

Stages of Family Growth Life Cycle

Cultural and ethnic backgrounds play an important role in how these stages, rewards, challenges, etc., are understood and handled. Divorce, death, remarriage or a catastrophic event may interrupt this growth cycle at any point and thus raise other rewards, challenges, spiritual tasks and needed resources.

Stage	Reward	Challenge	Spiritual Task	Ministry Resources
Single Adult Family	Autonomy Intimacy with peers Career plans New relationship with family of origin New experiences	Differentiate self/family Developing community of support Tasks of intimacy/skills Establishing start of career Loneliness	Vocation discernment Dealing with moral values as an adult Establishing an adult faith relationship with God/community	Young Adult Groups Adult Faith Enrichment Faith in Action Opportunities Vocation Education Young Adult Affirmation Mentoring Resources
Establishing Family (Courtship/ Marriage/ Forming New Family Unit)	Couple time Romance Freedom Intimacy/belonging	Realign relationships with families of origin Adjustment to living together: sex, marital chastity, money, lifestyle, friends, work, religion	Develop couple spirituality- entering the covenant relationship; domestic church Finding or forming a church Accepting/negotiating differences in faith expression	Marriage Preparation Programs 2nd Marriage/Blended Family preparation Interfaith Marriage Ministry Natural Family Planning Resources Young Marrieds Support Group Marriage Enrichment Programs Married retreats, annual renewal of marriage vows
First Child in Family	Generativity Joy in watching child develop Enriched identity as a family	Less couple time - making room for another in family system Less personal freedom New role as parent Develop new relationship to extended family, to own parents and to spouse/s parents/family Childcare	Expand to family spirituality Develop religious traditions/rituals Awareness of vocation of parenting Expand generosity of service Nurturing couple relationship	Marriage Enrichment Programs Baptismal Preparation Programs Young Marrieds Support Groups Family Prayer materials Values Education/Media Awareness Faith-based sexuality education Parish Parenting Program/ Network Christian Sexuality Materials/ Media
School-Age Family	Joy of seeing children develop, excel & form peer relationships Shared tasks in home Family bonding, shared memories Family's world expands	Pressure/pull of school & outside activities on family Challenge of being primary religious & sex educators Less time for couple Dual Career/childcare issues Individual issues of each child Adjustment when last child enters school Adults dealing with issues of addiction, mid-life, family of origin	Accept each child's strengths & limitations with grace Nurture couple relationship Teach/model values & morals Maintain healthy boundaries Incorporating faith practices Pass on faith to children through traditions, rituals, prayers, stories Family as "servant" community Making peace with family of origin	School-age Parenting Programs School-age religious education Family-centered enrichment Marriage Enrichment Programs Ministry to Marriages in Crisis Divorce Ministry Single parent support network Ministry for children with losses Family Counseling Services

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<i>Adolescence and Family</i>	Joy in watching child develop Beginning of new kind of relationship in family Increasing independence and competence in children	Challenge to parental authority (negotiating) "Middlescence" meets adolescence Less time with extended family Continued mid-life challenge in marriage relationship with extended family Needs of aging parents add more pressure Teen rebellion, sexual issues, addictions, etc.	Letting go of children while maintaining family unity, values Cooperate with larger church for adolescent faith development program (TEC, Search) New forms of family prayer and recreation	Youth Ministry Programs Marriage Enrichment Ministry to Marriages in Crisis Ministry to Teens with Losses Parenting Teens Materials Drugs, Alcohol, Sex Education Media Awareness Training Parish Parent Support Systems
<i>Letting Go Of Family</i>	Friendship with children Parents' entry into new arenas (career, volunteer) More time with spouse, friends	Re-negotiating couple relationship Caring for own parents Extra financial burdens Breaking continuity of family	Letting go, "healing the dream" Redefining spirituality of couple	Bereavement Ministry Marriage Enrichment Ministry to Struggling Marriages Support for People Caring for Aging Parents Support for Dealing with Mid-life Issues Support for Widowed, Separated & Divorced
<i>Empty Nest Family</i>	Freedom: finances & time Children settling in Grandchildren Back to "coupleness"	Loneliness Children returning home Letting go – pain of loss (evaluating self as parent) Entry of in-laws, grandchildren Unexpected parenting of grandchildren Preparing for and retirement	Emphasize personal spirituality Exploring new opportunities Wisdom, acceptance, trust Dealing with own, spouses' and parents aging Realizing relationships to include children's spouses, in-laws and grandchildren	Marriage Enrichment Support for Struggling Marriages Support for Widowed, Separated & Divorced Celebration of Aging Church Members Retirement Groups
<i>Aging Family</i>	Fulfillment in life Decrease in tasks, more free time New relationships with widows, friends Grandchildren	Loss of energy, work, identity, health, spouse, family members and friends Shifting generational roles Staying connected with younger generation	Acceptance Preparing for eternity, life review Integrates Emphasizing personal spirituality Wisdom, acceptance, trust	Bereavement Ministry Outreach to Homebound Elderly Like-to-Like Social Group for Elderly Hospice Parish Nurses Reminiscence Opportunities for Older Church Members
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