

SOCIAL WORK PROCESSES

Rules for Building Genograms

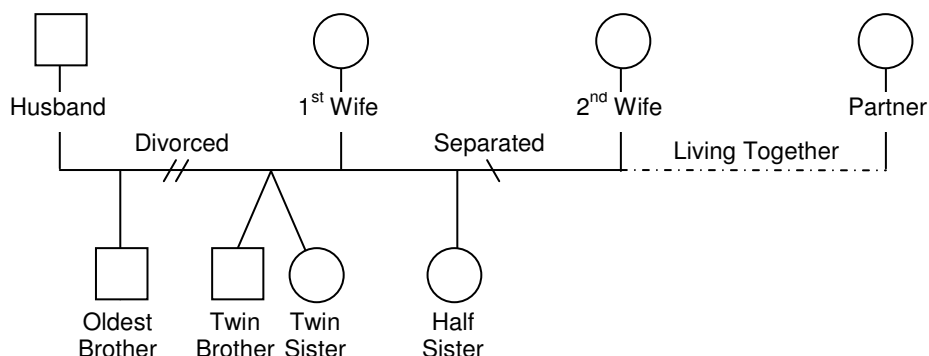
If you understand the following rules, you will be able create the most complex Genogram without any problem... and others will be able to understand your work.

Basic Genogram Symbols

- The male is noted by a square and the female by a circle. A family is shown by a horizontal line connecting the two.
- The children are placed below the family line from the oldest to the youngest, left to right. Although this may sound obvious, it will be very important to remember these rules when the situation becomes a bit more complex.

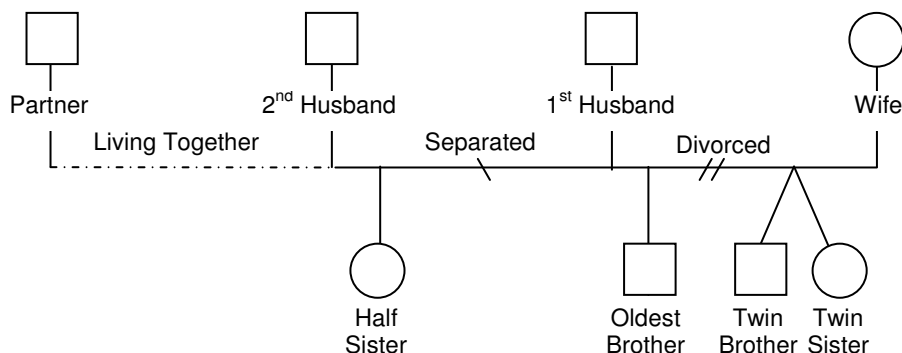
Example:

The following case is a husband with three spouses. The husband had three children with the first wife, then divorced. The husband married the second wife, had one child and separated. The husband currently lives with another woman. As you can see, the oldest child is at the left, and the youngest child, "Half Sister", is at the right of her family, as she is the only child of the husband and the second wife.



A Husband with Multiple Wives

Reversing the scenario where the wife had multiple husbands, we get the following Genogram:



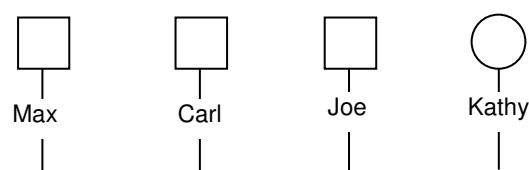
A Wife with multiple husbands

The second scenario is the same as the first one, except the female spouse had three husbands. She had three children with her first husband and divorced. The wife married another man, had one child with him and now lives with someone else. Please notice the oldest child is always at the left most position of the family of his biological parents. In this scenario, the "Oldest Brother" is older than the twins and the half sister, however the half-sister must be placed under the family of her biological parents. Since the second marriage is after the first marriage, it follows that the half sister is younger than the children from the first marriage. The half sister therefore appears to the left, although she is not the oldest child. If you are confused, please read this paragraph again.

