

STAGES OF FAMILY LIFE

Even stable relationships can be seriously shaken by unpredictable events. External and internal stress includes: unemployment, moving, disability, illness, death, school, drugs, problems with children, etc. Another kind of stress is predictable – times of major adjustment within a family. These transitional stages can cause major upheaval. When family transitional stages coincide with personal changes such as adolescence or menopause, the stress is compounded and you may feel your marriage is coming apart. At these times, it's normal to feel edgy, stressed, even somewhat depressed and despairing. With patience, understanding and flexibility, your marriage can grow and deepen through these crises. Sometimes you can get “stuck” at these times. If you do, counseling can often help.

The Seven Stages of the Family and the Tasks for Each

- I. Beginning: Courtship and marriage prior to children
 - a. Separating from family of origin
 - b. Negotiating relations with in-laws
 - c. Commitment to forming “us.” (duet/dyad)
 - d. Negotiating “space” – times of distance and closeness
 - e. Building intimacy

- II. Pre-School Years: From birth of first child until first enters school
 - a. Change from “dyad” to “triad” – making room for children
 - b. Preparing children – toilet training, teaching safety, tie shoes, etc.
 - c. Negotiating parenting rules and roles
 - d. Negotiating employment roles
 - e. More triads with birth of each new child
 - f. Mother may struggle with monotony, fatigue, feeling overwhelmed, trapped, unattractive.
 - g. Father may struggle with financial responsibility and feel he's been “replaced” as #1
 - h. Important to continue to make time for their relationship