

Definition of Family

Our definition of family is used by many educators, researchers, and family practitioners in Canada and around the world.

FAMILY:

Any combination of two or more persons who are bound together over time by ties of mutual consent, birth, and/or adoption or placement, and who, together, assume responsibilities for various combinations of some of the following:

- Physical maintenance and care of family members
 - Addition of new members
 - Socialization of children
 - Guiding social behaviour
 - Producing, consuming, and distributing goods and services
 - Love and emotional nurturance
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This definition of family informs the scope and focus of our work.

This definition is purposely broad because it is intended to include all family types and experiences. It is a functional definition, focusing on what relationships and roles within families have in common. A guiding idea in its development was that families are important to us and to society because of what they do, not because of what they happen to look like.

Our definition includes diverse family structures such as single parents, same-gender couples, stepfamilies, married or common-law couples (with or without children), skip-generation families, and more.

The definition includes at least one relationship between an adult and another person (adult or child)—a relationship *over time*, which signifies that a commitment has been made.

To learn more about the definition of family used by the Vanier Institute, see [“What’s in a Name? Defining Family in a Diverse Society”](#) by Alan Mirabelli.

Suggested citation: The Vanier Institute of the Family. (2024). Definition of family.

<https://doi.org/10.61959/d232856f>