Families come in different forms

01 / FAMILY TYPES AND DIVERSITY



Connect the ideas as you revise

Family or household?

Family: people linked by relationships such as parenthood, partnership, birth or adoption. Families do not all live together.

Household: one person, or people who share a home. Housemates may form a household without being a family.

Kinship: connections between relatives. These can involve care, support and a sense of belonging.

Family forms

Nuclear: a couple and their dependent children. **Extended:** includes other relatives, such as grandparents.

Lone-parent: one parent and their dependent children. It may follow separation, bereavement or a choice to parent alone.

Reconstituted / stepfamily: partners form a family that includes children from an earlier relationship.

Same-sex family: a family with a same-sex couple, with or without children. **Beanpole:** several generations with few people in each generation.

Other living arrangements

Living alone: a one-person household. **Living apart together:** partners have separate homes.

Commune: people share resources and some tasks, such as childcare. Some kibbutzim in Israel have used communal ways of living.

British Families in Transition

Rapoport and Rapoport (1982) | AQA

The Rapoports identified five kinds of family diversity. Diversity means differences in family forms and experiences.

Use it: Explain why one family type cannot describe everyone.

Think about: Their work came before later changes, including same-sex marriage.

Five kinds of diversity

Organisational: differences in family structure and who does which tasks.

Cultural: differences in beliefs, values and traditions.

Class: differences in money, housing and opportunities.

Life course: changes as a person grows older, becomes a parent or experiences separation.

Cohort: differences between generations born in different periods.

Families around the world

Family life varies between and within societies. Kinship, marriage customs, household size and care arrangements can differ.

Monogamy: one spouse at a time. **Polygamy:** more than one spouse at the same time. These are patterns to study, not labels for whole cultures.

Conventional Families

Oakley (1982) | AQA

Oakley examined the powerful idea that the normal family is a married couple who choose to have children. This ideal can put pressure on people to fit one pattern.

Use it: Question whether a familiar family image represents all families.

Think about: An ideal tells us what people expect. It does not show how every family actually lives.

Vocabulary and examples

Cereal-packet family: an ideal family image used in advertising. It often shows married parents and children.

Family diversity: variety in family forms and experiences. **Life course:** the stages and changes in a person's life.

A person may live in a nuclear family, then a lone-parent family, then a stepfamily. Family forms can change over time.

A current snapshot

In the UK in **2025**, married-couple families made up **65.3%** of families. Cohabiting-couple families made up **17.6%**. These figures include couples with and without children.

Source: ONS, Families and households in the UK: 2025. Family percentages are not household percentages.

What do families do?

02 / FUNCTIONS AND SOCIOLOGICAL VIEWS

Socialisation Support Resources

Connect the ideas as you revise

Four functions

Sexual: family and marriage expectations help regulate sexual relationships.

Reproductive: having and raising the next generation.

Economic: providing food, shelter and other resources. Care and housework are also forms of work.

Educational: teaching children early norms and values. This is **primary socialisation**.

Social Structure

Murdock (1949) | Extra

Murdock compared many societies. He argued that families perform four key functions: sexual, reproductive, economic and educational.

Use it: Explain the functionalist view of family life.

Think about: Other institutions can perform some functions. His view of the nuclear family is too narrow for some family forms.

Vocabulary

Function: a role something performs. **Socialisation:** learning norms and values.

Norm: an expected way to behave. **Value:** a belief about what matters. **Social institution:** an organised part of society, such as families or education.

The Social Structure of the Family

Parsons (1959) | AQA

Parsons argued that families have two main functions: primary socialisation and the stabilisation of adult personalities.

Use it: Explain how families teach children and support adults.

Think about: His picture may overlook conflict, unequal roles and different family experiences.

Two functions explained

Primary socialisation: children first learn language, behaviour and values through family life.

Stabilisation of adult personalities: family members give emotional support that helps adults deal with stress. This is often called the **warm-bath theory**.

Support can happen in different family forms. It is not limited to a wife supporting a husband.

Who else provides support?

Schools teach knowledge and values. Health services provide treatment. The state, friends and community groups can also help.

Families may share functions with these groups rather than lose every function.

Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life

Zaretsky (1976) | AQA

Zaretsky argued that family life supports capitalism. Unpaid care helps maintain workers and raise the next generation. Families also buy goods. Private family life may seem like an escape from work, while still being shaped by the economy.

Use it: Explain the Marxist view that families benefit capitalism.

Think about: Family care may also bring real support. Feminists ask whether men benefit from women's unpaid work.

Compare the perspectives

Functionalism: families meet needs and help society remain stable.

Marxism: families help keep class inequality and capitalism going.

Feminism: families may maintain patriarchy, but relationships can also change.

New Right: favours the married, two-parent family. Critics argue that support and resources matter more than fitting one family type.

Explain, then compare

A family meal can provide care and shared values. A Marxist may ask how unpaid cooking supports workers. A feminist may ask who cooks and who benefits.

Who does what at home?

