Course: HUMA 50

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***Genograms***

Developed by The Center For Mind Body Medicine

1. **Genograms**

The patterns of behavior you learned growing up can have a profound impact on your physical and emotional well-being. Because so much of who you are comes from what you observed or were taught as a child, creating and examining your genogram provides you with the opportunity to identify your vulnerabilities and draw on your strengths to make new and different life choices.

Most of the techniques you’ve learned so far, like meditation and guided imagery have focused on experiencing the present moment as a way to gather information about yourself. Working with the genogram brings this meditative approach to the process of looking at your history. In working with genograms, we ask you to be aware of your present feelings and thoughts as you contemplate the web of relationships that constitute your family.

You come from somewhere and your personal identity is linked to the family. The genogram unfolds a legacy. You are able to see the forces that have shaped you. From here, you can then decide what behaviors or patterns you wish to continue and what parts of the family legacy you would like to leave behind. You may see a personal issue with new eyes or be able to clarify family patterns and messages, or connect with your family in a new way.

You can use the genogram to tell the story of your life through the lens of your family of origin and to deepen your awareness of how your story has shaped who you are today. From this vantage point, you can see both the richness of your family heritage and the limiting patterns you may no longer want to perpetuate in your life.

When you have created your genogram, we will ask you to share it in the group. Sharing your history out loud is not only freeing but it connects everyone in the group. It helps us realize we are not alone with our family histories and that we share common threads.

1. **Directions (Drawing a Genogram has two steps):**

**Step One:** Take a blank piece of paper, and fold it in thirds as if you were going to mail a letter. Opening the paper out again, you see you have created 3 sections. Using the symbols shown in the chart, put your grandparents in the top section; your parents and their siblings in the second top section; you, your siblings, spouses partners in the third section. If you have children, you can choose to use your parents, your spouses/partners parents in the top section, then build down from there.

Note that in the 2nd section (your parents’ generation) that the symbols for your mother and father are placed lower than the symbols for your aunts and uncles. This makes it easier to connect them with a marriage line.

Each line down from a partnership line represents a child, with the children arranged from left to right from the oldest to the youngest. Note the symbols for adopted children, twins, pregnancies, stillbirths, abortions, and miscarriages.

After you get the basic relational diagram of your family member on paper, you can draw a clean copy. Add anyone outside your family who was or is important to you, such as godparents, family friends, teachers, or pastors and include a symbol for them that makes sense to you. Feel free to include important pets as well. As you draw, you may realize that families can become quite complicated, with divorces, remarriages, and blended families. Add as much detailed information as you want, such as occupations, dates of births, marriages and deaths, and lines that describe the nature of relationships, from close to conflicted.

**Important Symbols:**

* **Circles represent females and squares represent males. Be sure to include a circle or square and a name or age for each person.**
* **If someone has died, put an X through the circle or square.**
* **Join partners with a line - solid for marriage, dotted for living together. Slashes indicate separation; double slashes indicate divorce. Second or third marriages can be added along the same line.**
* **The double circle or square represents you.**

**Step Two:** Now you can begin to look at your genogram to get information about yourself and your family.

* **Be sure to note a common theme of mental or physical health conditions, even if only present in a few individuals. For example, alcoholism, migraines, heart disease, cancer, etc…**

You may want to reflection write about the relationships in your family and how they have influenced your life**.** As you consider themes and patterns, you might want to ask some of these questions and look to your genogram for answers:

-What are the challenges that you face in your life and what are your strengths?

-Have other members of your family faced the same & how have they dealt with them?

-Are there patterns, connections or conflicts across the generations that have shaped who you are today?

-Depending on the kind of information that is important to you, consider using colored markers to highlight family patterns. For example, you might note who went to college, who has alcohol problems, who participates in a particular religious tradition, or who suffers from depression, etc...

-Is there someone whose strength and creativity has inspired you?

1. **Sharing the Experience**

When finished, you will briefly describe the genograms to one another in your small groups; focus on the following:

-What was it like to draw and share your genogram?

-What themes or questions did you look at in your genogram?

-What patterns do you see?

-What strengths do you see in your family?

-What strengths did you develop out of necessity or was learned?

-Is there anything that surprised you?

-Are there any forgotten people?