The Family Life Cycle
What is family life cycle theory?

- An approach to studying families.
- Dates back to the 1930s
- Family developmental theory includes two basic concepts
  - The life cycle
    - Emotional and intellectual stages from childhood to retirement as a member of a family.
  - The developmental task.
    - Growth responsibilities that arise at certain stages in the life of the family.
Family Life Cycle

- To be successful: members need to adapt to family changes to ensure family survival.
- In each stage, challenges in family life cause you to build / gain new skills.
- Not everyone passes through these stages smoothly.
Why study the family life cycle?

- Mastering the skills and milestones allows you to move from one stage of development to the next.
- If you don't master the skills: more likely to have difficulty with relationships and future transitions.
- Family life cycle theory suggests: successful transitioning may also help to prevent disease and emotional or stress-related disorders.
- Your experiences through the family life cycle will affect who you are and who you become.
What can disrupt the cycle?

- Severe illness, stress, financial problems, or death can have an effect on how well you pass through the stages.
- If you miss skills in one stage, you can learn them in later stages.
Terms to Know:

- **Family life cycle** – Set of predictable steps or patterns and developmental tasks families experience over time.
  - The family life cycle concept facilitates studying the family from beginning to end.

- **Family stage** – A time period in the life of a family that has a unique structure.

- **Transition** – The shift from one family stage to another.
Assumptions

- Age does not matter... people enter the stages at different points, i.e. having a baby at 18 versus having a baby at 23 or 41.
- Development of group of interacting individuals is more important than of the individual.
- Developmental processes are inevitable and important in understanding families.
- Growth is going to happen.
- Families and individuals change over a period of time.
Stage 1: Beginning family

- Married couple establish home but no children
- Developmental Tasks: Establishing a satisfying home and marriage relationship and preparing for childbirth
Stage 2: Childbearing Family

- From birth of 1st child until that child is 2 1/2 years old
- Developmental Task: Adjusting to increased family size and providing a positive developmental environment
Stage 3: Family with Preschoolers

- Oldest child is between 2 ½ and 6
- Developmental tasks (DT): coping with demands on energy and attention with less privacy at home
Stage 4: Family with School Children

- When oldest child is between ages of 6 and 13
- DT: Promoting educational achievement and fitting in with the community of families with school-age children
Stage 5: Family with Teenagers

- Oldest child is between ages of 13 and 20
- DT: Allowing and helping children to become more independent
Stage 6: Launching Centre

- When oldest child leaves family until the youngest leaves home
- DT: Releasing young adults and accepting new ways of relating to them; maintaining a supportive home base
Stage 7: Empty Nest

- From time children are gone till couple retires
- DT: Renewing and redefining marriage relationship; preparing for retirement years
Stage 8: Aging Family

- From retirement till death of the marriage partner
- DT: Adjusting to retirement; coping with death and living alone.
Reflection Questions:

- Is the structure of the Family Life Cycle Changing?
- If so, what is changing / impacting it?
Film: THE FAMILYSTONE