What is a Family Life Cycle?

**An Introduction**

The emotional and intellectual stages you pass through from childhood to your retirement years as a member of a family are called the family life cycle. In each stage, you face challenges in your family life that cause you to develop or gain new skills. Developing these skills helps you work through the changes that nearly every family goes through.

Not everyone passes through these stages smoothly. Situations such as severe illness, financial problems, or the death of a loved one can have an effect on how well you pass through the stages. Fortunately, if you miss skills in one stage, you can learn them in later stages.

The stages of the family life cycle are:

Independence:

• Coupling or marriage.

• Parenting babies through adolescents. During this stage there are several sub-stages: o Childbearing Family--From the birth of the first child until that child is 2 years old.

o Family with Preschoolers--When the oldest child is between the ages of 2 and 6.

o Family with School Children--When the oldest child is between the ages of 6 and 13

o Parenting adolescents--When the oldest child is between the ages of 13 to 20

• Launching adult children.

• Empty Nest—All children are raised and moved out of the home.

• Retirement or senior years.

**Why is it important to understand the family life cycle**?

Mastering the skills and milestones of each stage allows you to successfully move from one stage of development to the next. If you don't master the skills, you may still move on to the next phase of the cycle, but you are more likely to have difficulty with relationships and future transitions. Family life cycle theory suggests that successful transitioning may also help to prevent disease and emotional or stress related disorders.

Whether you are a parent or child, brother or sister, bonded by blood or love, your experiences through the family life cycle will affect who you are and who you become. The more you understand about the challenges of each stage of the cycle, the more likely you are to successfully move on.