

Theme Topic

History Taking GENOGRAM (Family Tree)

Drawing a genogram collects and collates essential data and helps to engage the family. It often enables challenging or embarrassing data to be elicited more readily than through direct history taking. Reticent children often take to the relatively novel approach. We suggest drawing on a piece of paper in front of the family rather than into a file, which as well as fostering a sense of collaboration can be useful in giving them a sense of 'ownership', and can help build rapport.

A good genogram can display at a glance what would require several paragraphs of prose to communicate and should include:

1. All siblings with clear indications of their **parentage; age; stage of schooling; school** attended; any past or present **diagnoses;**
2. Stillbirths, **perinatal losses**, or other childhood deaths and preferably also miscarriages and terminations.
3. All marital/de facto **relationships** of both parents including any other issue, stepchildren, etc
4. Who lives in the current family home (draw a line around them)
5. Where parents are separated, **custodial** and **guardianship** arrangements
6. Family medical & psychiatric history.

Without a genogram, clues about important family or medical factors may be missed. Whilst an uncomplicated genogram is no guarantee of good health, significant disruption to the genogram is always a guide to the importance of family factors in presentation. A brief glance at a genogram will generate several useful hypotheses. Certain mistakes are safely avoided if a genogram is present (for example, seeking consent from the wrong parent).