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**NUCLEAR FAMILY:** The traditional definition of a nuclear family is a family unit that includes two married parents of opposite genders and their biological or adopted children living in the same residence. However, the term "nuclear family" can mean several different things in today's society. Understanding the classic roles in this type of family and how it is defined can help you understand the relationships in your own family, whether it's nuclear or not.

### History of the Nuclear Family

According to the [Merriam-Webster Dictionary](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nuclear%20family), the term "nuclear family" was first used in 1947, but the concept of a family that consists of just parents and children is much older. This basic unit of a family's structure has existed for millennia, but it wasn't until the 1960s and 1970s that the nuclear family became the majority situation. At that time, industrial economic booms and rising wages made it possible for young parents to afford their own homes without living with extended family members. At the same time, better healthcare contributed to the nuclear family, as elderly members became more self-sufficient and independent for decades after their children were grown.

Today, the era of the nuclear family is often glamorized, complete with mom in the kitchen, dad out earning the paychecks, and the kids building a tree house or hosting a stuffed animal tea party. In reality, there is no ideal type of family, and today's definition of a nuclear family can greatly differ from what it was a few decades ago.

### Who Is Part of a Nuclear Family

A nuclear family, also called a conjugal, elementary, or traditional family, typically consists of two married or legally-bound parents and their biological or adopted children all living in the same residence and sharing the values, duties, and responsibilities of the family unit. There can be any number of children in the family, and one or both parents may work outside the home.

There are pros and cons to the small, nuclear family.

#### **Pros:**

- Family members develop greater self-sufficiency and independence
- Family members share the strongest bonds with their immediate relatives
- Less conflict of family values across different generations

#### **Cons:**

- Less support emotionally or financially for individual family members

- Less contact with extended family members may result in lost traditions or poor communication
- Smaller families may be less resilient in emergencies due to a smaller support structure

Each family adapts according to its size and needs, and just because a family may be defined as nuclear does not mean there are no strong bonds with extended family members. How each family encourages family values and connections varies, and there is no right or wrong family style.

### Changing Definition of Nuclear Families

The nuclear family today may be in the minority considering the increasing diversity of Western societies. While the classic definition of a nuclear family may only include two parents of opposite genders, today's definition often includes two-parent families with same sex parents raising the biological children of one parent or the children that both have adopted. Other [types of families](#), such as single parents, non-married parents, foster families, blended families, and couples without children are on the rise, and the traditional nuclear family, while still strong, is increasingly in the minority.

### PROS AND CONS OF THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

Nuclear families, which include a mother, father and any children living in the household, are often thought to be passé. Yet, approximately 70 percent of children live within a nuclear family unit, according to 2010 U.S. Census [data](#). The nuclear family is generally believed to be the ideal [arrangement](#) to raise a family, although it is not without its problems.

#### Advantages

##### 1. Strength and Stability

Two parent families, whether married or not, tend to be more [stable](#) than a single parent or multi-generational family. Spouses or partners can role model a loving, caring and supportive relationship for their children. This will translate into future success by teaching children how to seek out positive relationships and interact well with others. Children will also benefit from watching partners work together to solve problems, delegate household responsibilities and support one another through positive and negative issues.

##### 2. Financial Stability Equals More Opportunity

Many nuclear families have enough economic [stability](#) to provide children with luxuries and opportunities in life. Children may be able to attend dance, gymnastics, music or other types of classes, especially both partners work outside the home. Children who are provided with these types of opportunities are more likely do better academically and socially, as well as develop confidence and time management skills.

##### 3. Consistency Means Behavior Successes

The nuclear family can provide children with [consistency](#), in addition to stability. Children who have both stability and consistency in their lives are more likely to behave positively, do better in [school](#) and become more involved in community and extracurricular activities. The nuclear family may eat dinner together on a regular basis, go to church and take family vacations, further strengthening relationships and building a solid foundation for future life goals.

### **Disadvantages**

#### 1. Close-Knit or Isolated?

The nuclear family unit does provide a closeness that many single parent or multi-generational families cannot. The smaller family size allows for individualized attention towards partners and children, creating lifelong bonds. However, the nuclear family unit can also [isolate](#) people from other relatives and relationships. This can break down the extended family unit, which can be beneficial in hard times. Grandparents, aunts and uncles should have a place within a family, but the nuclear family does not always create one for them.

#### 2. Burnout

Family members, particularly mothers, may have a tendency to burn out from attempting to meet every person's needs [alone](#). Mom is the cook, maid, babysitter and sometimes, moneymaker. That leaves little time for pampering and nurturing herself and her relationships with others. Without help, she may need to take off work to care for sick children. Mothers may struggle to balance the demands of work, family and friendships without any outside assistance. Stress, depression, anxiety or other [problems](#) can all be a result of nuclear family burnout.

#### 3. Less Conflict Resolution Skills

While the idea of less [conflict](#) and [stress](#) could certainly be considered an advantage to the nuclear family, it also puts the family at a disadvantage. Conflict is a part of life, and conflict resolution skills are beneficial in school, in the community and in the workplace. Nuclear families can begin to develop like-minded thinking, which will lead to fewer arguments within the family unit. However, it can increase the disagreements with extended family members. Extended family, with differing opinions and ideas, can help families see alternate viewpoints and learn to effectively deal with conflicts and opinions other than their own.

### Preferred Family Structure

The nuclear family is still a preferred way of many to raise children, although the incidence of single parent, divorced and [multi-generational households](#) is rising. Choosing to raise a family by the nuclear model will not guarantee success or happiness, but it can provide a basis to obtaining those ideals. By being aware of the possible disadvantages, you can look for ways to alleviate them. After all, no family is perfect. Working together with all family members ensures the best possible outcomes for everyone involved.