

Facilitator's Guide: Family Assessment in Community Health Nursing

The exercises and discussion questions in this Guide are meant to complement the viewing of this video program. Facilitators can select various exercises/questions to suit the particular context. Exercises can be completed individually or discussed in groups.

1. Discuss with a group of peers the notion that “building healthy families builds healthy communities, which, in turn, build health populations”.
2. From the video and the literature on family assessment, what, exactly, is assessed in a family?
3. Research the literature on family assessment within various contexts such as: a) families with a chronically ill family member; b) families dealing with acute physical or mental illness; c) families experiencing the birth of a first child; and so on. What are the similarities in the assessment and what are the differences?
4. Write down **your** definition of “family”. Research the literature for a variety of definitions of “family”. How do these definitions compare with your own definition? How might different definitions impact family nursing practice in the community?
5. How do you feel about the notion that the best definition of “family” comes from the family itself – who they define as “family”? What underlying values and assumptions inform this particular stance? Who do you, yourself, consider to be your family and why?
6. In the video, Whall's (1999) definition of family appears on the screen:
“The family is a self-identified group of two or more individuals whose association is characterized by special terms, who may or may not be related by bloodlines or law, but who function in such a way that they consider themselves to be a family.”
Discuss this definition with a group of your peers, focusing on the following phrases: Self- identified group; association characterized by special terms; function as a family. Relate these notions to your own family.
7. Identify all of the variety of family forms in our society today: nuclear family; blended family; single-parent family (male-headed and female-headed); same gender family; adoptive family; intergenerational family; and so on. What unique challenges/stereotypes might these families encounter? How does your appraisal of these unique aspects guide assessment of such families?
8. What are some unique aspects of family assessment in the community setting?
9. Interview several community health nurses and ask them how visiting families in their homes facilitates the process of assessment.

10. What are the advantages of focusing on assessing the whole family? What are some of the challenges in assessing the whole family? How might the community health nurse introduce to the family the rationale for focusing assessment on all family members?
11. Research the literature for various models of family assessment: Friedman's Family Assessment Model; the McGill Model; the Calgary Family Assessment Model; and so on. In what contexts might each model be relevant for family assessment? What are the strengths and limitations of each of the models? Which one(s) might you find useful in your practice and why? (This question can be completed as a group assignment, with a number of group members researching each model, then, in the larger group, discussing the models).
12. Do a genogram of your own family – structural relationships, medical and social history, and boundaries. What additional insights were gained about your family/family functioning through completing this activity? In what contexts might the genogram be a valuable assessment tool?
13. Do an ecomap of your family's connections with entities beyond itself – work, neighbourhood, religious organizations, extended family, volunteer groups, educational systems, health care systems, recreational groups, friends.....What additional insights were gained about your family's connection to the "outside world" through completing this activity? How might an ecomap be a valuable assessment tool?
14. Do a genogram and an ecomap on a family you know. What types of questions did you ask to get the information that you needed? Did you co-create the genogram and ecomap with the family? If not, why not? What additional insights did the family gain from this assessment? Reflect on the process. What would you change before using these assessment tools again and why? What were the positive aspects of this exercise? How can genograms and ecomaps facilitate the development of the nurse-family relationship?
15. Discuss the notion of seeing the family as an active partner in assessment. What can the nurse do to facilitate a partnership stance with the family? Why is it so crucial?
16. What are the characteristics inherent in a partnership relationship between the community health nurse and the family? In what situations might a partnership relationship be difficult to attain? How might the nurse deal with such situations?
17. Discuss the importance of focusing on family strengths in dealing with concerns and issues of family life. From the literature, and from your own nursing/personal experiences of family life, develop a list of what is included as family strengths.