03 / CONJUGAL ROLES, WORK AND POWER







Connect the ideas as you revise

Key ideas and vocabulary

Conjugal roles: roles within a couple. **Domestic division of labour:** how housework and childcare are shared.

Joint roles: partners share tasks and activities. **Segregated roles:** partners do different tasks and often spend leisure time separately.

Breadwinner: someone who earns money for the household. It is not always a man.

Instrumental role: earning money and dealing with practical needs. **Expressive role:** providing care and emotional support. Parsons linked these to men and women; feminists challenge this division.

Dual-career family: both partners pursue careers. Sharing paid work does not prove housework is shared equally.

Work that is easy to miss

Double shift / dual burden: paid work plus unpaid housework and care.

Triple shift: paid work, domestic work and emotional work.

Emotional work: supporting feelings, managing tension and keeping relationships going. Planning appointments and remembering tasks also takes effort.

The Symmetrical Family

Young and Willmott (1973) | AQA

A large survey around London suggested a move towards a home-centred family. Partners made more similar contributions and shared more activities.

Use it: Support the view that conjugal roles have become more joint.

Think about: Symmetry means more similar contributions, not identical tasks. Small amounts of help do not prove equal workloads.

The Sociology of Housework

Oakley (1974) | Extra

Interviews explored women's experiences of housework. Housework could be repetitive, isolating and still mainly women's responsibility.

Use it: Question the claim that families are fully symmetrical.

Think about: A small, historical study gives detailed experiences, but does not describe every household today.

Family and Social Network

Bott (1957) | Extra

Close-knit networks of relatives and friends were linked to more separate conjugal roles.

Use it: Explain how people outside the couple can influence expectations.

Think about: A link between networks and roles does not prove a single cause.

Money and Marriage

Pahl (1989) | Extra

Couples used shared funds or housekeeping allowances. Control of money could affect power.

Use it: Explain why a shared account does not prove equal control.

The Second Shift

Hochschild and Machung (1989) | Extra

Research with US couples found that women often did more housework and childcare after their paid working day.

Use it: Explain the dual burden.

Think about: Do not assume all couples, countries or time periods are the same.

Love and Intimacy: The Gender Division of Emotion and Emotion Work

Duncombe and Marsden (1993) | Extra

Research explored unequal emotional work in couples. Some women felt they carried more responsibility for closeness and feelings.

Use it: Show that equal chores do not measure all relationship work.

Check equality

Compare time spent on chores, childcare, money control, major decisions and leisure. Ask who plans the work, not just who occasionally helps.

How have family relationships changed?

Change | Family life | Care

Connect the ideas as you revise

A broad historical pattern

Pre-industrial: many families worked together to produce goods or food. Wider kin could provide help. Nuclear families also existed.

Industrial: paid work moved outside many homes. Moving for jobs could separate relatives. Schools and public services took on some tasks.

Contemporary: varied family forms, more women in paid work and longer lives shape care and relationships.

These are broad patterns. History was not a simple switch from extended to nuclear families everywhere.

Family and Kinship in East London

Young and Willmott (1957) | Extra

Research in Bethnal Green found strong family networks. Moving people to new housing could break up nearby support.

Use it: Show why extended-family ties can still matter in industrial society.

Think about: One area does not represent every family.

The Symmetrical Family: change over time

Young and Willmott (1973) | AQA

They described stages from a family working together, to strong extended-family links, to a more home-centred nuclear family.

Stratified diffusion: patterns beginning among higher social groups spread to others.

Their possible next stage was the **managing-director family**: work-centred, with the wife responsible for home and children. This could make roles less equal.

Feminists question whether this predicted stage or full symmetry became widespread.

Parents, children and teenagers

Many families place more value on children's views, education and wellbeing. **Child-centred** means giving children's needs a central place.

Teenagers may want independence while adults want to protect them. Rules can be negotiated, but experiences vary.

Good parenting involves care and support. Family type alone does not tell us the quality of parenting.

Care across generations

Longer lives can increase care needs. Relatives may support older or disabled family members. Public services and paid carers also help.

Care can bring closeness, but also pressure on time, money and employment. Women often face strong expectations to provide care.

Beanpole families: several generations may be alive, with fewer siblings to share care. **Boomerang children:** young adults who return to the family home.

Marriage choices

Arranged marriage between adults: relatives help find a partner, but both people freely agree.

Forced marriage: someone cannot freely agree, or faces pressure to marry. It is different from an adult freely choosing an arranged marriage.

Do not assume everyone in a religious or ethnic group follows one marriage pattern.

Why relationships change

Paid work, housing costs, longer lives, technology, contraception, changing laws and feminism can all shape family life.

Explain a link: moving far away for work may reduce daily help from relatives. Video calls may help maintain contact.

Do families benefit everyone?

05 / CRITICISMS, INEQUALITY AND SUPPORT

Power Money Support

Connect the ideas as you revise

Key criticisms

Idealisation: presenting family life as always happy. This can hide conflict or pressure to fit an ideal.

