Ecogram Guidance for Salford Safeguarding Partnership
My/Our Ecogram Map.

What is an Ecogram?

An ecogram should be seen as an enhanced genogram because it's more than just a family tree, it also explores the intricate nature of family relationships. It is a useful tool of assessment, and uses symbols to depict a lot of information about families as succinctly as possible. It can be used to gather information about family history, inform assessments and help families to identify their support networks and strengths.

Direct work: Methods and approaches for practitioners

- Use large sheets of paper- flip chart paper is best
- Plan your approach well; think about using different tools to capture the information and the types of questions you will use.
- Decide who to start with- an individual or the whole family. It is empowering and insightful to ask the person who *they* would like to start their ecogram with
- Consider different approaches to gather the information, such as different types of pictures, modelling clay, coloured pens, dolls houses etc. depending on the age of the child and how the family best communicate.
- Remember to include pets if they are significant members of the household
- It is often useful to take a copy of the ecogram to further sessions with the child or family, to refer to and make/changes additions where appropriate.
- Discuss with the child/family who will have copies and what you will be doing with your copy as the information shared is likely to be sensitive
- Record dates or approximate years of birth rather than ages, as ages change over time
- Agree a symbol and key with the family/child. Symbols can be created as needed.
- Don't worry if it gets messy or you have to cross things out- you can tidy it up later if you need to
- Take a photo of the finished Ecogram to upload to documentum

Purpose

An ecogram can help workers to:

- know who is in the family / friends

- explore family dynamics and relationships

- understand who is important in the family

- understand what has happened in the family

- illustrate the way in which past and present separations, losses, transitions and traumas have been part of family members' life experiences

- understand where the family turns for support and understand how the family 'fit' in relation to larger society – neighbours, other organisations and their community

- explore transitions, life cycle patterns and strengths

Ecograms are a great way to make sure that who is important to a child or young person is not forgotten and is understood in relation to strengths within the family and the impact of these relationships upon current needs.

Consider the impact of putting on paper historical adult issues such as domestic or sexual abuse. It may be necessary to create bespoke maps with the adults and the children to avoid children being made aware of these issues unnecessarily.
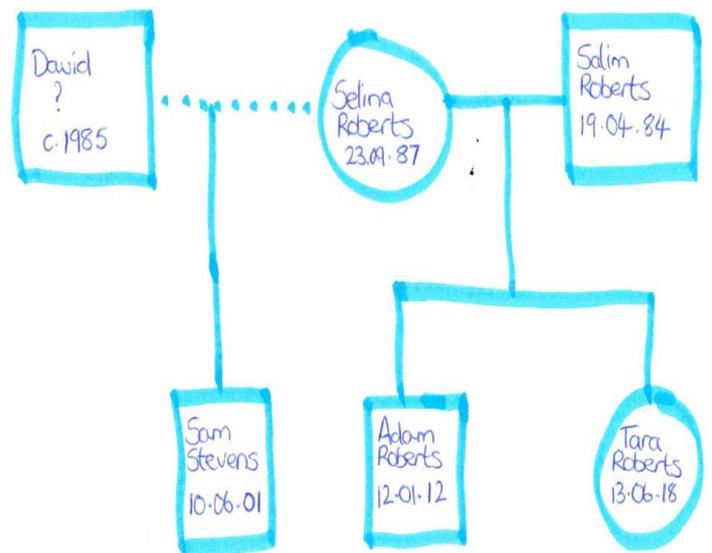

A simple ecogram

An ecogram is being completed with Selina by the family support worker, who is allocated to the family due to concerns around home conditions and some missed medical appointments for the children. Selina lives with her husband Salim and their two children. Also living with them is Selina's adult son from a brief relationship with David.

Men are depicted by a square and women are depicted by a circle. Family relationships are depicted by two gender symbols connected by a line.

Children are placed beneath their parents, with a line stemming from the parents' family relationship line.

