

Family Life Cycle

The single, unattached, young adult stage involves a person differentiating, becoming independent in various aspects from the family of origin, change in the relationship with parents, development of peer relationships, and because of these things leaving the home (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2021). In our family we were taught that at the age of 18 you were an adult and had to start carrying your weight financially as well as take responsibility for all your actions. As a child I was very attached to my mom so much I could not stand to be separated from her. Yet, as I grew up, I became too independent for my mother's liking, not realizing this was the result of her being a single parent and leaving me to care for my younger brother most of the time, because my older sister was always hanging out. My attempts at differentiation were met with anger, rejection, criticism, and corporal punishment. She took me thinking differently or questioning things, as me being a smart aleck, defiant and disrespectful. My older sister was rebellious and fought with my mother but would end up running to her for help when she got into trouble. At the age of 16 she was hooking up with her boyfriend and moved out with him when she got pregnant at 18. I had a terrible falling out with my mother and at the age of 17 (a few months before my 18th birthday) I moved out to live with a boyfriend who was 23. I ended up going back home at my mother's request after I had my kids (at age 20) to help take care of her because she got sick with HIV. I was living with her there until she passed away a couple of years later. Looking back, I can see that both my sister and I sought to leave the home as soon as possible to be free from my mom's abusive, unstable and chaotic lifestyle. My brother, who was the youngest of us three, was very close to my mother and she saw him as her confidant and friend. Unfortunately, he never technically left the home because my mother died when he was living with her at the age of 17, and he ended up having to go live with our aunt.

My mother was very possessive and controlling. We were not allowed to have our own opinions, go out on our own or do what we wanted. She made all the decisions. Therefore, developing our own personalities and identity was very difficult, even traumatic, and for this reason we did not navigate this stage well at all. The positive things that came out of this was that we adopted my mother's standards for good manners and being respectful towards adults. We were also sheltered from a lot of negative influences and taught to not submit to the culture around us and hold on to our family values. Yet, the downside to this is that me and my siblings were isolated from the world, had low self-esteem and tended to please people to gain acceptance, and didn't have an opportunity to develop our own identity. We were basically just extensions of our mom. We were enmeshed and developed into codependents. Regrettably I repeated some of these patterns with my own children, except that I was intentional in allowing them to express themselves, if they did it respectfully, especially if anyone tried to harm them, they could tell me. I also made sure my children had ample opportunities to participate in school activities and not be burdened with having to take care of their younger siblings. However, I believe that I went too far to the extreme of not giving them enough responsibility to allow them to mature appropriately.

The second stage in the family life cycle is the new couple (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2021). Our family did not navigate this stage well either. When I left home at 17 with my boyfriend, it did not last. I later became involved with my first husband who was 26 and got pregnant with my first children (twin boys) at 18. We were first living with his family that was abusive towards me and he did not earn enough money to provide for us both. I eventually applied for public assistance, got an apartment and we were living on our own, until my sons were about 1 year old, and I went back to live with my mom when she got sick. Although we were both Hispanic the

ethnic cultural differences and his alcoholism made it nearly impossible for the marriage to survive. After my mother's death in 1993 I decided to get a divorce.

I met my current husband, who is Mexican, in the summer of 1994 and got married in 2001. At first we both did as much as possible to adjust to each other's cultures but his machismo and my feminist, opposing mentalities, put a big strain on our relationship. In addition, I came from a small single parent independent matriarchal family, and he came from a large two parent collectivist patriarchal family. Therefore there were so many conflicts and differences. From how to raise our kids, handle money, making plans for the future and even intimacy, there were constant power struggles. One thing we did agree with was that the kids came first. Looking back this sounds good but not the best way to keep a relationship or family together. We were also very young; I was 22 and he was 21. I came very broken into the relationship and too soon after the death of my mother and a divorce. It would have been wise to heal from my losses and childhood traumas before initiating another relationship. My conversion to Christianity at age 30 added additional strain because of the lifestyle changes I made to conform to my faith. Due to all these issues, we separated and reconciled many times over the years. He became a Christian 3 years after I did. We have participated in couples therapy, pastoral counseling and taken relationship courses which helped with our codependent issues. This has helped us in some ways to grow over the years but unfortunately, we still have trouble seeing eye to eye because of our different personalities and spiritual maturity. In addition, there are wounds from the past that have created a wedge and prevented us from healing and moving forward. Until this is not resolved there will continue to be issues in the marriage.

Going into the stage of families with very young children, we were a blended family. My first born sons were 3 when I met my husband and were aware that he was not their father

because their dad would visit them. My twins grew up primarily in daycare because I was the main breadwinner. My second husband was undocumented and refused for years to get his residency out of pride issues (machismo) and not wanting to 'owe' me anything. Due to him being undocumented his jobs did not pay well and were unstable. Therefore, although he worked, I was the primary breadwinner until I had my third son. I stood home for a year or two and then went back to work full time to be able to pay off the debt we accumulated during that time. Six years later I had my daughter and was able to be a stay-at-home mom for a couple of years until she was able to attend daycare as well. Despite working I was still always responsible for cooking, cleaning, finances, and most of childrearing, especially disciplining. When the kids were young this was easier because they did what they were told. Although it was a lot of work for me, I was young, so I had a lot of energy, and with my upbringing it seemed normal to have to do everything myself. We navigated this stage as well as we could being that we did not have a lot of family support.