Isolation: a small household may have little contact with wider kin. Caring can become harder without nearby support.

Loss of functions: other institutions do some family tasks. This does not mean families have no purpose.

Unequal roles: one person may do most care or have less say over money and decisions.

Marital breakdown: relationships can end.
Dysfunctional family relationships: relationships that harm wellbeing or fail to provide needed care.

Vocabulary

Patriarchy: a system where men hold more power.
Exploitation: benefiting unfairly from another person's work.

Dependency: relying on someone for support.
Inheritance: money or property passed on after someone dies.

Familiar Exploitation

Delphy and Leonard (1992) | AQA

They argued that men benefit from women's unpaid work within families. Women may still do most domestic work when they also have paid jobs. Families can help maintain patriarchy.

Use it: Explain the feminist criticism of unequal work and power.

Think about: Families vary. Compare this argument with evidence of shared roles and changing expectations.

Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life: a criticism

Zaretsky (1976) | AQA

A private family life may seem separate from the economy, but work and class pressures still shape it. Family support can make it easier to return to stressful work.

Compare the main beneficiary: Zaretsky focuses on capitalism; Delphy and Leonard focus on men.

Class inequality

Families with more money can pass on wealth and buy advantages, such as secure housing or private education. Families with fewer resources may struggle to meet the same needs.

This is an argument about unequal opportunities, not a judgement about how much parents care.

Power and abuse

Abuse can include violence, threats, humiliation or controlling money and contact with others. It can occur in different family forms.

A feminist explanation links abuse to unequal power. It does not mean all men are abusive or all women have the same experience.

Private family life can make harm harder to see. Unhappy or unsafe relationships challenge the idea that families always offer support.

Compare support and inequality

Functionalists: emphasise care, socialisation and stability.

Feminists: ask who provides care, who controls decisions and whether roles are fair.

Marxists: ask how family work and wealth support capitalism and class inequality.

The same family may offer love while still having unequal tasks or power.

Build a supported judgement

Do not decide quality from a label such as nuclear or lone-parent. Consider resources, care, conflict, power and wider support.

Use a study to support each argument. Explain a limit, compare views and answer the question directly.

Marriage, separation and divorce

06 / PATTERNS, EXPLANATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES


Marriage


Choices


Family change

Connect the ideas as you revise

Vocabulary and changing choices

Marriage: a legally recognised union. **Civil partnership:** a legally recognised partnership.

Cohabitation: partners living together without marrying. **Separation:** living apart or ending the relationship. **Divorce:** legally ending a marriage.

Remarriage: marrying again after an earlier marriage ends. **Serial monogamy:** a series of partners, one at a time.

Cohabitation, later marriage and varied partnership choices reflect changing attitudes and opportunities. They do not mean marriage has disappeared.

Divorce since 1945

Divorce rose after the war and especially after reforms around 1970. Numbers were high in the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s. More recently, they have been below those peak levels.

In England and Wales in **2025**, there were **105,002 divorces**, compared with roughly 150,000 a year in earlier high periods.

Source: ONS, Divorces and dissolutions: 2024 and 2025. Divorce does not rise every year. Court delays and legal changes can affect timing.

Why did divorce become more common?

Law: the Divorce Reform Act 1969, in force in 1971, made marital breakdown the basis for divorce in England and Wales.

Attitudes: divorce became less shameful. People may feel more able to leave an unhappy marriage.

Secularisation: declining religious influence can weaken pressure to stay married.

Women's position: paid work and greater independence can make leaving financially possible.

Expectations: people may expect more love, respect and happiness. Divorce can show high expectations of marriage, rather than a rejection of it.

The Transformation of Intimacy

Giddens (1992) | Extra theory

Giddens argued that relationships increasingly depend on the satisfaction they give both partners, rather than tradition alone. This is the **pure relationship**.

Use it: Explain why an unsatisfying relationship may end.

Think about: Money, care duties and unequal power can limit real choice.

A current law example

From 6 April 2022: no-fault divorce began in England and Wales. A spouse no longer has to prove blame or use the old separation-based facts.

This is one example of legal change. Rules differ across the UK; do not apply one country's law to every case.

Consequences for family members

Adults: may experience relief, grief, money pressures or changes in housing.

Children: may face new routines and less contact with one parent. Ending serious conflict can also improve wellbeing.

Wider kin: contact and care arrangements may change. Divorce can lead to lone-parent families, and later to stepfamilies.

Effects depend on conflict, resources and support. Divorce is not always harmful or always beneficial.

Compare views and read data

Functionalism: asks about stability and whether ending conflict can help. **Feminism:** asks about freedom from unequal relationships. **Marxism:** considers work and money pressures.

A divorce **number** counts cases. A divorce **rate** relates cases to a population. Neither gives the chance that a new marriage will end in divorce.

AQA marks prescribed thinkers. **Extra** adds evidence. Explain findings and limitations; do not just list names.