

THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES
DEPARTMENT OF INTEGRATED PROFESSIONAL STUDIES
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT & FAMILY STUDIES PROGRAM

SYLLABUS

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Office Hours by Appointment

9:00 - 12:45 TuTh
July 3 – August 9, 2012
Lafayette L111
Code 60815

TEXTS:

McGoldrick, M., Carter, B., & Garcia-Preto, N. [Eds.]. [2011]. The expanded family life cycle: Individual, family, and social perspectives. [4th ed.] Boston: Allyn and Bacon. [on reserve]

Gilbert, R.M. [1992]. Extraordinary relationships: A new way of thinking about human interactions. Minneapolis: Chronimed.

Napier, A. Y. & Whitaker, C. A. [1978]. The family crucible. New York: HarperCollins.

DESCRIPTION:

Families viewed as a system and as an environment for human development. The family ecological approach applied to practical family concerns. Prerequisite: Senior standing and HDFS 60, or instructor's permission.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. To apply developmental and systems perspectives to understand families
 - a. as they interact with the environment and surrounding culture;
 - b. as their members interact and communicate with one another;
 - c. as their individual members develop and experience life cycle transitions; and
 - d. as they adapt to change and stress.
2. To enhance understanding and use of professional concepts and theoretical terms relevant to the study of family systems.
3. To learn ways to represent and describe families and the family system.
4. To become familiar with the diversity of family types, interactive styles, and systems.
5. To gain understanding and respect for diversity among families and in family heritage.
6. To understand the cycles of change within families over time.
7. To explore approaches to facilitating family coping and adaptation.
8. To enhance understanding of one's own family of origin and/or present family.

REQUIREMENTS

Readings

Reading assignments are a major component of this course and should be done **before** the class for which they are assigned. Since class discussion will often focus on ideas and concepts from the reading, it is important that you stay current with the assignments and bring the assigned books to class. Also bring to class all the questions and responses you have about the readings. Your questions will become a basis for our class discussion.

Summer courses are short, and there is considerable reading for HDFS 260, because it is an advanced seminar. It will be important to develop a routine that includes reading and writing almost every day so you can stay on top of the work. Just for some perspective, the assigned reading amounts to 23 pages per day, or less than one page an hour for the next six weeks.

On the other hand, summer class sessions are long, nearly four hours in our case. I will divide each class session into segments for different kinds of work, and we will plan to take at least one break for fresh air during each session.

Papers

The course includes four brief papers and three other assignments. All the assignments are interrelated and contribute to the final assignment, the case study.

Ecomap

Students will draw an Ecomap for their family. A two or three page paper of elucidation will accompany the Ecomap.

Genogram

Each student will develop a Genogram, for his or her own family of origin. Instructions for this activity will be given in class. A brief interpretive paper (3 - 4 pages) will accompany the Genogram.

Case Study

The major product of your efforts in this course will be an interpretive case study of your family of origin. The papers described below will be preliminary studies for the final case study. In the case study you will use the concepts of the course to describe and interpret your family as a system. If you do not want to write about your own family, you may do the case study on the Brice family.

Writing & Revision

The writing assignments are a central part of the learning process in this course. They should receive your best care. All of them must reflect the readings and your wrestling with the concepts discussed in the course, as well as your experience with your own and the volunteer families. Each assignment will be discussed in class before you write it, so there will be ample opportunity to understand what is expected. If you feel you need help with writing skills, seek it before you turn in your papers. Papers should be ready when they are due, as our class discussions will be based on them.

You may choose to revise up to three [3] of the assignments after they are returned to you. Revisions must be received within one week of the return of the first version. Turn in the original paper containing my comments with your revision. Scores earned on revised assignments will replace scores earned on the originals. Of course, you will turn in papers that

are well written, using correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and structure. They also need to be clean and neat. I will not read papers that do not meet these criteria. If I find several errors in the first page or two of a paper, I will return it to you to re-do. The paper you subsequently re-submit will count as one of your three allowed revisions. I prefer papers be printed with 1.5 spaces between lines.

Brief Exercises

Occasional brief writing assignments will be given in class. These will be optional, but worth a few points toward your final grade.

