in a slow process of bringing both sides together through calm but open communication. Most of all, I needed a long term role model to believe in and encourage me. The wounds of low self-esteem were being infected daily with new ridicule and phrases of negative opinion. This would have been a slow process, demanding patience, tolerance and encouragement through positive reinforcement. I sincerely believe that such a commitment is the only way my life would have evolved differently."

13. From the mother's point of view, what was her relationship with her son?

14. What are some ways Russell's parents could have dealt with their anger so it wasn't so prominent in their son's life? Think of any outlets you can - feel free to be creative.

Russell talks about the importance of a role model in a child's life, which he unfortunately did not have.

15. Make up a fictional role model for Russell. Write a paragraph about her/him, and how s/he helped Russell.

Towards the end of his story Russell talks about his fear for the future once he's released from prison. Of his family he says, they are "still poor; they can do little more than encourage me."

16. Do you think it is better for a released prisoner to try to resolve issues with her/his family, or is it better for her/him to start anew without the family's potentially negative influence? Explain your answer.

17. What do you think Russell's advice to his son would be?

Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes