

KEY TOOL #5

FAMILY DIVERSITY AND CONTEXTS



Policies and programs affect different aspects of family functioning for different types of families in different ways. This tool helps answer the question: What do we mean by the diversity of families? The schematic below lists the variety of family types, family contexts, and stages of the family life cycle. The list is meant to stimulate thought about the diversity of family forms and functions, but is not intended to be exhaustive.

FAMILY TYPES	FAMILY LIFE CYCLE STAGE*	FAMILY CONTEXTS
<p>Socioeconomic Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Education level ▶ Income level ▶ Occupation <p>Structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Couple with and without dependent children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • married • cohabiting • first marriage • remarriage/reconstituted family • domestic partnership ▶ Single-parent household <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • never married • separated • divorced • widowed • single-by-choice ▶ Foster family ▶ Adoptive family ▶ “Estranged” family ▶ Nuclear/extended/multigenerational household ▶ None/one/two/multiple wage earners ▶ “Living apart together” families—couples who are in cohabitation or marriage-like relationships who define themselves as couples, but who live in separate households (Cherlin, 2010, p. 410) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Dating ▶ Hooking up ▶ Cohabitation ▶ No children ▶ Early formation—infants and preschoolers ▶ With school-age children ▶ With children in transition to adulthood ▶ With no dependent children ▶ With elderly dependents ▶ Elderly with adult children/grandchildren ▶ “Sandwich” generation—midlife adults with both young and old dependents ▶ Families with a dependent with developmental disabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Ethnic/racial/cultural ▶ Religious ▶ Socioeconomic ▶ Geographic (rural/suburban/urban) ▶ Presence of special needs (e.g., cognitive, emotional, physical, etc.) ▶ Informal social networks (extended family, friends, neighbors, peers)

*Families can be at more than one stage at a time.