

Family structures



Activity

Provide a description of the following family structures.

Adoptive families

Adoptive family statistics:

Adoption numbers declined 50% over the past 25 years – from 668 in 1995–96 to 334 in 2019–20. However, since the low for the period of 278 adoptions in 2015–16, there has been a rise of 20%. This increase is due to a 65% increase in known child adoptions from 2015–16 to 2019–20, which can be attributed to a higher number of adoptions by known carers, such as foster parents, in New South Wales.

Source: AIHW Adoptions Australia 2019–20.

Blended families

Childless families

Childless family statistics:

- In 1997, 41.2 % of Australian couples were childless (out of 4.09 million couple families). In 2007 this figure had grown to 47.1 % (out of 4.77 million couple families).
- Of the childless couples, 78 % of those aged 18–24 and 75% of those aged 25–29 expected to have children in the future.
- In 2016, couples without children consisted of 38 % of the 6.1 million families in Australia.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 2006 and 2016.

Communal families

Defacto families

Extended families



Foster families

Nuclear families

Nuclear family statistics:

- In 1997, of Australia's 4.89 million families, 43 % were a nuclear family that included children who were 15 or younger.
- By 2016, the number of households that comprise of a nuclear family has plunged to see only 37 % of couple families with dependent children.

Source: www.aifs.gov.au/facts-and-figures/population-and-households

Same sex couples

Same sex couples statistics:

In the 2016 Census, 10,484 dependent children under the age of 25 were counted as living in a 'same-sex couple' family. Children who are living in a 'same-sex couple' family constitute only 0.2 % of all children who are living in a couple family. The vast majority of the children who were living in a 'same-sex couple' family – 85 % – were living in a 'female same-sex couple' family. Children in same-sex couples may have been born into a previous opposite-sex relationship of one of the partners, or conceived with the help of reproductive technology, adopted, or fostered in a same-sex relationship.

Source: ABS Data, 2016, Same-sex couples in Australia, cat no. 2071.0, Canberra (www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0~2016~Main%20Features~Same-Sex%20Couples~85)

Sole parent families

Sole parent family statistics:

- Of the counted children in the 2011 census, 24.3 % lived with one natural or adoptive parent. This was an increase from 18.8 % in 1986.
- In the 2016 census, 15.8 % of families in Australia were one parent families.

Source: ABS – Australian Social Trends, July 2013, cat. no. 4102.0 and 2016 Census QuickStats.

Kinship

To learn more about family structures, watch the video at <https://youtu.be/hpCyyNqzIE>.
To learn more about kinship, watch the video at <https://youtu.be/mNtPcW4t1PY>.

Activity

1. Outline the potentially positive and negative aspects of adoption for birth parents, adopted parents and children.

Positive aspects	Negative aspects

2. Outline the advantages and disadvantages of a blended family structure.

Positive aspects	Negative aspects

3. Discuss the reasons for childlessness, along with the impacts of childlessness on society.

7. Discuss the positive and negative aspects of the fostering family structure.

Positive aspects	Negative aspects

8. Describe the characteristics of a nuclear family.

9. Compare and contrast different family structures.

Roles individuals adopt within families

Satisfying specific needs

Traditional family structures had clearly defined roles that most families followed in the past and still do. However, the demands of modern society and the changing structures of families has seen the roles within families challenged in order to satisfy specific needs. It is not uncommon to see men more involved in child rearing, women remaining in the workforce, women becoming the primary income earners and children remaining in the family home well into adulthood. Families are more empowered and enabled to seek solutions and roles that satisfies their particular family unit.

Building relationships

Each family has its own ways of deciding who has the power and authority within the family unit, and which rights, privileges, obligations, and roles are assigned to each family member.

In most families parents are expected to be the leaders or executives of the family – children are expected to follow the leadership of their parents. As children in the middle years grow older, they will ask for, and certainly should be allowed, more autonomy, and their opinions should be considered when decisions are made; however, parents are the final authorities.

Of course there will always be disagreements among the generations. A child may want to go to the beach on a family holiday; the parents may want to go skiing. The child may think he has too many chores to do; the parent may think he has just the right amount. Let them speak their mind, but the ultimate decision should be the parents. They should explain why they've made the judgment they have, without becoming defensive or apologetic. The parents won't always be popular in these decisions, but the relationship will flourish and the children will love their parents.

Promoting wellbeing

One of the primary roles for individuals within a family is the promotion of wellbeing. The behaviours that parents model for their children will, to a large extent, shape and determine the values, behaviours and aspirations their children will adopt.

To learn more about roles individuals adopt within families, watch the YouTube video at <https://youtu.be/gwXKtMON-EY>.



Activity

The promotion of wellbeing addresses many issues, some of which are listed below. Discuss these roles in small groups and provide a summary of what each issue involves.

Provision of resource

Nurturance and support

Life skills development

Maintenance and management of the family system

Development of strong, loving relationships