A Personal Note

Much of the reading, writing, and discussion in this seminar will be quite personal. The case studies and papers may raise issues for you about your own families, development, or relationships. It will be essential that all of us be aware of this and supportive of each other so the class remains a safe place to study and explore the content of the course and how to interpret it. It is not necessary to share with the class or with me anything about yourself or your family that you do not wish to reveal. You may pass on any question, regardless of who asks it [and *especially me*], without providing a rationale for doing so.

If you suspect studying your family of origin may pose some difficulty for you, please make sure you have personal support in place now. You may want to initiate contact now with the Counseling Center to talk about the feelings and issues that may be raised in the seminar. If you discover later in the semester that you are having unanticipated reactions, please contact the Counseling Center immediately.

As we talk about the families we study, it is likely I will raise hypotheses or offer interpretations about them. It is crucial to remember that these are only speculations on my part. They do not represent valid or authoritative interpretations, and should not be taken or communicated to others as such.

If you have a strong preference not to write about your family of origin, you may choose to write all of the family of origin papers using the Brice family as your subject. That means you would write about the Brice family for papers 1, 2, & 4, the EcoMap, the Family Genogram and your case study.

Confidentiality

The value of this course is tied firmly to our ability to learn about and to talk about families, including our own families. Maintaining the confidentiality of all the information we learn and all that we share about our families is of utmost importance. We have to be faithful to our commitment to keep confidential all information and feelings shared in class. We all must be very cautious not to talk outside the seminar about the families we study. Therefore, we all need to take special care to avoid revealing to anyone outside the class any information about the families we study as well as any information about the personal content of our class discussions. It is fine to talk about the concepts we study, but we must monitor ourselves and each other to be sure we are not talking outside the class about the families or each other's contributions in class. Maintaining confidentiality is a core professional skill you will need in your future work. This is an opportunity to practice.

Important Note about your E-mail

When I e-mail the class, which I will do occasionally, I will use the Registrar's list of enrolled students. Messages sent by faculty go automatically to your uvm.edu address. You are responsible for all messages sent to this address, so be sure to check it regularly. If you prefer to use another e-mail address, you must forward your uvm.edu address to the preferred one. You may do that through the UVM CIT web site.

Evaluation

Since much of our class time will be devoted to discussion and exchange of ideas, regular class attendance is vital. Furthermore, regular class attendance is necessary to receive course credit. Three or more unexcused absences will result in a reduction of one letter grade for the course. Class participation will be evaluated for ten percent [10%] of your final grade.

Each paper, genogram, and ecomap assignment will be worth ten points. The sum of the points earned will count for 60% of the final grade. I will be assessing both your analysis and your writing in each paper. For your guidance, my thinking about scores for the written work in this course is:

Points:

9/10	Excellent work.	Writing <u>and</u> thinking are "top-notch" in both content <u>and</u> mechanics.
7/8	Good work.	Writing, in terms of content and/or mechanics, could be improved, and/or analysis warrants more depth and/or elaboration.
5/6	Fair work.	Writing and thinking meet minimum standards.
3/4	Poor work.	Writing has serious problems and/or analysis is superficial.
1/2	Failing work.	Writing and analysis are unacceptable for advanced students.

The case study will be evaluated for 30% of the final grade.

Summarizing:	Class participation	10%
	Papers, genograms, and ecomap	60%
	Family case study	30%

	Total	100%

SCHEDULE

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topics / Assignments Due</u>	<u>Readings</u>
July 03	Introductions and Course Overview Families & Systems	<u>Crucible</u> , Forward & Chs. 1 - 4
05	The Life Span & Families	EFLC, Preface & Chs. 1, 2
10	No Class Meeting – Read!!	EFLC Appendix, pp. 447 - 455
12	Family Issues <u>Paper # 1 Due</u>	<u>Crucible</u> , Chs. 5 – 10
17	Gender & Sexuality in Families	EFLC, Chs. 3, 4, 7, 8
19	Complexity & Change in Families <u>Paper #2 Due</u> Family Structure	<u>Crucible</u> , Chs. 11 - 21 EFLC, Chs. 10, 11 Gilbert pp. 199 - 212
24	Race, Class, and Poverty <u>Eco-Map Due</u>	EFLC, Chs. 5, 6, 22
26	Family Cycle Stages Becoming Adults & Couples Parenting More Parenting Later Families Divorce After Divorce <u>Paper #3 Due</u>	EFLC, Chs. 12, 13 EFLC, Ch. 14, EFLC, Ch. 15, 16 EFLC, Chs. 17, 18 EFLC, Ch. 19 EFLC, Ch. 20, 21

