

You may be wondering ...

How do I respond to students who are unsure about who to include in their Family Map?

### For children, growing diversity in family living arrangements

% of children living with ...

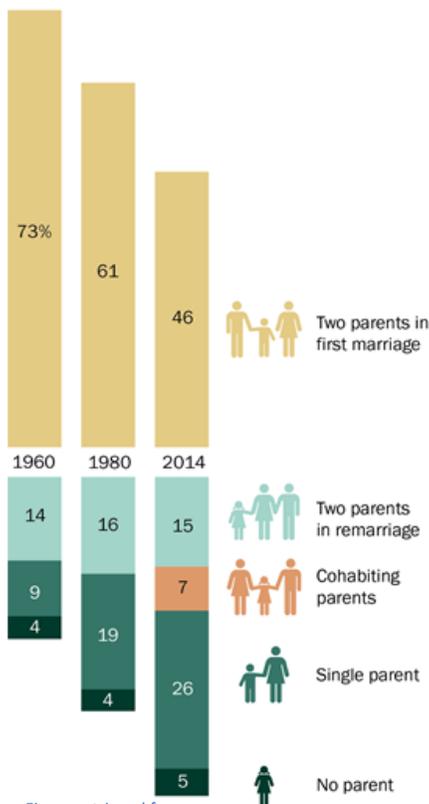


Figure retrieved from [https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/17/parenting-in-america/st\\_2015-12-17\\_parenting-11/](https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/17/parenting-in-america/st_2015-12-17_parenting-11/)

**Identity Project Curriculum** During Session 5 of the Identity Project, students are asked to create their Family Map. **This may bring up questions from students about which family members to include, such as stepparents, members of adoptive family, or estranged family members.** These questions are important to address. Adolescents are particularly sensitive to not appearing “normal,” so it is important to emphasize to students that there is no “right” or “wrong” family structure. All family constellations and feelings towards one’s family are valid.

**Diverse Family Structures** Family structures in the U.S. have drastically changed in the last few decades<sup>1</sup>. For example, two-parent households are less common and one in four children live in a single parent household<sup>1</sup>. Other family structures include changing living arrangements (if parents are divorced), same-sex parents, foster families, and adoptive families<sup>2</sup>.

**Family Map ≠ Family Tree** The Family Map is not a family tree where youth are being asked to identify genetic heritage. For some students, their Family Map will involve people who are biologically related to them, for other students there may be no family members who are biologically related, and for other students there may be a combination – any and all of these are representative of families’ experiences.

**Purpose of the Family Map** The Family Mapping activity aims to provide an opportunity for students to think about who they identify as their family, consider how those individuals identify with respect to their ethnic-racial identity, and consider how those individuals have an influence on their self-concept. It is designed to help students understand that people who they consider family have different degrees of influence on them and how they personally identify with respect to ethnic-racial identity. Creating a Family Map helps students recognize that the way people identify with respect to ethnic-racial background varies and there is not a ‘correct’ or uniform way that this happens. Students also have the chance to learn more about their peers’ backgrounds and the diversity that exists across families.

### IN THE CLASSROOM

**Before completing the family mapping activity, ask students to consider:**

Who are the people that you consider part of your family? Who plays a big role in your life as a mentor and acts as a parent or grandparent figure? Who are the different people that have played a role in your life – directly and indirectly? Can you see how the influence of certain people has changed over time?

**Why Family?** The family context is one of the most influential sources of information for adolescents' ethnic-racial identity development<sup>3,4</sup>. Adolescents look to parental and grandparental figures as they shape their identities and consider their values and beliefs. Family members can provide youth with information about their family's history, they can pass down stories from prior generations of their family, and they can offer insights into the history of different members of their family. When families have been created through adoption, family members can still pass on information about the family's ancestry and important values and traditions that the family practices. Family members' efforts to expose adolescents to their ethnic-racial heritage, engage in activities that are specific to the adolescents' ethnic-racial group, and provide opportunities for adolescents to learn about the traditions and history of their ethnic-racial background play a significant role in positive ethnic-racial identity among adolescents, including adolescents who are being raised in families created through adoption. The most important thing is to engage in the conversation.

**Opportunity for Further Conversation** The family mapping activity is a great opportunity for adolescents to continue (or begin) conversations with family members about their ethnic-racial identity. For youth who do not share the same ethnic-racial background with those who are raising them, this is an opportunity to discuss how the adolescent may be thinking about their own identity, how they think about their identity in relation to their family members' identities, and whether this is something that, at the current moment, they want to know more about. This activity provides an opportunity for caregivers to engage in a conversation with their adolescent about a topic that could potentially be sensitive in the family.

## Teacher Moves

In the space below, brainstorm strategies you might use to help students figure out who to include in their Family Map. What phrases can you use to help signal to students that there is no such thing as a "normal" family constellation?

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### Key Takeaways:

(1) It is important to emphasize to students that there is no "normal" family. Our adolescent students are in a developmental period when they are highly sensitive to other people's perceptions of them. As a result, doing an activity that highlights unique family constellations and experiences should be approached with care and caution, repeatedly signaling to students that there are no "normal" family compositions.

(2) Research has shown that social context plays a role in ethnic-racial identity development. Creating a Family Map helps us to better understand aspects of our social context by focusing on the people close to us and considering their influence. The family mapping exercise prompts students to consider the people – both biological and nonbiological relations – who they consider family, how those individuals identify, the degree of influence those people have in their lives, and how students themselves self-identify with respect to race and ethnicity.

### References and Articles for Further Reading:

1. Pew Research Center (2015). The American Family today. Retrieved from: <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/17/1-the-american-family-today/>
2. Population Reference Bureau (2016). Understanding the Dynamics of Family Change in the United States. Retrieved from: <https://www.prb.org/dynamics-family-change/>
3. Umaña-Taylor, A. J., Quintana, S. M., Lee, R. M., Cross Jr, W. E., Rivas-Drake, D., Schwartz, S. J., ... & Ethnic and Racial Identity in the 21st Century Study Group. (2014). Ethnic and racial identity during adolescence and into young adulthood: An integrated conceptualization. *Child development*, 85(1), 21-39.
4. Umaña-Taylor, A. J. (2016). Ethnic-racial identity: Conceptualization, development, and youth adjustment. In *Child Psychology: A Handbook of Contemporary Issues: Third Edition* (pp. 305-328). Taylor and Francis Inc.
5. Powell, Kimberly. (2019, January 28). How to Handle Adoption in the Family Tree. Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/handling-adoption-in-the-family-tree-1421622>

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**How to cite:** Umaña-Taylor, A. J. & AERID lab (2020). *You May Be Wondering...How do I respond to students who are unsure about who to include in their Family Map?*. [Fact Sheet]. <https://umana-taylorlab.gse.harvard.edu/>