When there are a number of children from the same relationship the eldest child is placed on the furthest left, followed by the second eldest and so on, with the youngest child appearing on the right.

Everyone in the same generation should be along the same line.

Ecograms are rarely simple!

Salim also has two children with his ex-wife Natasha, who live with their mum but the two families get along well. When family relationships are complicated, it is especially important to clearly show who lives in the household, and this is done by putting a dotted line around the households.
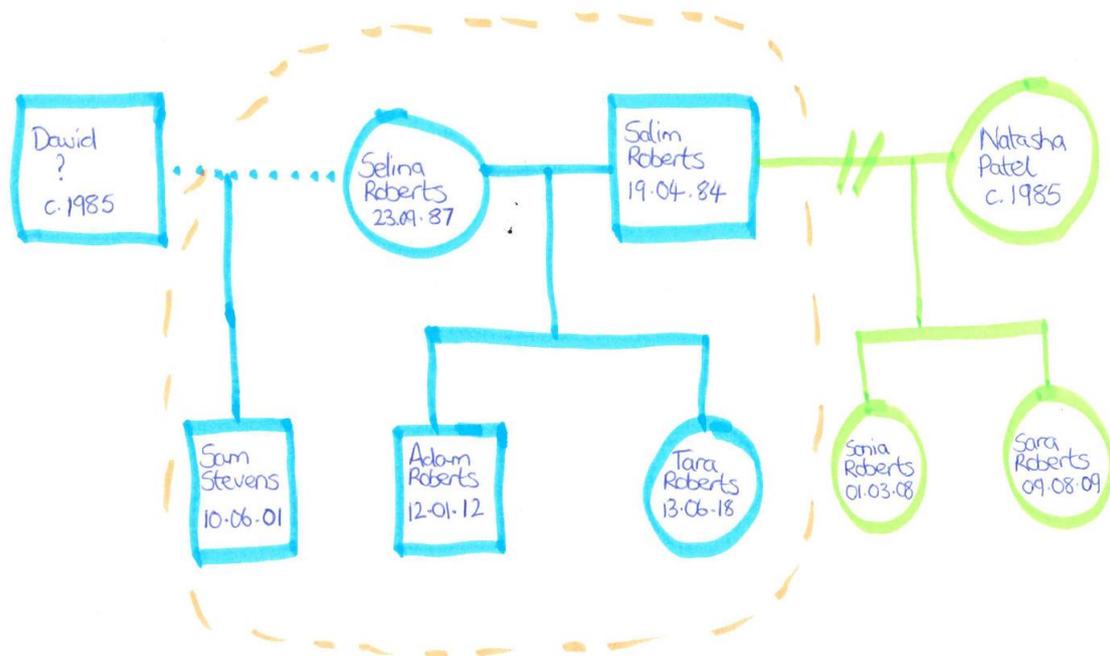
Emotional Relationships, risk factors and strengths

Emotional relationships are depicted with a line directly connecting two gender symbols. These lines can be used to connect any two people on the ecogram.

Colour could be used for emotional relationship lines to increase readability. Symbols are used to represent issues that are relevant in the family.

Tip: Your ecograms will be very complicated if you connect every person to everyone else with emotional relationship lines. Try asking about each relationship, but only mark areas that are noteworthy or relevant to the current situation

Maybe you've already noticed a trend in a family's history, for example abuse or involvement with services, but an Ecogram can help to analyse what this means for the child and what impact this has. It may highlight intergenerational patterns of parenting such as neglect, mental ill health, substance misuse and domestic abuse in a way that is clear to professionals and family alike. It's easy to get wrapped up in

the negative traits that are passed down in families, so don't forget to spend some time on the strengths. If every session is spent focused on how dysfunctional a family is why should they believe things can improve?

Sometimes, even the negative traits in an ecogram can have a positive basis, such as identifying how family members have moved on from difficult situations or have broken out of intergenerational cycles of abuse.