18. Research the literature to identify various family functioning and family coping scales. From these scales, what characteristics and qualities of family life are associated with health functioning and healthy coping? Why is it important for the community health nurse to have knowledge of these?
19. What is family resilience? Research the literature to identify family resilience scales. How might such scales be valuable in assessing families?
20. Interview a family who has experienced an adverse life event (illness, death of a loved one, divorce...) but who you deem to have done well – even thrived – in spite of such adversity (resilience). Ask the family what factors contributed to their resilience.
21. Do **you** see families as capable and having the inherent ability within themselves to deal with life events? If so, how did you come to this position? If not, why not?
22. Interview several community health nurses, asking them to give instances where their own intuition was operant in assessing a family's situation. Ask them what subtle cues" underlay this "gut feeling" that everything was not as it appeared to be with this family.
23. Reflect on instances in which your own intuition informed your nursing practice. Research the literature on the place of intuition in clinical practice. Discuss your findings with a group of peers.
24. Interview several community health nurses about the critical role of observation in family assessment. How does observation stimulate the nurse to further assess areas of family functioning? Ask the nurses to illustrate the role of observation in assessment from clinical practice with families.
25. What feelings might be evident in a community health nurse who has a specific purpose in mind in visiting a family, but finds when she gets there that there needs to be more intensive assessment with the family? What are the advantages of visiting a family with set goals in mind? What are the advantages of the nurse having a more "open" stance to family assessment?
26. Research the literature for examples of probes: questions (open-ended, closed-ended, leading....); statements; minimal prompts (eg. "go on"; "yes"); nonverbal prompts (eg. nodding one's head, having a "questioning" expression on one's face). Discuss the impact of each of these on the process of family assessment, including the "overuse" of various probes.

27. Think of various contexts of family visiting in community health nursing practice – eg. a family with a newborn, a family who has a family member dying at home; a family whose child has a significant health problem; a family who has just experienced the birth of a stillborn baby, etc. For each family context, form hypotheses about the issues/needs of the family. Make a list of questions that you could ask the family to check out your hypotheses. Give your list to a peer for critique and revise the questions if necessary. Discuss this exercise with your peers.
28. Why is it important to check out hypotheses you have made about a family **with** the family? What might be the impact if you do not do this?
29. Discuss the concept of “weaving assessment questions into the conversation” as opposed to asking questions in an “interview” format. Compare and contrast both approaches in terms of the impact on the assessment process, the openness of the family, and the nurse - family relationship.
30. Research the following contexts in which the nurse needs to do an assessment when child abuse/neglect is suspected; when postpartum depression is suspected; when suicide ideation seems to be present; when domestic violence might be an issue; when substance abuse is suspected. What are some effective assessment tools for such situations? Discuss how the nurse might feel in each of these scenarios.
31. What ethical issues arise in family assessment? How might the community health nurse deal with such issues?
32. What legal aspects does the community health nurse need to consider with respect to assessing families?
33. In the video, sample questions are given for assessing various aspects of family life: family coping; family nutrition; family support; family sleep and rest patterns; family communication; and family health behaviors. In a group of your peers, appraise these questions for their value in drawing forth the family’s story. Add additional questions. In this way, you will be comprising assessment questions for various dimensions of family structure and function. Pilot these questions with a family you know and revise if necessary. Discuss this exercise as a group.
34. Research the literature for examples of questions used in family assessment from various family assessment models (eg. the Calgary Family Assessment Model). Integrate these into your assessment of families.

35. In the video, empathetic statements, self-disclosure, immediacy, and challenge/confrontation are illustrated as skills which can be of use in family assessment. What other communication/counseling skills can be helpful? Discuss the advantages (and perhaps cautions) of the use of each skill in family assessment.
36. Discuss the concept of family assessment as “drawing forth the family’s story” as opposed to the concept of family assessment as “gathering data about the family”. How does each of these perspectives impact on the process of family assessment and the relationship between the community health nurse and the family?
37. In addition to the goal of family assessment as being to generate a list of the family’s strengths and concerns, what other goals might there be?
38. What is the impact of the family gaining valuable knowledge about itself through the process of assessment?
39. In what contexts might the community health nurse need to be persistent in assessment of a given family? How might this persistence “pay off”?
40. View a current movie which portrays some family drama. What assessment questions might you formulate to ask this family? Appraise the family’s level of functioning. What might be the role of a community health nurse with this family?
41. Review research studies pertaining to family assessment. Write a paper summarizing your findings.
42. Generate a list of principles of family assessment from your viewing of the video and from a review of the literature.
43. Discuss the importance of the nurse-family relationship in assessment. How does the nurse facilitate the development of an effective therapeutic relationship with families?