

KEY TOOL #3

FAMILY FUNCTIONS AND ROLES



The Main Functions Families Provide for their Members and Society

Family policy is any policy that directly affects family outcomes such as the various functions and responsibilities that families perform for the well-being of their members and society. Family policy encompasses five main functions of families:

Family Formation and Membership: Families bring new individuals into the world and provide individuals with their personal and family identity, helping define who they are and where they come from, and assuring continuity across generations. Government regulates this function through policies affecting childbirth, marriage, divorce, adoption, foster care, inheritance, etc.

Partner Relationships: Families are a fundamental influence on individuals' abilities to form and maintain committed, stable partner relationships. Families can serve to strengthen and nurture healthy communication, cooperation, intimacy, and conflict management skills in their members. Government can support these efforts through policies regarding marriage, relationship education, benefit eligibility, tax incentives, etc.

Economic Support: Families provide economic support to meet their dependents' basic needs for shelter, food, clothing, and so forth. Government sometimes supplements this family function through income, food, housing, and related supplements; job training; and various subsidies in the tax code.

Childrearing: Families raise and nurture the next generation to be productive members of society. Families are responsible for ensuring children's health, safety, education, and general well-being, and for teaching them values and appropriate social behavior. Government shares these responsibilities with families, sets minimal standards for parental behavior, and intervenes when these standards are not met.

Caregiving: Families provide protective family care across the life cycle. Although not required to do so by law, families still provide most of the care and concern for the elderly, frail, ill, and those with disabilities. Government supplements or supplants families who need help or are unwilling or unable to provide this care.

Note. Reprinted from *The Family Impact Handbook: How to View Policy and Program Through the Family Impact Lens* (p. 35), by K. Bogenschneider, O. Little, T. Ooms, S. Benning, and K. Cadigan, 2012a, Madison, WI: Family Impact Institute. Copyright 2012 by the Family Impact Institute. Reprinted with permission.