Tip: Ecograms are written through the lens of their creator. Everyone will interpret their family's relationships differently and each person in a family may draw their ecogram slightly differently, especially when it comes to emotional
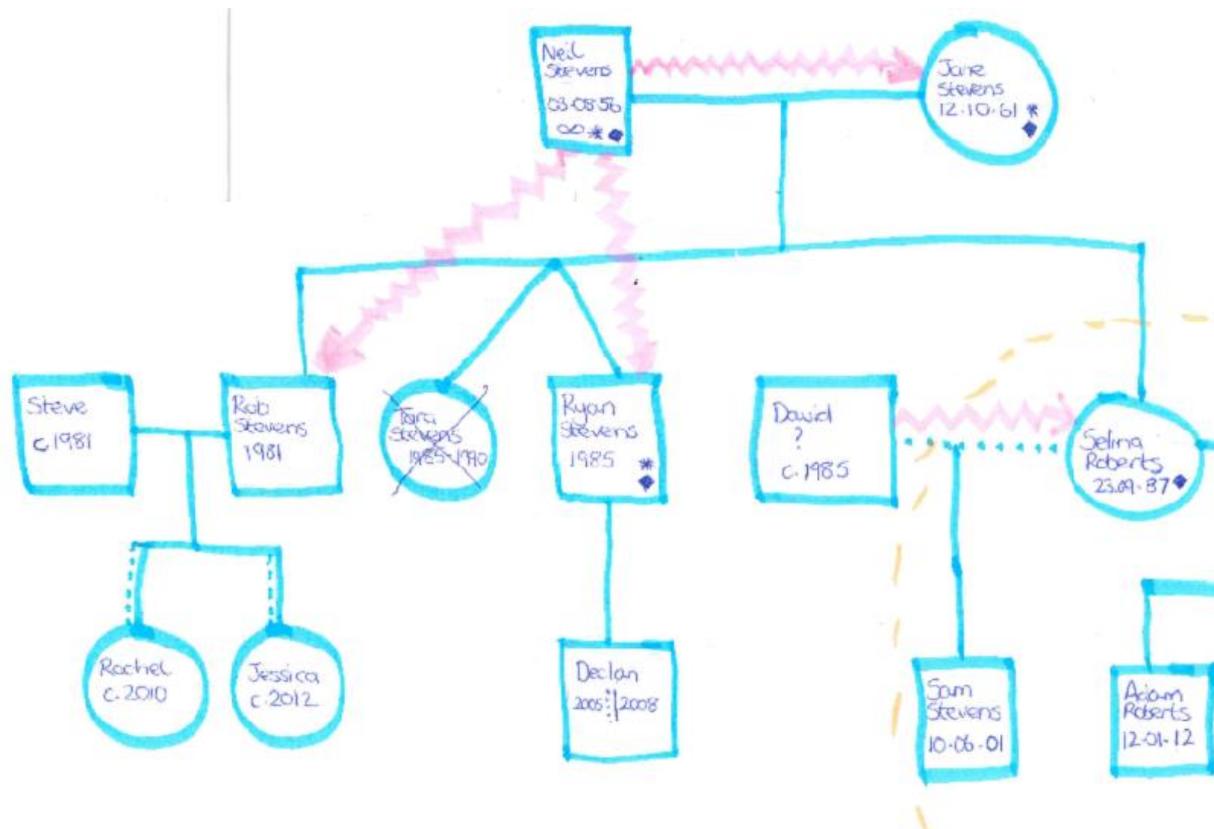
relationships, risk factors and strengths. It should be recorded who the ecogram has been completed with, and this bias should be considered when viewing ecograms on file

Analysing the Ecogram

When exploring Selina's family history, the family support worker is able to identify that Selina suffered significant trauma in her childhood: witnessing her mother and older brothers physically abused by her father; both parents misusing substances; her father suffering from poor mental health; the death of her older sister Tara. Tara's twin brother Ryan also misuses substances which resulted in his son being removed from his care and placed for adoption. Selina identifies that her early relationships involved violence, and she turns to alcohol (but not drugs) at times when she is stressed.