SCHEDULE [continued]

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topics / Assignments Due</u>	<u>Readings</u>
July 31	Bowen Family Systems Theory	Gilbert, pp. 1-92, 180-198 [Forewords, Preface, Chs. 1-5, Appendices 1, 2.]
Aug 02	Bowen: Relationships Bowen: Developing Self <u>Fam. Genogram Due</u> Using Bowen	Gilbert, pp. 95 - 171
07	Stressors: Illness, Alcohol & Violence <u>Paper #4 Due</u>	EFLC, Chs. 23, 24, 25, 26
09	Working with Families Wrapping Up, Leftovers	EFLC, Chs. 27, 28, 29
<u>Family Case Study Due: Tuesday, August 14</u>		

We will not have exams.

PAPER ONE

Review Crucible Chapter 4 and McGoldrick et al. Chapters 1 & 2 & Appendix

Provide a simple diagram of your immediate family, including names and ages. Don't try to draw your entire genogram for this exercise, but do use the standard format provided in McGoldrick et al. to place your immediate family.

In three to four pages, briefly describe your family of origin system. Who is in your family? How do you relate to each other? Consider the parental generation and the child generation separately. Then describe the parent-child relationships. What are the important dynamics in the system as a whole? What was/is your role? What do you see as special features of your family? What might Napier and Whitaker say about your system?

Due in class July 12

PAPER TWO

Review Crucible Chapters 7 & 8 and McGoldrick, et al. Chapters 3, 4, 7, & 8.

What were the gender roles and rules in your family of origin? How did you know how you were supposed to be female or male? How did gender shape how your parents communicate, make decisions, and resolve conflict? How did gender play out in your parents' emotional relationship? Did gender shape how the family system expressed and managed emotions and how conflicts were resolved? Consider gender in the parental generation and the child generation separately, and then the parent-child relationships in the family.

Due in class July 19

PAPER THREE

Read relevant chapters in McGoldrick et al. [5, 6, 9, 22, Appendix].

List all the ethnic, tribal, class, religious, and other memberships represented in your family. Remember that European-American is an ethnic identity.

In your essay, describe your family's ethnic, religious, class, and cultural history. What traditions from these roots have been maintained, which ones dropped, and which merged to make blended traditions? How are these memberships reflected in your family system and its roles and relationships? Are these memberships important in your parents' relationship? How have these "roots" affected your development and your experience within your family system? What contrasting traditions and roots have you experienced with other parts of your family, neighbors, friends, or others important in your development?

While you may want to talk about the effect of these memberships on you, and how you individually reflect them, be sure to consider the family system – all of you.

Due in class July 26

PAPER FOUR

Review all of Gilbert.

Now that you've read Gilbert's book, apply the concepts of Bowen's Systems Theory to your family. What fits, what doesn't? Describe the relationship patterns you observe in your family. Are relationships in the younger generations similar to relationship patterns in the older generations? How would you characterize the general level of differentiation in your family? Are there significant differences among individuals? If so how do these affect the emotional functioning of the family system? What has Bowen's theory helped you understand better? What do you still not understand about Bowen and/or your family system?

Due in class August 7

Eco-map

Review Bronfenbrenner before you tackle this assignment.

The eco-map is a way of representing a family's connections to the larger community outside the home. In ecological terms, it is a map of the family's mesosystem, that is, the relationships among the settings in which members of the family actively participate.

Start with each member of the family making a list of all the places where he or she engages in important activities or relationships. This can be done as a family activity, with members contributing to the lists of other members. The goal is to make as complete a set of lists as possible. Then, for each setting, briefly describe the activities and the people who commonly participate in the setting. Does the setting include more than one family member? If so, it should appear on more than one list; the lists overlap if family members participate in the same setting [whether they participate at the same time is a different question]. Prompt the family to consider settings that involve work, recreation, religion, school, extended family, friends, entertainment, medical care, social services, etc.

