

# Intentional Family Tree



**Relationship Building**

**Grade(s): 4–8**

## **learning objective/s or description**

Students journal about what family means to them, discuss the concept of "intentional family" (chosen relationships beyond biology), then create an illustrated family tree featuring the people they consider family — noting why each person belongs — and write a reflection on how they show those people they're valued.

## **materials needed:**

- Pen and paper for journaling
- Art supplies — markers, glue, paper, scissors
- Optional: photos or magazines students may bring from home

## **Any tips or important information**

- Medium relational risk: the word "family" can carry weight for students who have experienced loss, separation, or estrangement. Make clear that "family" is whoever they choose, and that they can include people who are no longer with them.
- Define "intentional family" clearly: the family we choose to surround ourselves with — whether they are biologically related or not.
- Honor that students may not want to share publicly. Let them know it is okay to keep their tree private.
- Plan ample time — the journaling, discussion, and art portions each need room to breathe.

## **lesson structure:**

### **Opening Circle**

#### ***Facilitation (5 minutes)***

1. Everyone sits or stands in a circle.
2. Welcome everyone and review agreements (talking piece = one mic, calm bodies = listening).
3. Share the prompt/question and clarify any questions.
4. Pass the talking piece around for everyone to share.

5. End the circle by thanking everyone and giving the direction for the next activity.

### ***Sample Prompts (Middle (with elementary options))***

- Middle: Who is a positive role model in your life?
- Middle: What's special about your family?
- Middle: What's something you hope to accomplish?
- Elementary alternative: What is one thing you are good at?

### ***Lesson Hook***

- Today we're going to think about who we consider family — and the people we choose to surround ourselves with.

## **Community Builders**

### ***Facilitation***

- Assess your group dynamic: how are people feeling? Is everyone emotionally regulated? Is anyone triggered? Is this community builder still appropriate based on the emotional risk of the activity?
- Explain the activity: state the goal and how it will bring the community together. Keep your explanation clear and concise, and include examples or modeling of behavior. If students should expect to struggle, explain how you want them to work through it together.
- Do the activity: participate alongside the group when appropriate (remember, you're part of this community too). Monitor the activity and reassess how people are feeling.
  - If the activity escalates: STOP → REGULATE EMOTIONS → CLARIFY EXPECTATIONS.

### ***Opening Journal***

- Ask students an introductory question about family and give them a few minutes to journal a response. Question suggestions:
  - What does family mean to you?
  - Who is your family? Why do you call these people "family"?
  - Are there people outside of your biological relatives who are like family to you?

### ***Discussion***

- Spend time talking with students about what makes an intentional family, and how and why we cultivate intentional family members in our lives. Definition to share:
  - An intentional family is the family we choose to surround ourselves with — whether they are technically related to us or not.
- Suggested discussion questions:
  - What causes you to consider someone family?
  - Do you have to be related to someone biologically to call them "family"? Why or why not?
  - What happens to your relationship when you call someone "family"?
  - What does it look like to have an "intentional family"?
  - What are the differences between "biological family" and "intentional family"? Is one always better than the other? Why or why not?

### ***Creating the Intentional Family Tree***

- Allow students to draw, paint, or otherwise create their "intentional family tree."
- When including people, ask students to put a note about how or why they are intentional family members.

**Reflection**

- Ask students to write a reflection about their tree. Suggested questions:
  - How did you choose the members of your "intentional family tree"?
  - Do the people on this tree know that you consider them family? If so, what have you done to show them you value them? If not, what can or will you do to show them you value them?

**Share Out (if time allows)**

- Students can write about one of their intentional family members, or share back with the class about who is on their family tree. Sharing is always optional.

**Closing Circle****Facilitation (10 minutes max)**

- Consider before facilitating: What key ideas do I want students to leave with? How do I want them to feel walking away? Will each student share with the whole group, will a few students share, or will students share with a partner?

**Sample Prompts (Middle (with elementary options))**

- What would you change about today's class?
- What was something challenging today?
- What's something you're proud of?
- Elementary alternative: Share an appreciation with someone in the group.

**Closing Ritual**

- Thank the group, name what you noticed, and send students off with a clear next step or appreciation.