



DIFFERING TYPES OF FAMILY STRUCTURES

Mention *family* and most people will think of what is known as the nuclear family.

The **nuclear family**, sometimes referred to as the traditional type of family structure, typically consists of two parents and two children.

One of the reasons most people think of this as a "normal" family is that it is the one most seen in the media and, to some extent, is a societal norm.

With that said, family structures come in many different types, and a person may identify themselves as a member of many different families.

For example, a single parent may live in a larger, extended family consisting of parents or relatives.

Single parent families which consist of a mother or a father with children are now becoming one of the largest family groupings.

According to Gingerbread, a UK-based charity which supports single parents:

- There are around 1.8 million single parents – they make up nearly a quarter of families with dependent children.
- Around one per cent of single parents are teenagers.
- Around 90 per cent of single parents are women.
- The average age of a single parent is 38 years.

- The proportion of families with children headed by single parents has remained at around 25 per cent for over a decade.
- The proportion of single parents who are fathers has stayed at around 10 per cent for over ten years.

Source:

ONS (2017) Families and households, 2017. Gingerbread analysis of Labour Force Survey (April-June 2018)

Other forms of family unit are:

Adopted families

An adoptive family contains at least one adopted child and at least one adoptive parent. Sometimes children (as well as adults) use the term “real parents” instead of “birth parents”.

Blended families

In its most basic form, a blended family is one where the parents have children from previous relationships but all the members live together as one unit. Blended families become increasingly common as divorce rates rise.

Family by Choice

In a world dominated by the internet and identity politics, the family of choice is a relatively new familial construct found in industrialised nations such as the United States of America and to some extent the United Kingdom.

The term was coined by the LGBTQ (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) community to describe a family not recognised by the legal community,

The term can be applied to any grouping of individuals who see themselves as part of a family connected by a common experience or interest. An example is the 12-step recovery community (individuals recover from alcohol or substance misuse).

The term can also be used for any collective group who identify by pursuing any common interest or connection.

This list of families is not definitive. The key thing to consider is if a client talks about their family, **do not assume they are referring to one specific group or your own view of a family construct.**