On a large sheet of paper, begin a draft map. The map is a diagram of the settings, not a geographical representation; it need not be to scale, nor do settings have to be placed in their actual compass direction from the family's home. Put the home in the center and draw circles for the other settings. If possible, make a circle for every unique setting on every person's list. Label the settings and list the family members who participate in each. It may be useful to use a different color for each family member. Connect each setting to the home by a line that represents the person[s] who go to that setting.

Next consider the people who come into the home. Identify the people who come into the home occasionally or more. What settings do they come from? Some settings may be connected in both directions, while others are connected only in one direction, either family members go to those settings or people come from those settings, but family members don't go there. Add those settings to the ecomap, and draw lines to the home and label them with the names or roles of the people who come into the home.

How does the family describe the quality or emotional nature of the connection to each setting? You might use a heavy line to indicate an important setting, a light one a less important one. A zigzag line could represent a stressful connection. An important but cut off setting could be connected by a bisected line.

After you have each important setting connected to home, and have indicated the specific people who go into that setting and the type of relationship it has to the family, then ask about connections among the settings. Are there people, perhaps friends or extended family members, who participate in more than one setting? If so, draw connections between those settings to indicate the existence of relationships between them; transcontextual dyads are the most common connection. How richly connected is the family's network of settings? Try to represent the nature of the relationships among the settings as you did the connection of each setting to the family home. Are there conflicts between settings, inconsistent expectations or roles, or do some support activities in others? How do those connections affect the family? Do conflicts between settings affect relationships or activities within the home? Have there been recent changes in settings and/or connections?

Review the map to be sure you have all the settings and who participates in them, and especially all the connections between settings that are created by non-family members.

In your paper, explain the ecosystem drawing and the process that led to it. How did the family approach the task? Are there unusual settings, or are usual settings missing for this

family? Is the extended family represented? Do family members share many settings or few? Do they move through the ecosystem as a unit, or are their mesosystems distinct? Do the settings support and enrich their lives, or do they create conflict or stress? The eco-map depicts the position of the family in its ecosystem. What does it reveal about the family and about the ecosystem it inhabits?

Genograms

The genogram assignment is designed to give you an opportunity to construct and analyze a genograms for your family of origin. To construct the genogram you will need to gather as much information about the family as you can in the time available. The information is to be organized into a genogram following the guidelines given in McGoldrick, Carter, and Garcia-Preto's Appendix.

Some of you may have information for many generations; others will find scant information beyond the grandparents' generation. The availability of information is itself important data about a family. It's nice to have a complete genealogy to draw upon, but the point is to have a complete picture of the extended family that is detailed enough to see patterns that may be established or that might be emerging. Your written paper should outline those patterns and explain them.

The genogram should include, to the extent possible, names, birth dates, dates of marriages, divorces, and deaths, occupations, education, health issues, personality characteristics, etc., etc. The more information you include, the more you can interpret.

For your analytic paper, you should review the outline in the genogram instruction handout to see what sorts of **patterns** you might look for. There are dozens of possibilities covering basic demographics, such as everybody gets married late, no divorces, men die young, families are small, oldest sons don't marry, twins, stillbirths, women marry younger men, every generation contributes a priest, etc., etc. Then there are health issues, education levels, occupations, religion, emotional abuse, phenomenal good luck, leaving home, evil stepparents, adoption, children out of wedlock, large age differences between spouses, alcoholism, obesity, bigamy, extramarital affairs, etc., etc., etc. Every family will have different patterns, and your job is to be as creative and thorough as possible at detecting them and describing them. This is the place to see how far you can go.

How you organize the analysis will depend on how much information you have and what sorts of patterns you detect. You should explain any unusual elements in the genogram and describe any patterns that exist. It is also helpful to mention any typical patterns or features that do not appear in the genogram. These, too, are important data about the family.

Before you submit each genogram and accompanying analysis, check to make sure:

1. you have presented it in proper, standard format;
2. names are included in the genogram and are used in the paper;
3. dates of births, marriages, divorces, and deaths are included to the extent possible;
4. you have described and explained as many patterns as you can identify; and
5. considered what you do not see in the genogram, and why that might be.

Avoid common pitfalls:

Siblings must be kept in chronological order, left to right. If they are not, then revise your genogram to accommodate that.

