

Ecology Exercise: The influences and supports in our environment

1. **Self:** At the center of the diagram is your relationship with yourself (and your inner beliefs and cultural system of making meaning of the world around you). Draw a picture that represents your strengths, hopes, and dreams; any conditions or qualities that deeply influence your life (athletic ability, sense of humor); and/or something you enjoy. If religion or spirituality is an important part of who you are, for example, draw a representation of that.
2. **Partner, Children, Household:** Draw a picture representing the people closest or most important to you. Often this is a partner (if you have one), your child(ren), or other people living in your household. Describe your family members' goals, strengths, needs, and hopes.
3. **Extended Family:** Draw a picture representing extended family members here, including relatives, grown children who are on their own, closest friends, etc. You may want to include their qualities or aspects of the relationship that mean a lot to you. These influences can continue for a long time, even after the family member has died.
4. **Informal Network and Cultural Influences (Friends, Neighbors, Culture):** Draw a picture representing friends; neighbors; informal care providers; fellow members of cultural activities or associations; fellow members of a club, team, or religious group; others who have a relationship with you by choice. These are the people outside your family who make a real supportive difference in your life. Note the ways they influence your family life.
5. **Formal Network (Businesses, Schools, Co-workers):** Draw a picture representing the formal institutions you are related to: The business you work for, doctors/hospitals, schools your children attend, etc. You can include any of the people who are in your life because it is their job (your job supervisor, co-workers). Note what you get (a paycheck, health insurance, self-worth). Note what you give (eight hours a day, keeping a car on the road to get to work, time away from your children).
6. **Socio-economic and Community Influences (Economics, Policies, Community):** Draw a picture representing socio-economic influences in your family's life (new federal policies mean your job is more secure, you live in a safe neighborhood, it's a good community for your elderly father). You may want to illustrate your community and how it affects your family. Note local, state, national, and global trends that affect your family's self-sufficiency (video games, popular music, tax breaks for child care costs).
7. **Natural Environment (Nature):** Draw a picture representing how the natural environment and its condition affect you and your family (flowers are beautiful this summer, family likes to relax in nearby park).

Once you have completed this exercise, you'll have a good picture of the people and other influences that shape your life. Now go back and look at this "ecology." Is each of the slices around the circle about as full as the others? Was each as easy to illustrate? Are there areas of imbalance in your life? Where are your strongest supports and influences? Where are the areas you could enhance to receive more support?