Selina sees her older brother Rob as a role model, and says he is a brilliant parent to his two adopted daughters. When describing her relationship with Salim, she identifies that she doesn't expect him to help with the children or with the housework, and thinks this may be because she is grateful that he is not violent and does not use substances.

Family structure and uniqueness

Many people enjoy the opportunity to talk about their family history, and it can work as a good tool to build trust and rapport in a working relationship. Be aware that some people may find seeing a visual picture of the state of their relationships confronting or distressing, particularly if the majority of relationships in their life at present are conflictual or distant.

There are many different types of family structure in our society and it is not possible to explore every possible family structure in this guidance, but a good rule of thumb is to treat each family as a unique network and explore this sensitively, taking your cue from the family themselves as to how they view their relationships. Families may be blended after previous relationship breakdowns, there may be adopted children or children conceived via assisted conception methods using donor sperm or eggs or surrogacy. Some families have one parent and some families have two mothers or two fathers. The key above is not exhaustive and where a family structure exists that is not reflected in the key, create a key with the family and keep this with the ecogram so that it can be easily read later. A professional should bear in mind the age and level of understanding of the child and what they know about their own history as this may not be an appropriate time for the disclosure of new information.

Use this tool sensitively and in cases where you think it will be useful to help promote understanding, healthy change and the development of more positive relationships in the person's life.

Ecograms are multi agency

An ecogram can be commenced by any professional at any time, good practice would be to begin the ecogram at the start of the assessment period with the family. The lead professional is likely to be the best person to coordinate the completion of the ecogram, we know we case reviews that all agencies and professionals hold different information about strengthens and experiences within the family. Therefore

the completion and utilisation of the ecogram should be within the multi agency assessment, planning and review.

For example, if an Early Help practitioner or Social worker begins an ecogram, this should be firstly informed by the family and transparently informed by other professionals. The completion can be used to support multi agency assessment, meetings and reviews with the family- strengthening our understanding of how we can utilise the family and friends to ensure the child is safe, well and their best.

Reference list

Information on genograms can also be found on page 29 of *Assessing Children in Need and their Families: Practice Guidance* (Department of Health, 2000) www.dh.gov.uk

Salford Childrens Quality Assurance Team

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Appendix

Symbol Key

Female adult or child – name and DOB	Death
◯	✕ – record date if known e.g. Death of a male ⊠

Male adult or child – name and DOB	⊠ ⊗ [45] (45) ['75-] ['75-'99] Deceased — Age / Age at Death — Birth Year / Birth and Death
Gender unknown **?**	Twins – identical and non-identical
Pregnancy/ Unborn	Strong friendship ————————
Miscarriage	Committed relationship – – – – –
Termination	Casual relationship ··············
Transgender male Transgender (Female to Male)	Relationship ended – –| |– –
Transgender female Transgender (Male to Female)	Widowed ✕
Child removed from family and adopted (include year of adoption if known)	Close family relationship ≡≡≡≡
Pet – Name ◇	Friendship = = = = =

Child adopted into family	Neglect – – – → (arrow should indicate the victim)
SGO	Sexual abuse wwwww→ (arrow should

	indicate the victim)
Foster child/parent	Emotional harm wwwwwwww→ (arrow should indicate the victim)
Mental ill health ∞	Physical abuse wwwwwwww→ (arrow should indicate the victim)
Substance misuse Alcohol ◆ Drug misuse ✱	Ⓓ Ⓢ Donor conceived/Surrogate conceived (D on maternal line indicates donor eggs, on paternal line indicates donor sperm, you may wish to provide a footnote with more detail as there are many different types of assisted conception).