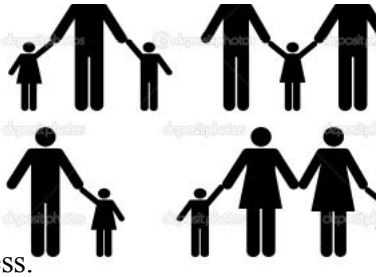


easy access english

The New Normal



ACTIVITY ONE – Read the text paying attention to your intonation and stress.

LIVING WITH CHILDREN used to be a **fairly** predictable way of life. Couples would get married around the age of 22 or 25. They would set up home, initially in an apartment or semi-detached house, **for the most part**. Then after a respectable year they would have a first child together. After a couple more years, or three, on average, they would have their second child and in some cases a third or fourth. Family planning enabled births to be spaced out two or thee years apart. High chairs, cots and baby toys and clothes would be **handed down** from the elder **siblings**. Eventually they would be passed on to friends or family, sold at jumble sales, or in some cases held on to for their sentimental value, one day to be shown to grandchildren, in a dusty loft.

How times have changed! The new normal is nothing like this. Nearly twice as many children are born **out of wedlock** in Europe than there were 40 years ago. Furthermore, one in three marriages end in divorce. Today more and more families are composed of children from more than one marriage, with different combinations of half siblings, step-parents etc.

The average age difference in France, for example, between siblings in a traditional family is 3.3 years. For a step-family, or 'blended' family it is 7 years. The average age difference between couples in an initial marriage is lower than in second marriages or unions where women tend to be older than men, (35 percent of them). Often women have children from previous relationships, **which can lead to** a big age gap when they start a family with their new partner. In France today nearly 16 percent of all children live in a stepfamily and 10 percent live in a single parent family.

Of course things are now changing even further following recent changes to legislation regarding marriage. Same sex marriage is now legal in many European countries. Holland was the first country in the world to legalise it, in 2001. It's now legal in 11 countries and 6 American States. More and more same sex couples have children (estimated at 120 000 in the USA for example). Thanks to specialized agencies for adoption or surrogacy it's becoming easier for gay couples to become parents. The new normal then is likely to be very different from the typical picture of a family traditionally used to predict buying habits and to plan marketing campaigns on. The retail sector, the advertising sector, the merchandisers of the world, have to adapt.

LIVING WITH CHILDREN in 2013 could mean having teenagers and babies in the same family. Having two sets of same sex couples sharing **custody** of a child. Kids today could easily have four mothers. Two mothers who divorce and then find new partners. Two mothers and two step-mothers. It's more common than before for mothers to have grandchildren and children of a similar age.

Houses have to be able to cater for an influx of kids on alternate weekends, or weeks, as joint custody arrangements change the way people live. Rooms are shared, space has to be multi purpose, decoration has to suit the tastes of several generations. Storage has to be flexible and baby furniture is less likely to be stored and passed on to siblings as the **age gap widens**. Nothing can be **taken for granted** in this **ever-changing** scenario. Manufacturers, retail distributors and merchandisers will **have their work cut out** adapting to new unpredictable lifestyles in today's world.

J.FRANKLIN



ACTIVITY TWO – Answer the questions below.

For questions 6-11 use the following expressions to introduce your answers:

I feel that, it seems to me that, I believe that, I am convinced that, I am not sure that,
It seems clear that, It seems obvious that, I think that, In my opinion,
Clearly, Obviously, Essentially, Ultimately, Basically, Indeed,

1. Briefly summarize the text.
2. What do the statistics in paragraph three prove about the 'new normal'?
3. What does the text predict about the future?
4. What does the text say about the past?
5. How does your own family compare to the 'traditional family picture' of old?
6. **What do you think the 'new normal' will be?**
7. **How do you think houses and homes will change as a result of these changes in society?**
8. **In your opinion, how much of an impact will same sex marriage have on society?**
9. **Is society really very different today from what it was like in the 1970's?**
10. **Is society better or worse today?**
11. **Is the traditional family better for children than the 'new normal'?**
12. Use the words and expressions in bold from the text in new sentences.

ACTIVITY THREE – Lifecycle of an object.

Tell the life story of these items. From their conception, to their life in a 'new normal' family, to their destruction. Tell the story in the PAST TENSES.



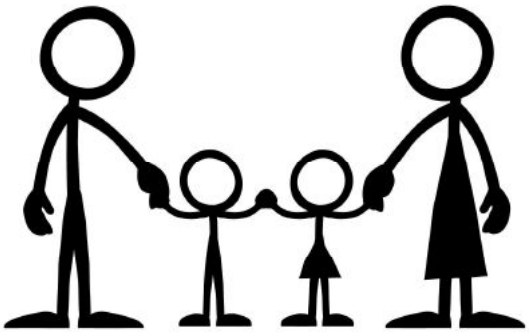




ACTIVITY FOUR – Introduce the family of the future!

Describe what you think the most common family set-up will be in 2030. Introduce us to all family members and explain the relationships. Use the FUTURE tenses for this.

ACTIVITY FIVE – Watch the video extract.
Explain the two points of view which are exposed in this brief extract. Then give your opinion on the question.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lXbTDQcvhyM



ACTIVITY SIX – What is a family?

In your personal opinion, how do you define 'family'.

Here are the different possible configurations of a modern day family, describe each one:

- Single Parent Families
- Married Families
- Step Families
- Blended Families
- Cohabitating Families
- Civil Union Families
- Adoptive Families
- Foster Families
- Same Sex Couple Families
- Grandparent Families
- Extended Families

ACTIVITY SEVEN – Debate.

Is family still important in society or are friends the new family?

ACTIVITY EIGHT – Definition.

Read the definition of 'family' given by Wikepedia and express your opinion on it.

In human context, a family (from Latin: familia) is a group of people affiliated by consanguinity, affinity, or co-residence. In most societies it is the principal institution for the socialization of children. Anthropologists most generally classify family organization as matrilocal (a mother and her children); conjugal (a husband, his wife, and children; also called nuclear family); and consanguineal (also called an extended family) in which parents and children co-reside with other members of one parent's family.

There are also concepts of family that break with tradition within particular societies, or those that are transplanted via migration to flourish or else cease within their new societies.[clarification needed] As a unit of socialization the family is the object of analysis for sociologists of the family. Genealogy is a field which aims to trace family lineages through history. In science, the term "family" has come to be used as a means to classify groups of objects as being closely and exclusively related. In the study of animals it has been found that many species form groups that have similarities to human "family"—often called "packs." Sexual relations among family members are regulated by rules concerning incest such as the incest taboo.

Extended from the human "family unit" by affinity and consanguinity are concepts of family that are physical and metaphorical, or that grow increasingly inclusive extending to community, village, city, region, nationhood, global village and humanism.

Family is also an important economic unit. Economic aspects of family is subject of family economics branch within economics field.