

Genogram Worksheet: Family Patterns Without Blame

Read the article first. This worksheet accompanies [Genograms: reducing blame and finding solutions in your family tree](#) at ThoughtsFromATherapist.com, which explains how a family tree can show that a struggle belongs to a family pattern and that someone in the family may already have found a way through. Search “genograms” on the site to find it.

A genogram is a family tree drawn across three or four generations, with names and ages beside each person. Families pass rituals, customs, behaviors and beliefs from generation to generation, often without anyone choosing them. Here we use the tree for two things: finding where a concern of ours also lives in the family, which loosens self-blame, and finding the people who already resolved something like it. This is a map, not therapy. If charting the family brings up more than we can hold, we bring it to a therapist. A few words per space is enough.

STEP ONE Draw the tree	Older generations higher, younger lower. Grandparents, parents with their siblings, then us with our siblings and cousins, and children if we have them. Simply naming everyone can raise things worth noticing.
STEP TWO The first color	With one colored pen, mark everyone who faced something like our concern in their own way. <i>Who else in my family went through what I am going through, in their own way?</i>
STEP THREE The second color	With a second color, mark the people among them who reached a resolution we find agreeable. Then we get to know one of them. <i>How did they resolve or get through it? What do I admire in them? How am I like them?</i>
STEP FOUR What the pattern protected	A pattern that repeats was usually adaptive once. Asking what it protected the family from turns blame into understanding, without removing anyone's responsibility for what happens next. <i>When this pattern started, what was it protecting the family from?</i>
STEP FIVE Translating it	We talk about how that person's solution might work for us, and what we would change so it meets our own needs. The process reduces blame, finds strengths and solutions that already exist, and creates hope, since someone in the family already found a way.