In summary, here are the four rules to build a Genogram:

1. The male parent is always at the left of the family and the female parent is always at the right of the family.
2. In the case of ambiguity, assume a male-female relationship, rather than male-male or female-female relationship.
3. A spouse must always be closer to his/her first partner, then the second partner (if any), third partner, and so on...
4. The oldest child is always at the left his family, the youngest child is always at the right his family.

By ignoring rule #2, we could interpret the scenario of a wife with multiple husbands as a man who had two male partners and one female partner.

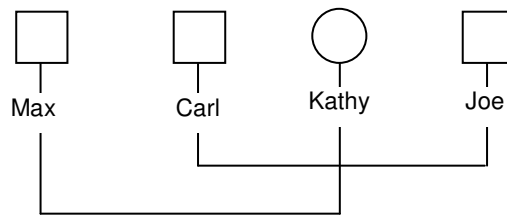


Possible ambiguity if rule #2 is ignored

The figure above has the same arrangement as a wife with multiple husbands, except the children have been removed and the families are all coloured black. As you can see, it could be possible Max and Carl were together, then Max lived with Joe and finally Max lived with Kathy. By following rule #2, the Joe-Kathy relationship has precedence over the Max-Carl relationship. It follows Carl is Kathy's second husband, and Max the third husband.

Incorrect Genogram Layout

The following figure represents an incorrect Genogram layout for Kathy with three husbands.



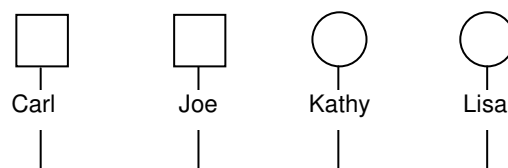
**Incorrect genogram layout for
Kathy having three husbands**

The idea here is to show Kathy had three husbands, however there is a problem with the figure above: which husband is first, second and third? The problem is that rule #3 has not been followed.

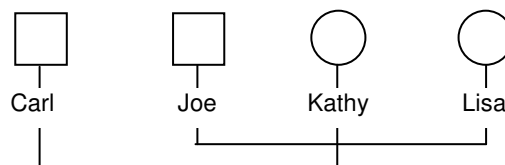
By looking carefully at this Genogram, we get a completely different outcome.

1. Joe and Kathy have never been together because it breaks rule #1.
2. Carl was Kathy's first husband (rule #1 and rule #3).
3. Carl left Kathy and decided to live with Joe (rule #3).
4. Max was Kathy's second husband (rule #1 and rule #3).

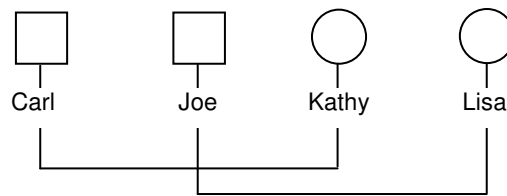
Possible Genogram Ambiguity



Possible ambiguity rule #2



No possible ambiguity (Solution 1)

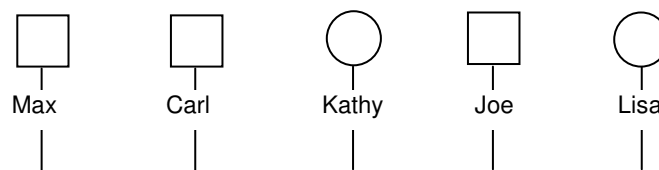


No possible ambiguity (Solution 2)

In this figure, we have two males and two females. At first, it would appear this layout is ambiguous, however applying rule #2 (male-female relationship), we can observe Joe and Kathy are together. Since Joe and Kathy are together, it follows Carl is Kathy's second husband since Carl is further away from Kathy. Similarly, Lisa is Joe's second wife. The best solution however is to place the individuals in a different layout so there is no possible ambiguity for the inexperienced reader.