Case Studies

A case study will be the culminating project for the course. You will focus on your family of origin, unless you have chosen to write about the Brices, instead. The purposes of the case study are to:

- challenge you to pull together and integrate your observations and understanding of the family;
- apply the material of the course to the family so as to understand more fully the concepts we discuss and to understand the family more articulately;
- demonstrate your ability to choose from your many observations of the family the themes and issues that best describe the uniqueness and the expectable functioning of the family.

The papers you have written during the semester will provide a starting point for the case study. All of your observations and personal knowledge of the family provide material for you. Our readings and discussions offer potential themes and issues to consider.

Your case studies will include:

Description of the family: members, ages, gender, ethnicity, culture, social class, religious orientation, structure, place in the family life cycle, etc.

Description of family functions: use of space, time, resources, roles, rituals, etc.

Description of the family system: relationships, communication patterns, management of change, conflict and stress, etc.

Analysis: This course is about family systems—how the family functions—and the family ecosystem—the relation of the family to its environment.

- In what sense is your family a system?
- What system features have you become aware of?
- What have you discovered about the relation of your family to the ecosystem of which it is a part?
- What patterns have developed across generations in this family?
- What do people learn about being in a family from being in this family?
- How has this family changed over time?
- If the family is blended or divorced or remarried or unmarried or same-sex, what are the impacts of the non-traditional form or changes in form on family functioning?
- Do Toman's notions about sibling order positions fit the adult relationships in the family?
- What roles have race, ethnicity, social class, and religion played in the family?
- How does your family fit in its community and with its institutions?
- How will what you have learned about your family be useful? How will you use the course material?

Apply any of the reading that pertains to issues the family presents. Make clear what concepts you're using to understand the system.

Twelve to fifteen pages strikes me as about the least you could write and do justice to the family and the course material.

14 August Family Case Study Due

Larry's Pet Peeves in Writing

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Good clear writing is the mark of an educated person. Clear writing reflects clear thinking. Mistakes in writing derail the reader, and prevent the reader from understanding the writer's intent. Writing with clarity requires practice and constant attention, just as does skillful snowboarding. You will communicate with me more effectively if you pay attention to your writing, read it critically, and revise to make it clear.

Always use the spelling and grammar checkers in your computer, but remember that they will alert you to some problems, but not all. The spelling check won't catch when you use the wrong word but spell it correctly. You must proofread everything you write before you turn it in. It is best to proofread out loud.

You should own and use a good dictionary and a good guide to writing and usage. You can locate good guides to writing by searching at the library, using the subject: "English Language Usage." Helpful guides to usage include, among others:

- Follet, W. [1998]. Modern American usage. [Revised by E. Wensberg]. New York: Hill & Wang.
- Fowler, H. W. [2000]. The new Fowler's modern English usage. [Revised 3rd ed., by R. W. Burchfield] New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fowler, H. W. & Crystal, D. [2009]. Dictionary of modern English usage. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Garner, B. A. [2009] Garner's modern American usage [3rd ed.]. New York: Oxford University Press.
- O'Conner, P. T. [2010]. Woe is I [3rd ed.]. New York: Riverhead.
- Stevenson, J. [2005]. The pocket idiot's guide to grammar and punctuation. New York: Penguin.
- The American Heritage guide to contemporary usage and style. [2005]. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Wilson, K. G. [1993]. The Columbia guide to standard American English. New York: Columbia University Press.

How to Use My Editorial Feedback.

When I mark something in your writing I think needs correcting, you can decide to ignore it. You might do that if you don't care, you don't think writing well is important, you don't believe you can improve, or you're lazy. If none of those is true, and you want to understand my feedback, then try the following:

- Take time to study the notations I make on your papers.
- See if you can figure out what I think needs to be corrected or improved.
- Compare what you wrote to what I suggest, if I do suggest something.
- Make sure you understand the point I've made.
- If you don't understand it, refer to one of the recommended writing guides.
- If you still don't understand what is correct or clearer, ask me.
- Study the correction or improvement.
- Revise the sentence or paragraph.
- Practice writing other sentences or expressions, using your improved knowledge.

