Families in all the diverse patterns and sizes are the heart and soul of human society. From the beginning of humanity, people have grouped themselves into families to find emotional, physical and social support. Families are the basic foundational structure for individual growth and development. Families are the place where we learn how to survive and thrive in our world.
There are a wide range of family structures. We are going to take a look at eight of the more common structures or types of families. These types of families are: nuclear, single parent, blended, extended, adoptive, childless, legal guardians and foster families.
A nuclear family consists of a mother, father, and their biological children. For the parents, having another adult around can be beneficial in many ways. For the children in a nuclear family, having both parents in the household can result in more support and being able to spend more time with their parents.
A single parent family is one in which children are being raised by one parent. Being a single parent can be very rewarding and challenging. One parent must juggle the responsibilities such as providing the income and taking care of all the household tasks.
Blended families consist of a husband, wife and children from previous marriages. Adjustments need to be made by both adults and children. With an extra effort, blended families can work with a lot of patience and understanding.
An extended family is a household that is made up of parents, children and other relatives, all living together. There are advantages and disadvantages of having other family members in your household. Let’s take a minute to brainstorm some advantages and disadvantages. The bottom line is, you will have to work together to help an extended family be a successful situation.
Adoptive families are comprised of parents and their adopted children. The adopted child usually takes the family’s last name and is legally protected as a birth child. Each year, approximately 120,000 children are adopted.
Some couples choose not to have children. These are called childless families. Their reasons for choosing not to have children are a personal choice. They may want to focus on careers and feel like they do not have the time it would take to devote to a child. Money could be another factor in deciding not to have children. They may look to other interests, family members and community events to fulfill their lives.
Legal Guardians

- A legal guardian is appointed by a court to provide care, have custody, and control of a minor. A guardian must provide the child with education, food, medical and dental care, and shelter.

A legal guardian has the financial and legal responsibilities for the child. A court may appoint a guardian when the child’s parents are neglecting, refusing, or unable to carry out parental duties, and when it is not in the child’s best interests for a petition to terminate parental rights to be filed.

For custody to be granted to someone other than a biological parent(s), the parent(s) must be unfit or unable to carry out parental duties or there must be compelling reasons (including abandonment or persistent neglect) for awarding custody to a third party.
Foster Families

- A foster family takes care of children on a temporary basis.

Children may be placed in a foster home waiting for an adoption to take place. If there is turmoil in the family, children may be placed in a foster home until the problems are solved. Foster parents are required to be screened by social workers and are often trained. They receive a small amount of money from the state to help pay for the child’s expenses. Foster parents must be licensed through the state. Being a foster parent can be rewarding but also be challenging. 6.3 children per 1,000 live in out-of-home foster care.
How are the two families similar and/or different? What types of roles does each family have?
The clip is from the television show Fresh Prince of Bel Air. Discuss what type of family structure this show exemplifies.
Functions of Individuals Within the Family

- Four essential roles to a happy, productive family
  - Providing resources
  - Be nurturing and supportive
  - Teaching life skills
  - Management of the family’s day to day responsibilities

Everyone in a family has an important role to fulfill.

What resources are provided in the family? Who provides these resources? What happens to the family when these resources are no longer provided?

What is nurturing? Why is nurturing so important to a happy, productive family life? How can family members be supportive of each other?

Emotional, physical, social and intellectual developments are included in life skills. How can the family structure help with the four types of developments? Ask students for examples.

The management of the family’s day to day responsibilities involves many roles, including leadership, decision making, handling family finances, and maintaining appropriate roles with respect to extended family, friends and neighbors. What other responsibilities of this role can be included? (Examples: maintaining discipline and enforcing behavioral standards.)

What is your function within your family structure?
Every culture has its own unique function within the family structure.

Basic or universal functions include those functions that are essential and common in all cultures and societies. They can be further classified into two types:

1. Biological functions - intimate relationships, having children and the nurture of children.

2. Psychological functions - feeling secure within the family unit (psychological security). Why is this important to the family structure?

Affection is another psychological function. How do we show affection to our family members? What happens if these two psychological functions are withheld from an infant? Child? Teenager?

Enculturation - is when one generation passes along what it has learned to the next generation. What enculturation has been passed on to you? Why is this so important to families?

How can we learn more about different cultures in our community?
Culture can include:

• how people live
• role expectations
• child rearing practices
• attitudes about time or money
• definitions of achievement
• conceptions of beauty, art, music, food, and a host of other things.

What are some examples how people differ in the above culture categories?

Nonetheless, culture is only one element of who a person is and how it influences their family dynamics.
Predict the effects of societal, demographic, and economic trends on individuals and the family now and in the future? What will future families look like? Where will they live? Where will they work? How will families affect the job market? Will technology and the digital age affect the economic trends on individuals and the family? How? What about the social media? Will it have an effect on the individual and the family? How?
Questions?
References and Resources

Textbooks:

Websites:
- Family Matters: Family Structure and Child Outcomes
- Family Matters: An Alabama Policy Institute Study on Family Structure and Child Outcomes
- Family Ties
  - What is a family? What are the family types? Canadian Census of Families (may be used for information, but statistics are not applicable)
- Family Research Council: Behavior Problems and Family Structure
- Teaching Tolerance
  - A place for educators to find thought-provoking news, conversation and support for those who care about diversity, equal opportunity, and respect for differences in schools
  - http://www.tolerance.org/
- United States Census Bureau
  - America's families and living arrangements
  - American Family Structure

http://www.edu.pe.ca/southernkings/familytypes.htm
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_family_structure

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