In the families with school age children stage, things began to get much more challenging. When the children were small, being a blended family did not seem like an issue. But over the years my first two children tended to feel that although my husband loved and cared for them, he was still partial to his children. Adding to this issue was that my ex-husband moved to Arizona and my twin boys suffered from separation anxiety that affected their academics. Culture was also an issue in raising the children because my husband's upbringing in machismo made him harsh and tough towards our sons, especially in regard to expressing emotions. As a result, this would cause tension in our marriage. Again, we were so busy trying to make ends meet that life seemed like just a big blur. My kids were also 6 years apart each so when my daughter was in 1st grade, my middle child was in middle school, and my twins were in high

school. This created a great strain on me because my husband worked most of the time and he did not have sick days, holidays or even weekends off. So, most of the home responsibilities with the kids were left to me. We did our best to make sure our kids were happy, or so we thought. Even though we both loved our kids and enjoyed being parents, if I could do it over again, I would invest more in quality time instead of working to provide entertainment and material things. This crazy lifestyle made me a helicopter mom and ended up perpetuating my codependent behaviors, that led to my husband complaining about me being controlling.

The families with adolescent children stage were tricky for us because we had young adolescents and older adolescents at the same time. My middle child, Ethan, was in middle school discovering himself apart from us, becoming more independent and hanging out with his friends. In this stage is where his father and I fell from the pedestal of perfect role models. My older sons were in high school exploring with peers, while thinking about going to college and seeking opportunities to be away from home. According to Capuzzi & Stauffer (2021), at this stage we would expect to take care of our parents, but we did not have to concern ourselves with this because during this stage our parents were distant or deceased. At times I wish my children had their grandparents and hoped we had the guidance of our parents, yet I think that having them around may have also created additional stressors for our family. For three years during this stage my husband and I were separated and this greatly affected our children. I believe we should have been better at paying attention to their developmental needs instead of letting ourselves be consumed by our marriage problems.

The families with children who are launching or leaving the nest stage involves separation (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2021). The twins both decided to go away for college but returned in a few years to live back at home because they could not handle the academic

challenges of college life. But in 2017 it was necessary to give our oldest children an ultimatum because they would not conform to the house rules of staying up and issues of cleanliness. They chose to leave. It broke our hearts and sadly created resentment in them towards us. For the first year they barely communicated with us. After they settled down in their new apartment and stable jobs. At some point when they needed help in certain areas of their life, they began to draw close to us again. During covid in 2020 our son Ethan was also given an ultimatum due to not obeying house rules regarding curfew and chores. He also chose to leave. He said that he was hurt and offended by our actions. He distanced himself and expressed his resentment towards us in subtle ways. Recently, when he had his daughter, we were able to talk it out and reconcile. It was difficult that my sons had to be launched from the home in that manner, but it was necessary. Later, God showed me that it was primarily due to me being an overprotective codependent parent that needed to place boundaries firmly.

Our daughter Bethany is the only child we have remaining at home. She is messy like the twins and a spirited like her brother Ethan, yet she is obedient and humble. This and that we learned so much from our previous experiences with the boys has made it easier to handle her new found independence. She is currently in college and still exploring what she wants to pursue. Bethany enjoys a lot of freedom and a little bit of responsibility as we try to keep a balance. We are not sure when she plans on leaving home, but we are neither rushing nor trying to keep her in the home. I enjoy my newfound freedom since I do not need to cook or take care of small children. I have seen that my husband and I can spend more time together even though for him it feels strange to do it without the kids. Holidays also look different now that the guys are older and choose to go to friends' homes or their girlfriend's family's house. At first it was hard and we resented them not spending special occasions with us but I time we have adjusted

and become flexible. Working on my codependent issues over the years (and explaining this phenomenon to my kids) has helped us all be able to set healthy boundaries, say no, and respect each other's personalities. In my marriage this is still a challenge, and unfortunately we are currently separated but still living together. Despite this, we enjoy being grandparents, pursuing our careers and helping our children only when they ask for it. We have come a long way from being an enmeshed family. We are not as close as we would like but are content and happy that everyone is doing well and blessed.

There are still a few years to go before I reach the families in retirement and later life stage since I am 50 (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2021). Yet it is important for me to start thinking about how I will support myself when the time comes, especially since I do not currently have any finances saved or invested. I am just starting my career when I graduate and will still have a couple of more years to go before getting licensed. Thinking of getting sick, not having enough energy, not making enough money or losing my spouse are legitimate concerns even now (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2021). Looking back I would not have cashed out my profit sharing from my first job, and invested in a 401k plan. At the same time, there are no guarantees in life. Therefore, we go forward from today with hope for a better tomorrow.