TYPICAL PROBLEMS IN WRITING**A. USAGE PROBLEMS.**

Affect / Effect	Study the meanings of these two words in one of your guides to grammar.
Number / Amount	[<u>Number</u> if you can count them; <u>Amount</u> if you can't]
Fewer / Less	[<u>Fewer</u> if you can count them; <u>Less</u> if you can't]
Comprise / Compose	[The whole <u>comprises</u> or contains the parts; the parts <u>compose</u> or make up the whole.]
If / Whether	Look them up in your dictionary and usage guides.
Prevent / Preventive	Prevent <u>at</u> ive is awkward and unnecessary. You wouldn't say "preventate," so why say preventative? <u>Preventive</u> works.
Orient / Orientate	Nor should you say "orientate." <u>Orient</u> works.

B. GRAMMAR PROBLEMS.

I / Me [After <u>and</u>]	Adding a second person does not change the pronoun you should use. Try reading the sentence without the first item. EXAMPLES: My sister and <u>I</u> were very close. [I was close.] My parents gave [my sister and] <u>ME</u> new toys.
I / Me [After <u>between</u>]	between him and <u>me</u> [not I] [you wouldn't say "between <u>we</u> "]
Singular / Plural Mixes:	"A <u>CHILD</u> is good if <u>THEY</u> do <u>THEIR</u> homework" is wrong. <i>Twice!!</i> The pronouns and their referents must agree.
Who / Whom	<u>WHOM</u> is the object of a preposition. Try substituting THEY/THEM . If you can substitute <u>THEM</u> , then <u>WHOM</u> is probably correct.
One	If you use <u>one</u> as the subject of a sentence, you must continue to use <u>one</u> throughout the sentence. You cannot switch to he or her or their in the middle.

A note: Sometimes I will mark something for correction, and you will find that the dictionary permits the form you have used. This doesn't mean the form you have used is good usage, and is why you should consult a guide to usage in addition to the dictionary. For example, some dictionaries indicate that *compose* and *comprise* are interchangeable. The dictionary allows that, but I don't. The dictionary is acknowledging that common usage is imprecise and that the distinction between the words is fading away. But the distinction is still quite useful, and makes your thinking more precise. Since the words have different origins and meanings in *my* mind, it's difficult for me to read and understand a less precise usage, without stumbling.

C. SPELLING PROBLEMS.

Development	Not "Develop E ment" Develop, Not "Develop E " [Envelop / Envelope]
Environment	Remember, there is IRON in the environment.
Roommate	Not "Roomate" [If you have a Roommate, there are <u>two of you</u> , and two Ms.]
Each Other	Two separate words, <u>Not</u> "Eac HO ther"
Than / Then	Different words. <u>Than</u> is a comparative conjunction. <u>Then</u> is an adverb connoting "next" or "following."
Accept / Except	Study them in detail.
Everyday / Every Day	<u>Everyday</u> is an adjective: This is my everyday outfit. I wear it <u>every day</u> . [two words]
Hypothesis / Hypotheses	[Single / Plural] One hypothesis, two hypotheses
Without	One word, not "With_Out"
Loose / Lose	If your head comes loose, you are likely to lose it.
Chose / Choose	
Definitely / Defiantly / Definately	Look them up.
Hang out / Hangout	Two separate words for <u>the activity</u> , a verb; one word for <u>the place</u> , a noun.
Aid / aide	The <u>e</u> makes it <u>a person</u> who helps
Passed / past	You passed a milestone some time in the past.
Led/Lead	<u>Led</u> is the past tense of the verb <u>to lead</u> . The noun <u>lead</u> is a soft gray metal.

D. Punctuation.

Semi-colons: a semicolon[;] is used to create a *compound sentence* out of two separate sentences, each of which could stand alone. If you read a compound sentence, and each part could stand as a separate sentence, the two parts must be separated by a semi-colon, not a comma.

Apostrophes: apostrophes ['] are used to indicate *possession* or *contraction*. If letters are omitted, creating a contraction, such as to change *you are* to *you're*, the apostrophe indicates a letter [or more] has been omitted. Apostrophes also are used to indicate possession, as when referring to someone's property. The most common mistake in my experience is that students fail to distinguish between a single person's property and the property of more than one person. Before you place the apostrophe, figure out whether you are writing about a parent or two parents. If there are two or more, put the s in to make the word plural before you put the apostrophe in. If *one parent* has something, it is the *parent's* something. If *two parents* jointly have something, it is the *parents'* something.

