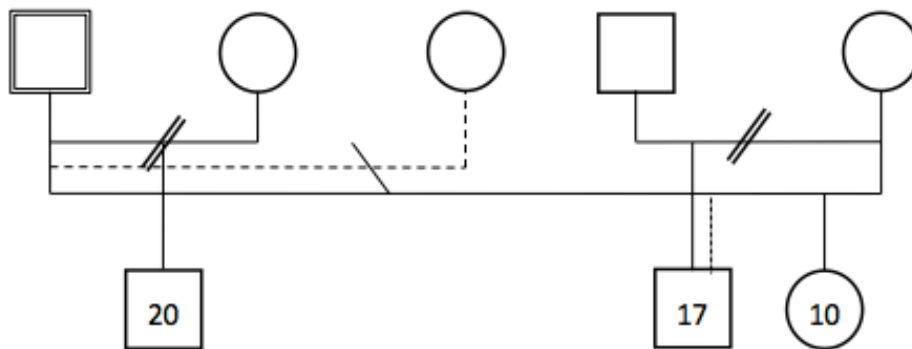


# Genogram: Diagramming Your Family History

A genogram is a graphic representation of a family tree that uses special symbols to summarize family patterns, relationships, and major events over multiple generations. In addition to recording who is related to whom, it captures important hereditary patterns and psychological factors such as strengths of relationships, substance abuse, mental illness, and history of abuse.

## Sample genogram

Here is a sample of the beginnings of a genogram that you can refer to as we walk through the basic rules of constructing a genogram. A chart of standard symbols is located on the last page.



The family story the sample above represents is of a man, who divorced his first wife, had an affair and is currently married to his second wife. His second wife also has had a previous marriage. They each brought one son from their previous marriage and had a daughter in their current marriage. The man legally adopted his wife's son from her first marriage.

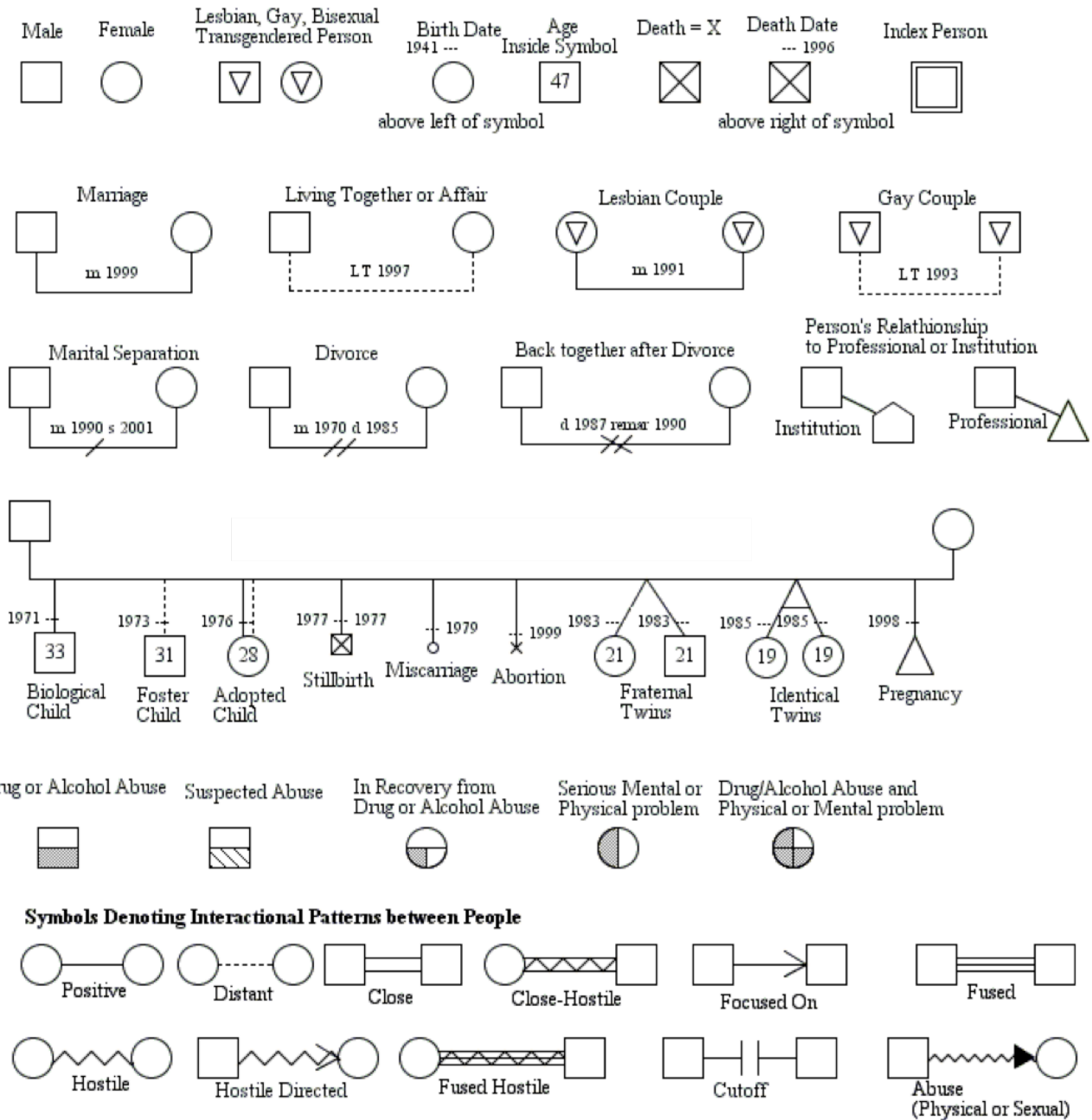
## Basic guidelines for the genogram

- The index person (the person of interest) for the genogram is marked with double lines.
- In general, you want to capture at least three generations.
- The male parent is always on the left and the female parent is always on the right of the family.
- The spouse(s)/partner(s) must be next to the index person in order of the relationship history. For example, the person's first spouse/partner should be closest to him/her, then the second partner (if any), and then the third, and so on.
- The children are placed below the family line from the oldest to the youngest, left to right, with a line drawn down from the two parents.
- Although these may sound obvious, these rules become important to remember when the situation becomes more complex.
- It is important to keep the chronological representation accurate to be able to see generational, relational patterns clearly at one glance.
- Once the members of the family are accurately mapped out, use symbols to indicate illnesses as well as family interactions such as conflict, closeness, estrangement and abuse. Sometimes using different colors for different symbols help to make patterns stand out more.
- Once finished, look for patterns. There may be hereditary patterns or generational psychological or relational tendencies that are noticeable.

## Other Information to include in constructing a genogram

- Ethnic background/immigration history
- Education, occupation or unemployment
- Personality tendencies and family roles
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Mental illness
- Medical conditions – major or chronic
- Traumatic losses (sudden deaths, miscarriages, bankruptcy, major moves)
- Significant others who lived with or were important to the family
- Trouble with the law
- Religion or religious change

## Standard symbols for genograms



For a fun sample of a genogram, check out this one of Harry Potter:  
<https://www.genopro.com/help/picture-mode>.