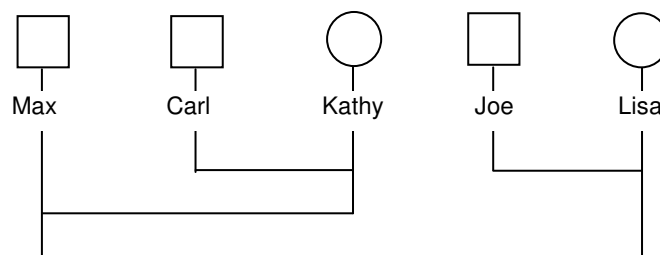
Resolving Genogram Ambiguity

Let's add one more partner to the Genogram. In this situation, it is impossible to determine the family relationships.

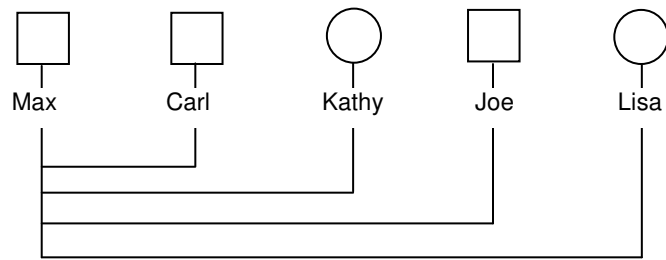


Genogram Ambiguity: Too Many Partners

At first glance, this sample Genogram could be the life of Max, having Carl as his first partner, then Kathy, then Joe and then Lisa. Let's analyze this sample Genogram a bit more deeper. Rule #1 tells us that Kathy and Joe cannot be together. By applying rule #2 (male-female relationship), we notice two couples: Carl & Kathy and Joe & Lisa. There are two problems: Who is Max's partner and the line between Kathy and Joe represent what family. This genogram is confusing and it is impossible to determine the family relationships. The best thing is to re-arrange the layout so there is no more ambiguity.



Possible Ambiguity (Scenario 1)



Resolving Ambiguity (Scenario 2)

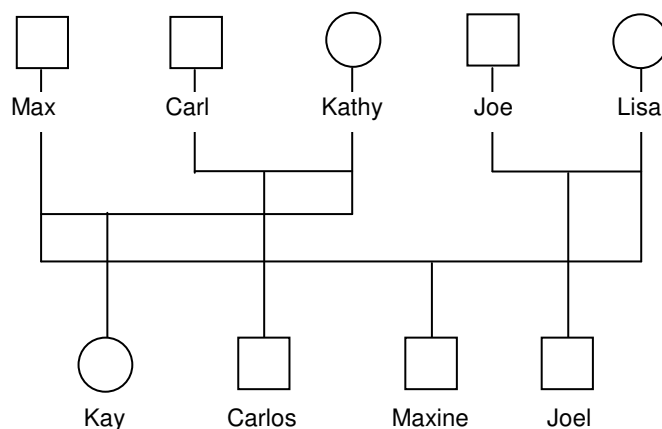
The first scenario is the story of Carl & Kathy and Joe & Lisa (rule #1 and rule #2). Both couples separated, Kathy had Max as her second husband and Lisa had Max as her second husband (rule #3). Max's first wife was Kathy and his second wife was Lisa (rule #3).

The second scenario is the story of Max.

Nothing more to say here.

Complex Genograms

So far, we have ignored rule #4 (the children). What if each couple had children? Let's have the Genogram of scenario #1 with a few children.



Genogram of Scenario #1 with Children

In this scenario, each couple has one child. For clarity, each child link has been coloured in green. If more children are present, a split of the family object must be performed as displayed below:

Adapted from: “Rules to Build Genograms” (Available Online)

www.genopro.com/genogram/rules/#the%20four%20rules%20to%20build%20a%20genogram

Accessed on: 20th January 2007