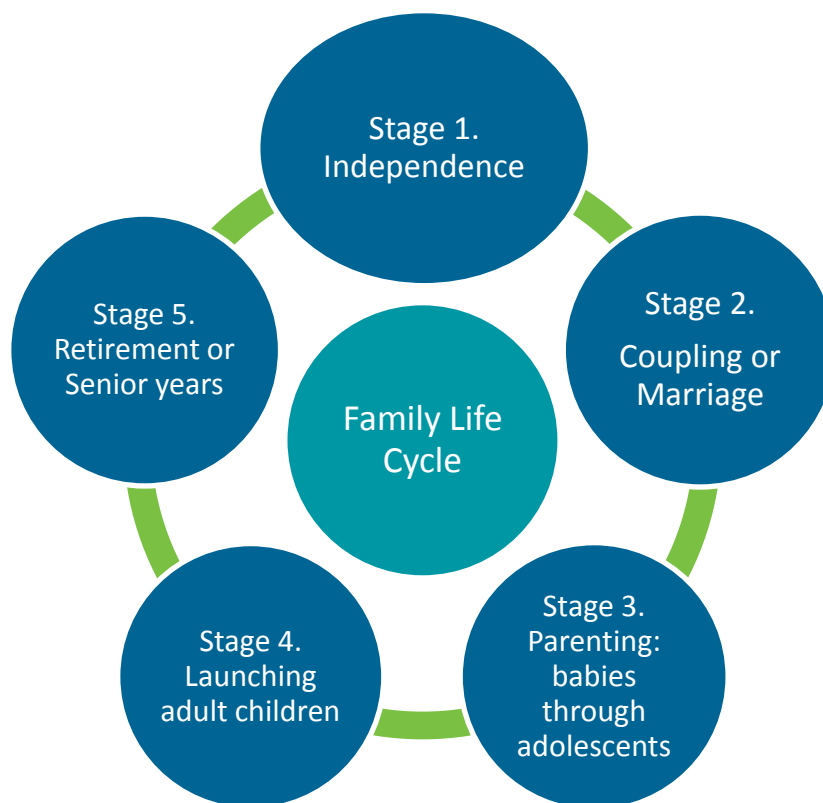


The Family Life Cycle

Over the course of a family's life, families will experience periods of change, periods of joy, periods of stress and worry, such as the arrival of their first child or following the diagnosis of an illness within the family.

Knowing and accepting that change is part of growing as a family can help families to recognise and prepare for future periods of change.

One model that is used to support families in preparing for future periods of change is the Family Life Cycle model. This model summarises the stages of change that your family is likely to pass through from dependent to independent childhood years to senior/retirement years.



The Family Life Cycle

As described in Figure 1 the stages of the Family Life Cycle are¹:

¹ Rolland, J.S. (1987) Chronic Illness and the Life Cycle: A Conceptual Framework. Family Process, 26: 203-221

1. Independence:

In this stage you strive to become fully able to support yourself emotionally, physically, socially and financially. You:

- learn to see yourself as an individual person separate from relationships with your parents, siblings and extended family members;
- establish peer relationships external to your family;
- develop your working life/career.

2. Coupling or marriage.

This stage is characterised by achieving interdependence which involves entering into a healthy relationship with another person. You:

- realign your relationships with family and friends to include your partner;
- with your partner, form a new family life together.

3. Parenting: children and young people through adolescents.

This is one of the most challenging phases of the Family Life Cycle. You:

- make the transition from being a member of a couple to taking on the parenting role;
- are challenged to provide a safe and developmentally healthy environment for your child.

4. Launching adult children.

This stage is characterised by ending in an 'empty nest' wherein children become adults and leave the family home. You:

- re-focus on non-familial relationships;
- establish adult relationships with your children;
- establish new relationships with new in-laws and grandchildren when your own children move into the parenting stage.

5. Retirement or senior years.

In this stage you will welcome new family members and see others leave as children marry or divorce and you become a grandparent. You:

- maintain your own interests as responsibilities to others lessen;
- emotionally support adult children and extended family;
- review and reflect on your own life and experiences;
- experience changes in abilities as well as financial or social status.

When reviewing the stages of the Family Life Cycle it is important to approach each new stage as an opportunity for your family to grow, to learn new skills and to build the strength of your family.

These new skills and strengths will prepare you and your family to face future periods of change and to move on to the next phase of your family's life cycle.

¹ Rolland, J.S. (1987) Chronic Illness and the Life Cycle: A Conceptual Framework. Family Process, 26: 203-221

For example, facing the challenges of child independence, developmentally prepares parents and family members for changes they will experience during the coupling or marriage stage of your family's life cycle¹.

For more information on strategies for preparing your family for future periods of change please visit the www.everymind.org.au/familyresilience

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¹ Rolland, J.S. (1987) Chronic Illness and the Life Cycle: A Conceptual Framework. Family Process, 26: 203-221