

Family Defined

Family can be “defined as a group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood, or adoption, constituting a single household and interacting with each other in their respective social positions, usually those of spouses, parents, children, and siblings. The family group should be distinguished from a household, which may include boarders and roomers sharing a common residence...

At its most basic, then, a family consists of an adult and his or her offspring. Most commonly, it consists of two married adults, usually a man and a woman (almost always from different lineages and not related by blood) along with their offspring, usually living in a private and separate dwelling. This type of unit, more specifically known as a nuclear family, is believed to be the oldest of the various types of families in existence. Sometimes the family includes not only the parents and their unmarried children living at home but also children that have married, their spouses, and their offspring, and possibly elderly dependents as well; such an arrangement is called an extended family.

At its best, the family performs various valuable functions for its members. Perhaps most important of all, it provides for emotional and psychological security, particularly through the warmth, love, and companionship that living together generates between spouses and in turn between them and their children. The family additionally provides such other socially beneficial functions as the rearing and socialization of children, along with such humanitarian activities as caring for its members when they are sick or disabled. On the economic side, the family provides food, shelter, clothing, and physical security for its members, some of whom may be too young or too old to provide for the basic necessities of life themselves. Finally, on the social side, the family may serve to promote order and stability within society as a whole.”

(Excerpts from article by Barnard, Alan John. "family". Encyclopedia Britannica, 6 May. 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/family-kinship>)