

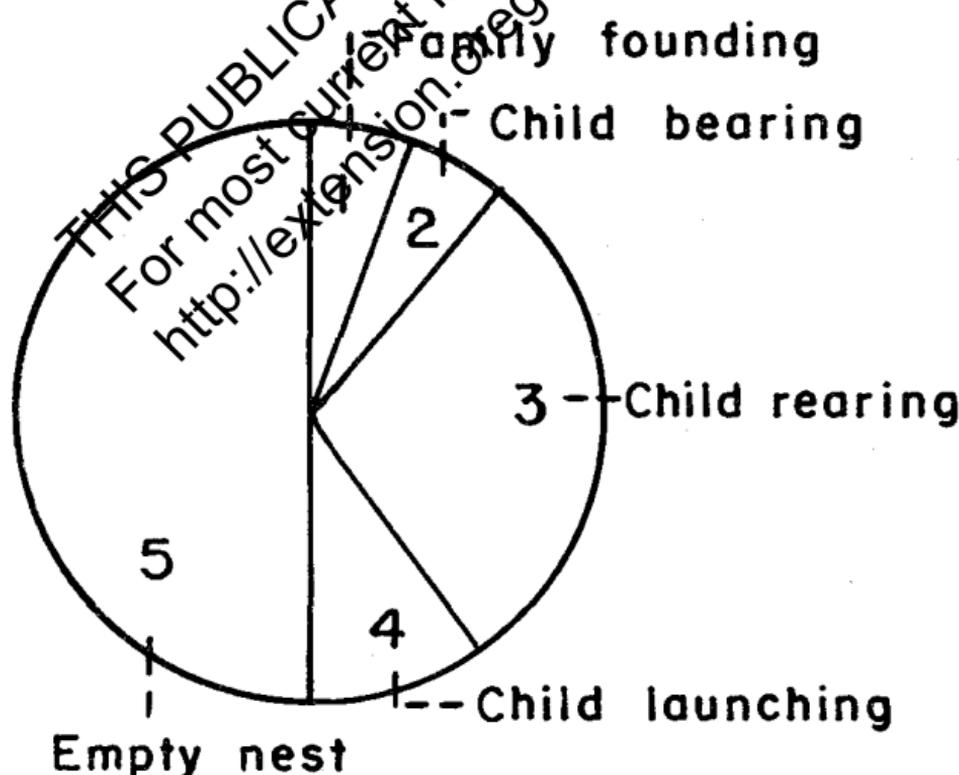
You and the Family Life Cycle

ONE WAY to look at yourself and your family is through the concept of the family life cycle.

The family life cycle denotes the stages a family goes through during its lifetime. Modern-day families have a life span of 50 to 60 years.

Most families go through five stages: 1) family founding; 2) child bearing; 3) child rearing; 4) child launching; and 5) empty nest.

If you imagine your life in the family as an on-going cycle, it looks about like this. The circle represents a life span of about 50 years.



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The family life cycle begins with marriage and ends with the death of both partners. But, a family never ends—it goes on through the generations. Each family sends out its satellites during the launching stage to insure its continuity.

The typical young couple starting marriage today can predict about a two-year interval before the birth of the first child. The last baby will probably be born about six years after marriage. This youngest child will be married shortly after the parents' 25th wedding anniversary. More than half of the married years will be spent after the children are grown and away from home. The husband is likely to precede his wife in death, leaving the wife a widow for approximately 16 years of the family cycle.

No two families will follow exactly the same pattern, but the concept of a family life cycle offers a helpful approach to managing family resources.

An understanding of the various stages and the approximate time couples can expect to spend in each stage will help you and your family develop your family spending and saving plan. This understanding is important in planning your housing, recreation, insurance, and other resources. It influences your home management and all your planning for the future.

Each stage has its beginnings in the stages which have gone before and its fulfillment in the future. Wherever an individual is at the moment, he has his roots in the past and is moving toward the next stage of life.

At each stage of development, families have certain tasks to accomplish. The concept of family developmental tasks can be understood by comparing them to developmental tasks of individuals. Each child goes through various stages, depending on his age and what is expected of him. At each stage a child has certain tasks to accomplish.

For example, during the first two years a baby learns to speak in his parents' language, to walk, to respond to "no no," to feed himself—he learns many things. At each stage of his development through the years he learns certain things and accomplishes certain tasks. This is because his body has developed to the point where he can manage these activities and because his parents and others have certain expectations.

The same concept of developmental tasks applies to families. At each stage, certain tasks should be accomplished to enable the family to move ahead to the next stage.

The birth of children moves a couple into the various stages. There is overlapping at each stage and the family is "moved along" with the oldest child. Any one family may be in several stages at any one time.

Outside forces—social and economic factors—affect the family and its tasks at various stages.

Developmental Tasks at Different Stages

1. Family founding

- ✓ Establish a home.
- ✓ Become emotionally dependent on one another; emotionally independent of parents.
- ✓ Work out ways of handling differences.
- ✓ Learn homemaking skills.

2. Child bearing

- ✓ Learn about pregnancy, childbirth, and children.
- ✓ Gain understanding of new husband-wife relationship.
- ✓ Develop philosophy of child rearing.
- ✓ Accept responsibilities of parenthood.
- ✓ Understand the role of grandparents.

3. Child rearing

- ✓ Continue to learn about children.
- ✓ Adjust financial plans and housing to meet needs of children.
- ✓ Assume responsibility for school and community betterment.
- ✓ Become alert to particular needs of children at different ages.

4. Child launching

- ✓ Discard folklore about love and marriage; gain insight and knowledge to help children.
- ✓ Enlarge child's vocational choice by learning about new opportunities.
- ✓ Give emotional support to children as they leave home for work, military service, school, or marriage.
- ✓ Release children to live their own lives.

5. Empty nest

- ✓ Adjust to life as a couple after years as parents.
- ✓ Accept the reality of your life's accomplishments.
- ✓ Learn about modern methods of child rearing to improve skills as grandparents.
- ✓ Prepare for and adjust to retirement.
- ✓ Prepare for living alone.

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Information about various stages of the family life cycle and developmental tasks for each stage is available from your County Extension Office.

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