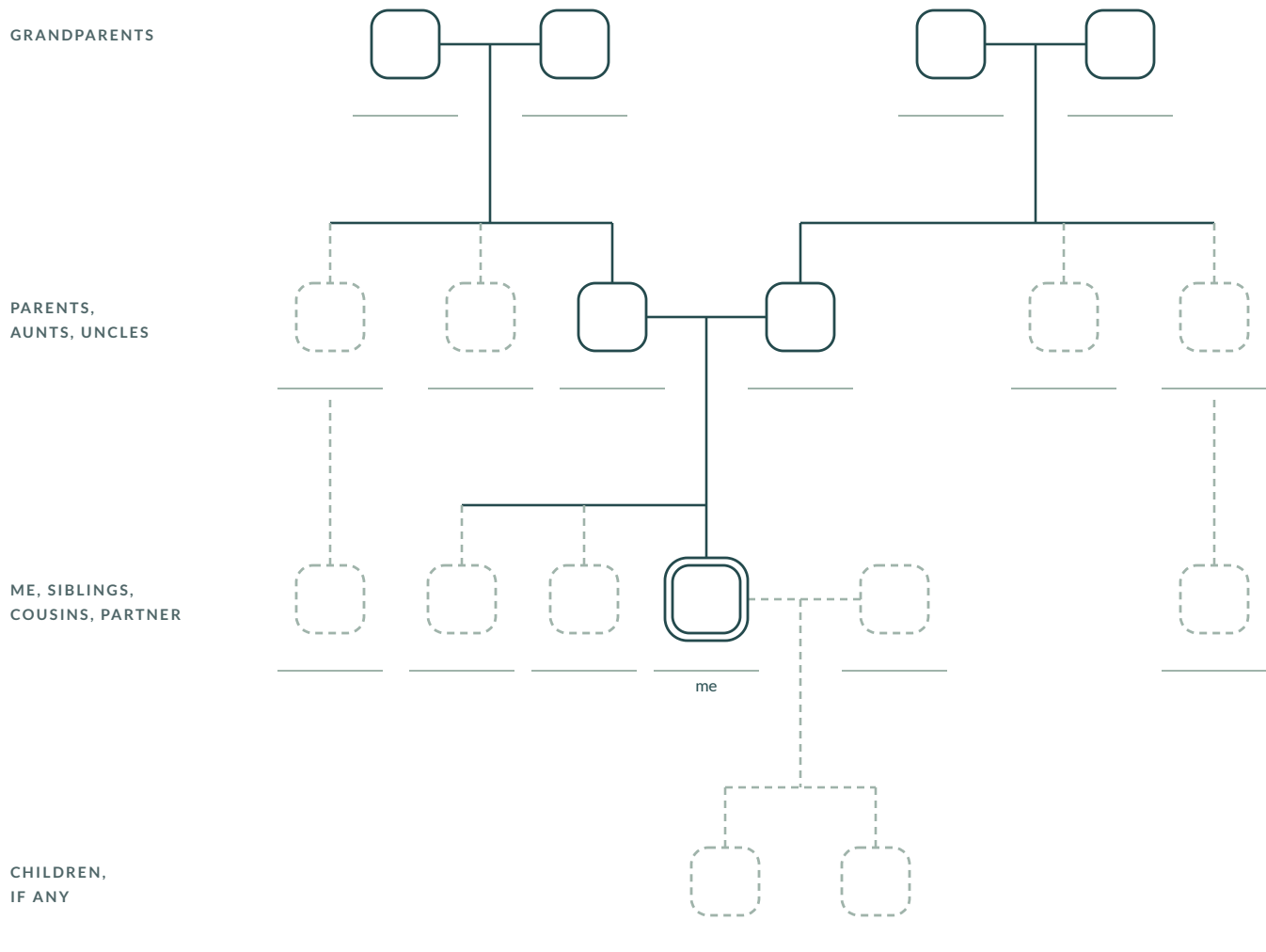
A WORKED EXAMPLE

MY CONCERN	Emotionally shutting down with my partner, and blaming myself for it.
FIRST COLOR	Men on one side of the family, back several generations.
WHERE IT STARTED	A great-grandfather held in a prisoner camp before he came home to father the next generation.
WHAT IT PROTECTED	Distance let a man survive violence and oppression, and the family organized around it.
BLAME	The only thing to blame is an abstraction: a human's natural reaction to violence and oppression.
SECOND COLOR	Who in the family found a way to stay emotionally close anyway, and how?

Sometimes simply naming everyone in the family raises something no one anticipated, like the uncle we admired who died too soon.

My family tree

Fill in the names and ages we know, add or cross out slots to fit the family, and leave blanks where we don't know. Then mark the two colors from page one.



KEY



A person. Draw over it: square, circle, or a shape that fits.



Optional. Add as many as the family has.

— Partners



Separated or divorced



Died (X inside the shape)

Name and age on the line under each person.

THE TWO COLORS

Write which color is which, so the tree still reads later.

FIRST COLOR (FACED SOMETHING LIKE MY CONCERN):

SECOND COLOR (FOUND A RESOLUTION I RESPECT):

Finding the solutions already in the family

Choose one person marked in the second color. Work through the prompts about them, in a few words each.

MY CONCERN

Name it specifically, the way we would name it to a therapist.

THE PERSON

Who I chose

Their name, their place in the tree, and what they faced.

THEIR WAY THROUGH

How they did it

How were they able to resolve or overcome this difficulty?

STRENGTHS

What I admire

What do I admire about this person? What are their strengths?

SIMILARITY

How I am like
them

In what ways am I similar to this person?

TRANSLATION

Fitting it to my
life

How might their solution work for me, and what would I change so it meets my specific needs?

What the pattern was protecting

Looking for the adaptive reason a pattern began. This is not about transferring blame to an earlier generation.

WHERE IT LIVES

The pattern

Where does the pattern show up across the tree, and where did it seem to start?

POSSIBLE ROOTS

Where it may come from

Check what may apply. More than one often does.

- ☐ A biological thread: several people with similar symptoms
- ☐ A family ritual or custom that started long ago
- ☐ A natural reaction to violence, loss, or oppression
- ☐ A family rule about emotion, money, work, or closeness

ADAPTATION

What it protected

When this pattern started, what was it protecting the family from? How was it intelligent under those conditions?

NOW

What it costs now

An adaptation that fit the old conditions can be expensive under current ones. What does it cost me, or the people I love, today?

CARRYING FORWARD

Understanding where something came from does not remove our responsibility for what we do with it next.

WHAT I WANT TO CARRY FORWARD FROM THIS FAMILY:

WHAT I WANT TO SET DOWN, AND WHAT COULD REPLACE IT:

"We are what we eat and we are our family."